The imagined and the real: Identifying the tensions for academic identity

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Changes within the higher education sector have had significant effects on the identity of the individual academic. As institutions transform in response to government driven policy and funding directives, there is a subsequent impact upon the roles and responsibilities of those employed as educational professionals. Academic practices are changing as multiple roles emerge from the reshaping of academic work. Institutional pressures to produce specific research outputs at the same time as teaching and undertaking managerial/administrative responsibilities are creating tension between what academics perceive as their professional identity and that prescribed by their employing organisation. Reconciling this disconnect is part of the challenge for academics, who are now seeking to understand and manage their changing identity. Narratives obtained from research in a university with a polytechnic background and an institute of technology (aspiring to be a university), provide some subjective reflections for examining this issue.

Introduction

What makes an academic today and how does the academic perceive their working identity? This question is being asked more frequently as the roles and responsibilities of tertiary academic staff are reframed and revised. The common refrain from academics often includes reference to the manner in which they feel constrained and continually asked to do more than before. Yet, perhaps academics could ask 'How accurate is my interpretation of what I do and who I am?', 'How genuine is my willingness to adapt to my employing institution's changing needs?' The individual's academic identity contains some inertia when centred around the values of academic freedom, and this is exacerbated by an increasing disconnect with the more recent institutional adoption of economic objectives. Historically, academic staff comprised a "community of scholars" (Harris, 2005 p. 424) who identified with their discipline more than their institution. Now, as commercial interests are accelerating within the higher education sector, the boundary between academic and institutional identity is less clear. In this paper I open up a space for further critical debate on academic identity and examine some issues that lie at the point of tension between staff perceptions and organisational pressures.

The topic for this paper is positioned within a dynamic social and higher education context, which is providing academic staff with fresh challenges. Over the last decade much has been researched and written about the pressures being experienced by academics within higher education. Churchman (2006), Debowski (2007) and Duke (2003) have commented upon Australian contexts, while Deem and Lucas (2006) and Gordon (2005) have undertaken work in the UK and Scotland. At the same time, Ashcroft (2005) and Middleton (2005) have examined this issue within New Zealand. The burgeoning literature in this field suggests an issue of concern, particularly as the pressure to reform the tertiary sector is continual. In particular, academic work and identity have been reshaped "around an idealised image of corporate efficiency (and) a strong managerial culture" (Winter, 2009, p. 121). Such shifts in institutional direction have emerged as a result of an increased governmental focus on global competitiveness (Clegg, 2008).

While institutions have changed in response to external influences, their strategic directions have not always developed in alignment with an academic's notion of their professional self, although Clegg (2008) has noted that these individual perceptions vary according to context. The revised institutional focus appears to clash with values held by academics (Briggs, 2007) whose focus is on student learning rather than student numbers. My exploration into the growing divide between the perceived professional self and that being prescribed by the organisation has led me to research the experience of practising academics and listen to their voice. Rather than view the academic professional as an occupational category in this changing context, I prefer to align with Winter who refers to the professional as having a "valued self-identity" (2009, p. 122) that encompasses commitment and

competence. I utilise Winter's conceptual 'schism', for exploring the difference between an academic's 'imagined' or 'perceived' identity and their actual experience of how it is constructed.

Recently, I worked with a research partner in a study undertaken in Aoteoroa/New Zealand, examining the research culture within two tertiary institutions. Both institutions are grappling with changing funding regimes and processes of accountability, including the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF), through which institutions receive funding based on an assessment every six years, of individual staff research. The research findings help to elucidate identity tension for academics in that country. I draw on that project's interviews which were held with staff, during which they had an opportunity to reflect on their own changing experiences of working as an academic. Staff perceptions of institutional research, culture and the degree of alignment between managerial expectation and support, provide insights into the professional divide between the academic manager and the managed academic (Winter, 2009). In so doing, these reflections indicate how academics are having to reconcile their positioning in a more corporatised environment (Churchman, 2006).

How an academic contextualises their identity has an impact on the way in which they make sense of their workplace. The process of imagining one's place in the world and, in particular, one's envisaged community, has been raised by Anderson (1991). While Calhoun (1991) supports the view that personal affiliations can be enhanced through imagined personal connection, he also contends that there can be diverse ways of understanding one's social positioning, that results in "an experiential and intellectual split between lifeworld and the system world" (p. 99). Imagining oneself as a member of a community, Calhoun suggests, results from collegiality, a common purpose and collective identity. He also maintains that communication of certain practices within that community develops commonly accepted social practices which become traditions. In this paper I examine how the changing context for academics is laden with tension as the academic seeks to understand or reconcile their *imagined* identity (associated with past, present and future constructions) with that of their current reality.

