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Navigating the demands of academic work to shape an academic job

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Abstract

Findings from interviews with mid-career academics in English and Australian universities elucidate how academics interpret and navigate complex institutional contexts in shaping academic jobs. The paper argues that how they do this is a function of what they notice and respond to as well as the mode of reflexivity they employ. Three core areas are seen to affect academics sense of agency as they shape their own jobs: how they orient themselves to the world around them including the academic institution and department; their underlying goals and purposes as they seek to have a fulfilling role; and how they relate to structural conditions of the workplace. The paper argues that understanding academics' differing foci of awareness in these areas is helpful to institutional policies and strategies.

Keywords: reflexivity, focus of awareness, university policy, qualitative research

Introduction

In universities there are many official accounts of academic work. Selection criteria, job descriptions, workload planning and promotion criteria as well as university policies, procedures, and structures define particular academic roles. The proportion of time to be spent on different activities and the number of hours to be worked may even be specified (Malcolm & Zukas, 2009). However, such descriptions provide merely a framework for action, not a description of the actual balance of activities, nor a guide to career trajectories. Like professionals in any complex organisation, academics have a measure of freedom in how they enact their assigned roles.

Universities present contradictory messages about aspects of their functioning. Some of these are of universities' own making but others come from outside e.g. government, technology and economy. Such forces reflect the ambiguity of twenty-first century society and lead to questions about how to respond. Academics are potentially working with a number of drivers: their institution, their discipline, the students, research funding bodies and their perceptions of the experiences and evidence needed to secure and advance their career. Given this complexity, academics can be confronted with conflicting notions of the job they are undertaking and different ideas about what is expected and what must be produced. These require on-going re-evaluation.

Academic work is actively shaped in the light of what the structural conditions of the workplace make possible and what academics desire to achieve. A certain degree of autonomy is implied and individuals can become resentful when they are told what to do. On the other hand, publicly funded institutions have responsibility to ensure that tax-payers' money is put to good use. Given these conflicting influences and the complexity of university functioning, it is often difficult to see why particular academics respond as

they do. For example, why a well-qualified academic in a research-intensive environment does not become research productive when given opportunities to develop research, or why an academic chooses not to undertake a new role that would appear to advance their career. Knowledge about how academics shape their jobs and forge a particular career trajectory is vitally important to discussions about how and whether universities should be supported. It is also important to university managers in strategic and policy decisions.

This paper elucidates key dimensions of awareness that influence the shaping of academic jobs. Interviews with mid-career academics are used to explore how academics navigate the complex demands that are placed on them to shape their academic jobs. A critical realist perspective (Archer, 2007, 2012) has been used to argue that it is not simply a question of what academics choose to focus their attention on, the positions they create are functions of what they see and respond to as well as what they may not notice. The paper explores the different ways academics read their context demonstrating how these differences relate to their focus of awareness. We argue that there are three core areas affecting academics sense of agency as they shape their own jobs: how they orient themselves to the world around them including their orientation to the academic institution and department; their underlying goals and purposes as they seek to have a fulfilling role; and how they relate to structural conditions of the workplace. In this paper, then, we are concerned with how academics perceive and interpret these core influences in shaping their jobs.

We begin with Archer's ideas as these are important to our argument. We then explore literature around academic work and set out the methods of investigation. In order to highlight distinctively different ways in which academics respond, the paper focuses on four individual 'case examples'. Similarities with other interviewees are also briefly presented. Finally the paper evaluates the implications of the findings for university policy and strategy and for further research.

Background

Theoretical background
Underlying this paper is the question of the relationship of individuals' subjectivity to social structure, specifically institutional structure. It is clear that social structures are highly influential in how people perceive themselves and the world (see e.g. Bourdieu, 1990; Giddens, 1990). However, whereas Bourdieu's notion of the habitus describes underlying dispositions of particular groups to act and think in certain ways, a critical realist perspective argues that structural reality exists and is interpreted by individual social agents (see e.g. Archer 2012; Elder-Vass, 2007). Structures may mediate, but they do not determine individuals' actions (Sayer, 1992). Archer (2007) argues that social situations are ambiguous and present a complex variety of conflicting opportunities for growth, development and the pursuit of personal objectives. She suggests that people develop an 'internal conversation' (Archer 2007, p.2) and use this to interpret the situations they are in.

In teaching, researching and administrating, academics balance their freedom against perceived personal, institutional and structural constraints. But why do individuals respond as they do? Psychological factors, such as self-efficacy, personal self-confidence, or stage of career might all be relevant. However, in this paper, we argue that academics differ in where their attention is focused and how they then reflect on what they notice. They develop their particular academic trajectory or profile by selectively focusing

attention and evaluating what they notice through reflexivity. Archer defines reflexivity as an internal dialogue that enables individuals to evaluate their agentic concerns within the circumstances in which they find themselves. It is: '…the regular exercise of the mental ability, shared by all normal people, to consider themselves in relation to the (social) contexts and vice versa' (Archer 2007, p.4). Archer identifies four different modes of reflexivity: communicative (where internal conversations require confirmation and completion by others before leading to action); autonomous (where internal conversations are self-contained and lead directly to action); meta-reflexive (where internal conversations critically evaluate previous inner dialogues and are critical about effective action in society); and fractured reflexivity (where internal conversations cannot lead to purposeful action, instead intensifying distress and disorientation resulting in expressive action) (Archer 2012, p. 13). These concepts have been found instructive in a range of studies (see e.g. Archer, 2007; 2012; Czerniewicz, Williams, & Brown, 2009; Otsuki, 2012; Clegg, 2010). They have not hitherto been used in examining academics' responses. Here, Archer's modes of reflexivity provide lenses through which to view different ways in which individual academics respond in shaping their jobs.

Academic work
The changing context of higher education has focused attention on the changing nature of academic work (see e.g. Blau, 1994; Gornall, Cook, Daunton, Salisbury & Thomas, 2013). This work is infused with concerns about conditions for academic professionalism. For example, Boyer's (1990) concern was to understand how research and teaching were differently evaluated while Nixon's (2001, p.176) concern was with the 'erosion of the conditions necessary for academic freedom'. There is unease, even in some research-intensive institutions, that considerable numbers of teaching and research academics are not research-active. Indeed, sometimes draconian strategies are put in place to remove them or shift them to teaching-only positions (Henkel, 2005; Lucas, 2006). Further concerns have centred around pressure of work and time constraints (e.g. Ylijoki, 2013). Comparative studies have examined academic work across countries suggesting that these concerns are widespread. (see e.g. Coates et al 2009; Fumasoli, Goastellec, & Kehm, 2015; Teichler, Arimoto, & Cummings, 2013).

Churchman and King (2009) point to the disjuncture between how academics describe their work and official stories that are told. Malcolm and Zukas (2009) highlight the messiness of academic work and argue that more needs to be understood about the academy as sites of social practice where there is interplay between the institution, the working lives of academics, what they do, what they think, and about disciplines as networks.

Our focus here is mid-career academics on teaching and research contracts. Locke (2014) argues that there is a greater differentiation of academic roles nowadays. He reports that in 2012-13, over 60 per cent of those on full-time contracts were engaged in teaching and research, but in 2013-14 that figure had gone down to less than 50% (Locke, Whitchurch, Smith, & Mazenod, 2016). The numbers of teaching-only staff have increased considerably in the UK from 2013 to 2016, which Locke, et al, (2016) attribute to responses to national research assessment. Australian statistics show a similar pattern. In 2016 teaching-only staff represented only five per cent of Australian academic and professional staff, whereas teaching and research academics constituted 50 per cent of the workforce (Source: Universities Australia HE Statistics, 2016).

Academics' formation is clearly likely to be influenced by their past training and experience in working out how to do their jobs and learning how to be an academic (see e.g. McAlpine & Åkerlind, 2010). In exploring responses to training and development, Brew, Boud & Namgung (2011) reported resistance among mid-career academics in utilising development opportunities. Research on workplace learning argues that everyday interactions can be more influential for learning than formal training (Boud & Middleton 2003). Price, Scheeres, and Boud (2009, p.217) examined how new professionals, in exploring how to do their jobs, utilise existing skills and previous experience in making or 'remaking' their jobs. They argue that in this way these professionals contribute to changing organisational practices through how they interpret the context and the tasks to be completed. This suggests that making, or shaping, jobs is a common workplace practice.

This paper builds on studies of how academics position themselves in relation to research and teaching, through the doctorate (Brew & Boud, 2009), academics' conceptions of research (Åkerlind, 2008; Brew, Boud, Namgung, Lucas & Crawford, 2016), their responses to research selectivity (Lucas, 2006), and their conceptions of teaching. (See for example, Nicoll & Harrison 2003). Academics' views of these key aspects are clearly important to how they respond. However, a more nuanced understanding about how academics shape their academic jobs is needed in order to counter misunderstandings about what it is academics do and why they do it.

Our concern here is with how academics respond to the structural conditions as they see them, so our interest in how academics shape their jobs is closely allied with what Clegg, (2008, p329) calls the 'vexed' question of academics' identities. However, in asking academics about the work they did, we did not, like Clegg (2008), ask about their identities. Therefore, we do not infer academics' identity positioning or make any assumptions about how academic identities are formed. Like Churchman and King (2009) our concern is with the stories about their work that academics tell. Before identities can be deduced, we need to understand what it is that academics notice and how they consider what they notice. This is the concern of this paper.

Method
The study draws on a critical realist perspective that argues that a structural reality is mediated by social agents. Structural aspects were explored through a large-scale survey of academics within six Australian and six English Universities, (see, eg. Brew & Boud, 2009; Brew, Boud & Namgung, 2011; Brew et al, 2016). This paper focuses on a subsequent qualitative study.

Semi-structured interviews with twenty-seven mid-career academics in three Australian and five English universities were conducted and transcribed. Interviewees were all located in research-intensive environments. From those who indicated in the survey a willingness to be interviewed, purposive sampling was used to select academics having 5-10 years' post-doctorate experience from three broad disciplines: Sciences and Engineering; Social Sciences and Humanities; and Health Sciences. Interview questions focused on how participants saw themselves as an academic, how they became the kind of academic they are, critical incidents in their career, perceived personal and structural influences in their current role, what constrained and what enabled teaching and research decisions, and their future aspirations. Interviews each lasting, on average, one hour were carried out by a team member. Interviewees were informed of the purpose of the research and signed a consent form. All identifiers have been anonymised

to protect confidentiality. Disciplines are only reported when they are germane to the analysis, as overall we did not find a relationship between discipline, focus of awareness and form of reflexivity among participants.

The interpretivist perspective taken in analyzing the data is in line with the approach of Archer (2012) in her study of sociology students. Data were first analyzed in terms of emergent themes, namely: how participants appeared to navigate perceived constraints and enablements, their PhD experiences, issues of power, what kind of narratives each was telling, transitions (e.g. promotion), teaching issues, orientations to research, academic working conditions, and critical incidents. These themes are the subject of other papers (see e.g. Brew, Boud, Lucas & Crawford, accepted 2017).

Each transcript was independently analysed by two members of the team through an iterative process of going forward and backward through each transcript. These members discussed their analyses, which were then shared with the whole group and linkages in themes across the different transcripts identified. Cross-matching of pairs of team members across the range of transcripts and periodic two-day team meetings ensured critical engagement with emergent interpretations. A summary for each participant was produced around key questions that emerged to enable comparisons across different cases. A second level of analysis (the focus of this paper) was carried out as a team seeking to answer the overarching question: what is it that characterizes the different ways that academics think about and shape their work? We noted variation in academics' forms of reflexivity, consistent with Archer's four forms. Noticing variations in what academics were attending to, we then enumerated these variations. Comparison across transcripts involved examining what each was not saying as well as what they were.

Findings

Two key findings of the study are that academics differ in the modes of reflexivity they employ and that they differ in the foci of their awareness. The modes of reflexivity employed and on what their awareness is focused appear to be interwoven within each individual. Our data suggest that these relationships are critical to understanding how individuals shape particular academic jobs.

All four of Archer's modes of reflexivity were evidenced in the transcripts. Communicative reflexivity was seen in participants whose internal conversations appeared to require confirmation by others, (e.g. colleagues, students, etc.) before resulting in courses of action (Natalie, William). Autonomous reflexivity which Archer describes as self-contained internal conversations leading directly to action was evidenced in many of our interviewees (Brett, Stephen, Shaun, Katie). Meta-reflexivity was demonstrated in participants who were critically reflexive about their own internal conversations and critical about effective action in society, working to improve university functioning (Silvie, Declan). Fractured reflexivity was evidenced through internal conversations that appeared to intensify distress rather than leading to purposeful courses of action (Isla, Rosemary).

These forms of reflexivity appeared intimately linked to individuals' focus of awareness. Some academics presented the world as complex and messy and controlling their actions (Natalie, William, Isla, Rosemary). These academics appeared to be overwhelmed by the world, dependent on the actions of others and the perceptions that others had of them. This appears to be closely related to communicative reflexivity but

can also be seen in those exhibiting fractured reflexivity. Other academics' focus of awareness was to see the world as needing to be controlled. They take action to control their world. The individual is in charge working autonomously to focus on individual achievements (Brett, Stephen, Shaun, Katie). This appears to be closely related to autonomous reflexivity. Other academics see the world as in need of change. Their trajectories are tied to making changes in the world that make it a more just place (Silvie, Declan). This is closely related to meta-reflexivity.

Depending on the focus of their awareness, academics' underlying goals also differed. There were those whose focus was on self-advancement (Brett, Stephen, Shaun, Katie), others whose goals were related to survival (Natalie, William, Isla, Rosemary) and yet others whose focus was social change (Silvie, Declan).

Academics' relationships to structural conditions and constraints also varied. Structural conditions were seemingly ignored or minimised (Brett, Shaun, Stephen, Katie); or they appeared to overwhelm and confuse (Natalie, William, Isla, Rosemary), or for some academics, actions were taken to change structural conditions (Silvie, Declan).

To demonstrate the complexity of these interactions and to illustrate particular ways of responding, four case examples that illustrate different modes of reflexivity and different foci of awareness, are now presented (Natalie, Brett, Isla, Silvie). Careful post hoc comparison of the emergent forms of reflexivity identified in the transcripts with Archer's modes of reflexivity provided a rationale for the choice of case examples. However, these four examples are not isolated cases, so following these descriptions, some comparisons are made with other interviewees' responses.

Case examples
Natalie
Natalie joined English University C when there was a strong emphasis on teaching. In the forefront of Natalie's awareness are large student numbers, teaching load, workload policies, administrative responsibilities, type of classes, and lack of availability of a research lab. All are perceived as constraining action. She talks about how there is no choice but to keep abreast of the teaching as there is a shortage of staff, insisting this has meant she has not been able to do any research. The presence and help given by good close colleagues and her former PhD supervisor are perceived as enabling.

Natalie's congenial home situation, helpful partner, nice house and settled situation enables her to work, but also appears to constrain her career advancement giving her a potential 'excuse' not to engage in research. However, recently, University C had changed policy. Natalie describes how this change in focus from teaching to 'massive' (L.140) pressure to do research, which could be interpreted as enabling time for research, actually constrains her because there are no deadlines. Teaching has '*shorter deadlines*' (L.159) while research, which she sees as self-indulgent, *'can always wait'* (L.161). This change in policy and the pressure of workload owing to what she saw as poor management, presents real challenges. She deals with this pressure by keeping research on her agenda but not actively engaging with it because she says there is a lack of time to do what needs to be done.

> '*It makes me overwhelmingly guilty almost all the time. But at the same point when you have students at your door and you have a three-week turnaround of marking … I don't know how*

I'm going to change my attitude, I think that's probably what it really comes down to, is that to me research has always been at the bottom of the heap.' (Natalie, L.146-90)

Throughout the interview Natalie provides assurances that she is hard working. She appears to need the confirmation of her actions by students, by colleagues, by her head of department and even by the interviewer. Natalie suggests a day-to-day sense of just getting through. The world is viewed as complex and messy and it controls her actions. Structural conditions appear to overwhelm and confuse. There is no bigger picture here; no sense of trying to effect change or influence university agendas. Her goal is simply survival. She illustrates how she actively contributes to her own lack of social mobility, that Archer suggests is typical of 'working at staying put' which characterises communicative reflexivity. This for Archer describes internal conversations that require completion and confirmation by others before resulting in action. This is characteristic of Natalie whose main focus of attention is on others and on how they view her.

Brett

Brett exhibits independence in his presentation of self as a person very much in control in relation to his work life. He entered English University D as a senior lecturer and was subsequently promoted to Reader then Professor – all within 10 years of his PhD. The over-riding sense in Brett's narrative is of someone who focuses on pursuing his goal of self-advancement and ensuring that anything that could be seen as a setback is creatively re-worked to be a potential success. Early in his career he experienced what could have been serious structural constraints. His supervisor left part way through his PhD and he had very limited support from a second supervisor. Undaunted, he managed to successfully complete his PhD and published two book chapters and two articles during this time. Brett provides a narrative of self-reliance and independence that he claims has characterised his career and has resulted in him often seeing opportunities inherent in any constraints placed on him.

Although Brett has developed a position as a strong researcher, it would be an over-simplification to see him as having achieved this success by being someone who is only focused on research. He relays examples of himself as a 'good citizen' attending library committees as well as his achievements in teaching when he was awarded a prize for devising an innovative interdisciplinary course, which was very popular with students.

He has undoubtedly had tremendous success, but is also quite forthright in his description of rejections and difficulties he has faced. However, his narrative around these is always how he managed to achieve some success; but he takes nothing for granted and does not assume that things will go well. He shows an almost ruthless determination and perseverance to succeed in terms of being very strategic in reinforcing collaborations, getting funding and publishing:

> *'… what funding bodies, and people who are reviewing funding bodies, are particularly interested in seeing is the sequence. Can this person … complete the research project in a timely manner and get good outputs out of it? And I have, in a sense, a regular series of kind of the cookie cutter manufactured research project: conference participation, three journal articles, book. Right, you know, same thing. … project, conferences, three journal articles, book. … – and with another book in between the projects or something like that.' (Brett, L 208-230)*

Unlike Natalie who was focused on other people and the effects of her actions on their view of herself, Brett's concern is self-contained. This is not just a question of a difference in confidence. The focus of attention of each is different. Brett's narrative is focused on himself; not in a solipsistic way, nor in an approval-seeking way, but rather himself in relation to action in the world. Brett's narrative is characteristic of what Archer calls autonomous reflexivity. Archer suggests that the enforced independence of autonomous reflexives brought about by their backgrounds, plays a significant role in creating an independent trajectory. Such people, according to Archer, take personal responsibility to shape a life. Brett endorses this in his statement: '*you have to make your future for you*' (L.290).

Silvie

Silvie is an associate professor at Australian University A. At the time of interview she had a large administrative load and a four year research council funded fellowship so was not doing any teaching. She thinks critically about her environment and her place within it and works to ensure that she is able to communicate a sense of self that is valued but also challenges the perceived status quo. Throughout her interview it is her value commitments that are to the fore; particularly her concern for equity and social justice. She describes how she '*had quite a barney with the DVC research*' about the practice of only rewarding first named chief investigators on highly rated non-funded grant proposals. She argued that this was immoral and not very good for early career researchers since second named chief investigators may have done much of the work but be not quite so senior.

> '*… so I've never been afraid to cause waves about things like that.*' (Silvie, L.337-352)

Also in talking of how the level of research activity is not taken into account in the faculty's workload formula, she says:

> '*I don't have children, that's fine for me, but I have argued that it's actually very discriminatory against people with caring responsibilities because [being highly research active] becomes a discretionary part of your workload if it's not actually actively recognised.*' (Silvie, L. 386-389)

She is also particularly concerned with the ways women are unknowingly discriminated against in academia:

> '*Research shows that, especially younger female academics end up doing admin for other people. They're brought in on things but they're not the lead person therefore their work is ultimately not recognised … I'm collegial but I don't allow myself to be exploited … '* (Silvie, L. 84).

Silvie is a strategist focused on the efficient and effective working of her department and the university more generally. She is strategic about what she takes on –and makes sure that she gets credit for what she does.

> '*I've always found that the hierarchy's been interested in what I've had to say and they've taken the opportunity to involve me in a lot of strategic thinking at the faculty and the university level quite easily*' (Silvie, L. 65).

Whatever is perceived to be a structural constraint is strategically addressed in some way. She describes herself as manipulating the faculty, and indeed the whole university, and says that you can move things forward by '*creating structures through which people can participate …*' (Silvie, L.178).

> '*a lot of academics are quite naïve about how organisations work … [they] … take up a lot of time in meetings, … they don't prepare. You know we're very inefficient in our structures. So if you wish to actually get things done the best way … is actually to come to the table with a sensible proposal, … … in a context where people are often frozen by indecision, academics work very well if there's something in front of them on paper rather than just a space to speak.*' (Silvie, L. 172-182)

Essentially Silvie's focus of attention is on the world around herself. That world is viewed with a critical lens. Her concern is to change the environment in which she works, not just to further her own career, but because furthering her own career and improving institutional functioning go hand in hand. Silvie's value commitments are central. Her internal conversations exemplify Archer's notion of meta-reflexivity, which is characterised by internal conversations that are critical of one's own internal conversations and on the look-out for difference in the world.

Isla

Isla is a senior lecturer in Australian University A. She has been in her post for eight years teaching both undergraduate and post-graduate students. After six years Isla applied for promotion and was promoted on her second application. However, two weeks after being informed about her success with the promotion, Isla was told that she was at risk of redundancy due to lack of performance on some newly defined criteria. As the institutional processes worked through this, Isla had to wait for 3-months without knowing whether she would be made redundant. She found this very worrying and demotivating.

At the time of the interview, Isla was not research active. She perceives structural constraints in connecting with colleagues because people are in their offices at different times. She describes this as the nature of academic work; '*it's like you can come in and just sit in my office and not see anyone*'. Isla goes on to explain how the value attributed to research publications, in her view, compounds this. Besides, as she explains '*you only get 50% credit for a co-authored paper*', (Isla, L.382-5).

Isla indicates that she used to enjoy her work, but institutional strategies that have recently been put in place in terms of pressure to research and publish present serious structural constraints for her. She is debilitated in having to produce a certain number of papers with no time to think of ideas. She was granted study leave to have time for research but found having too much time without structure was debilitating. She wasn't able to use that time productively.

> *I was unable to do any research during that time because of my mental health and family issues and everything else (Isla, L. 56-58)*

Isla used to enjoy teaching and commonly taught large classes, which she feels she is good at. Isla also states that she is good at the administrative responsibilities that go along with her teaching. She feels

frustrated that she is not able to develop a course in her own area of interest, partly due to what she perceives to be bureaucratic institutional processes for course approval.

She is angry about how the university is managed and of the idea of surveillance. This adds to her perception of powerlessness. The structural constraints overwhelm and confuse.

> *I just wonder … if there was less pressure to keep on pushing research out whether I would feel differently about it because I would be able to explore different ideas and play around with different things, but you can't because we've always got to get funding '. (Isla, L. 116-125)*

In total contrast to Brett, whose focus is on himself acting in and controlling of his world, Isla's focus of attention is on herself but being dominated by her world. Isla's narrative exhibits characteristics of being 'primarily expressive, wounded and regretful without being able to design a course of action to ameliorate their situation' that Archer (2012, p,251) describes as being characteristic of fractured reflexivity. Her internal conversations intensify distress and disorientation rather than leading to purposeful courses of action. Archer acknowledges that fractured reflexives may have been different at different times, but that events, possibly traumatic, have put them into this state. We can certainly see this in Isla's narrative.

Other interviewees' responses

As mentioned above, these are not isolated cases. All of our interviewees exhibited these modes of awareness and reflexivity. For example, William demonstrated communicative reflexivity in his concern with the changes in higher education. His focus of attention is on the chaos that he believed is being brought about through new policy dimensions. Like Natalie, he demonstrates a focus on himself surrounded by confusion. He recognises the need for change while all the time working hard to stay put; to not change too much. He is critical of change and trying to come to terms with it, but really he would like to have the autonomy to decide himself what he should do and how he should respond.

Stephen is, like Brett, very focused on his own research trajectory and takes personal responsibility to shape his life in the way he wants it. This is more diffuse than Brett and it seems to come from a growing realisation that he needs to be more strategic.

> *'And I think in general their advice, which is very sound, is to scope your activities as narrow as possible so that you don't waste time on the peripheries, and just try and make that happen,' (Stephen, L. 1039-1041)*

Katie similarly is focused on her own career trajectory and demonstrates autonomous reflexivity. At the time of the interview she had had a period of maternity leave and then research leave and had recently returned to teaching. Her focus of attention, like Stephen and Brett is on the self, acting in the world. This is seen in many of the interviews. Indeed, the data suggests that for successful researchers, structural constraints need either to be ignored or to be reworked in order to forge ahead in gaining a successful profile.

Rosemary, on the other hand is in many ways like Isla in that she is debilitated by the situation in which she finds herself. She moved from a research intensive institution to a more teaching focused one. She always thought of herself as a researcher but in her present institution research is not strong and she has had difficulty in sustaining it. There is a lot of negativity in Rosemary's interview transcript, which suggests

elements of a fractured reflexivity. She does not exhibit the same levels of distress as Isla, but she does seem unable to design a course of action that would take her out of passivity.

Declan entered academia in his 50s with a wealth of experience as a researcher in industry. He thinks of himself primarily as a researcher, even though he is carrying a heavy administrative load as an associate dean. Declan, like Silvie, displays meta-reflexivity. Much of his conversation is around the effects of university structures on his colleagues and about how his research can be socially worthwhile. Like Silvie, Declan seems to feel quite happy about his own position but he is sympathetic to and concerned about the struggles for more junior academics. He believes academics '*are getting mixed messages' (*L366*)* about whether to focus on teaching or research. Declan seems perplexed as to why some academics do not seem to understand that to succeed in their role, they have to be strong in research. He puts it down to resistance to change.

Discussion

This paper set out to explore dimensions of academics' awareness that influence how they navigate complex demands to shape particular academic jobs. In the absence of research evidence, why and how people develop particular academic profiles and how and why they are likely to respond to particular policy changes and new initiatives appear mysterious. For effective decision-making in university policy and strategy, it is important for academics and academic managers to understand how academics make sense of the competing pressures of teaching, research and administration and how they position themselves in ways that personally make sense within institutional expectations. This paper has demonstrated the different ways that a sample of mid-career teaching and research academics from England and Australia have mediated their personal and professional goals and orientations and university imperatives in shaping satisfying and sustainable jobs

Our findings suggest complex interactions of individuals' foci of awareness, forms of reflexivity, differing aims and varying responses to structural conditions. These can be characterised in terms of four principal responses to the university environment as academics shape their particular jobs. For some, their focus of attention is how to respond to a complex, messy world over which they have no or limited control. Such academics work hard to stay put exemplifying Archer's communicative reflexivity. Their aim is focused on survival. Structural conditions may overwhelm and confuse. Others, and this is by far the largest group amongst our interviewees, create a career through a focus on self-advancement; taking charge of their actions in the world and taking personal responsibility to shape a life, which Archer argues is characteristic of autonomous reflexivity. For these academics, structural conditions tend to be ignored or minimised. The third response is through a focus of attention on the self being dominated by a hostile world. This way of responding means that the academics are regretful and unable to see a purposeful way out of their situation, which characterises Archer's fractured reflexivity. The fourth way of responding is where academics' aims and their focus of attention are on improving the world. Structural conditions are considered ripe for change. Individual advancement is dovetailed with actions to bring about change as in Archer's notion of meta-reflexivity.

The findings point to areas where greater understanding among academics and academic managers of how academics respond is likely to be beneficial. Greater sensitivity to how academics orient themselves in relation to the world around them is indicated. Understanding the various underlying goals of academics as

they seek to satisfy institutional demands as well as their own personal objectives is important. These goals may be a response to the demands of the position they are in, or may emanate from personal orientations. Understanding how academics relate to structural conditions and constraints as demonstrated in this paper is necessary for effective institutional functioning and sustainable academic trajectories and careers.

As well as suggestions relating to university policy and strategy, the different responses found in this study provide an agenda for future research. As a form of social practice, important questions are what are the foundations of reflexivity and why do individual academics exhibit particular mode(s) of reflexivity. Archer (2012) argues that modes of reflexivity derive largely from exposure to particular natal conditions. Our research did not explore such foundations but it would be instructive to do so in future work. However, in order to do this we would have needed to ask academics about their family backgrounds and early experiences which we did not do. This would be interesting to explore in a subsequent study.

In this paper, in interpreting academics' interview responses in terms of Archer's (2012) modes of reflexivity, we recognise that individuals may exhibit other modes at other times and that the mode of reflexivity exhibited may have been a function of how they viewed the interview and the interviewer. Nevertheless, it can be seen that taking these modes as a starting point has opened new ways of looking at academic positioning by drawing attention to different dimensions of how individuals focus their attention and navigate the complexities of structure and agency in shaping academic jobs. Further research is now also needed to examine how prevalent these dimensions are amongst a wider group of academics.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed a study of how academics shape their academic jobs in the context of conflicting and ambiguous university environments. How individuals reflect and what is in the forefront of their focus of attention are allied to their levels of awareness and engagement in particular activities. They are also linked to the perceived levels of control or autonomy that they can exercise and whether they are active or passive in relation to a particular way of being. What people see and what they perceive as possible to control affect the kinds of jobs they shape for themselves. We see in our data the ways in which academics shape their work and the particular jobs they constitute. Ultimately the kinds of jobs they shape determine their career trajectories.

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