I have structured the paper by firstly considering the terminology and understandings of identity and in particular, academic identity. In conceptualising identity I acknowledge its dynamic nature and identify the context in which academic identity is constructed. In order to provide a space for the academic voice, I include partial narratives from academic staff interviews. These comments provide an illustration of the tensions that academics are experiencing. How far then, from their perceived or imagined identity, do academics view their current identity? What implications arise from any identifiable disconnect? Finally, by referring to organisational and individual expectations and the complexity and heterogeneity of the academic community (Silver, 2003), I offer an avenue through which the debate on academic working relationships and identities can be advanced.

Identity

Identity can be interpreted in various ways and different terminology is used to articulate its meaning. Our identity or 'sense of self' is not so much ascribed, rather, it represents an ongoing effort of making sense of who we are, when situated in past, present and future experiences (Geijsel & Meijers, 2005). Identity is therefore continually changing and involves a subjective interpretation of our individuality in the context of activities. In this way identity is learnt and re-learnt. Henkel (2000) has referred to identity as being reflective of contextual understanding and the sense of self comprising an "organised endeavour" (p.

14) in which self identity is repeatedly reconstructed. However, while identity may be dynamic, it does need continuity (Henkel, 2000), for it has significance in both personal and working lives and influences the way in which these are managed.

While there has been an increased focus upon identity development and its characteristics, Taylor (2008) points out that less attention has been placed upon its historical origin. In order to examine how individuals may perceive the composition of an academic identity, Taylor provides a helpful insight into how philosophical standpoints distinguish identities. He refers to four perspectives, the first relating to the 'taking-on' of identities through shared and accepted practices. The second, during the seventeenth century, placed more emphasis on personal reflection which contested earlier assumptions. Individuals took greater responsibility for their own sense of self through critiquing external authorities. This was then translated through a third historical phase of "co-construction" (p. 28) which Taylor attributes to the work of Freud. The latest (fourth) position has occurred in the more recent post-modern phase, in which identity undergoes continual re-construction within a complex environment. These four historical perspectives offer a backdrop for the current experience of academic identity which does not privilege any one of them, but instead may involve an inter-relationship of some or all of them.

Conceptually then, identity is a dynamic construct, as one's individual identity emerges from a personal, ethnic and national context, but is also socially constructed over time. Henkel (2000) views this construction as being on a continuum that links the past with the present and future. In the context of academe, the individual develops their sense of 'academic self' through their imaginings of what comprises 'the academic', their past experiences and their understanding of the current circumstances. However, one's identity is neither static nor time-specific (Henkel, 2000). Self identity has strong connections with the known and the valued, is influenced and modified by the unforeseen and disruptive and is transformed by external social pressures at both the micro and macro levels. Hence, each component of the individual's identity, while being connected to the past and contributing to that of the future, may well emerge from the imagined and projected as well as the real.

Since academic identity is tied strongly to the past, it is also related then to perception of what comprised the professional role in the academy through history. Historically, the university has represented a collective of scholars which Harris (2005) suggests exhibited "exclusion, elitism and power" (p. 424) and individuals held ideological rewards and peer esteem to be paramount (Winter, 2009). Certain values were held as precious, namely collegiality, collaborative management and academic freedom (Winter, 2009), but this was when universities were more autonomous and internal practices were less subject to external influences. The more recent version of the tertiary institution involves a contestation of those values. The academic's sense of freedom has been more recently challenged by revised institutional mores, which demand the ideological engagement and endorsement of economic and managerial priorities.

Rather than viewing identity as singular, Churchman (2006) notes that there is no sole academic identity within the current tertiary environment, where the role of the academic is both one of change and compromise, but instead there exists a complex multiplicity of accounts and understandings of being part of academe. This plurality is not always favoured in tertiary institutions where there is an increasing focus on unifying practices to enhance cohesion (Churchman & King, 2009) and so there exists a tension for accommodating difference in times of change. In some cases there may be practical constraints on how far individuals can re-construct and re-vision their identity. When conflict develops between an

individual's expectations and those of the institution, this may result in staff resistance to institutional demands.

So how do academic and professional identities co-exist? An individual identifies themselves as an academic both in relation to the organisation itself, and as a member of the academic profession. Academic identity then becomes intrinsically bound up with the values, beliefs and practices held in common with others of that affiliation. Briggs (2007) explains that professional identity is underpinned by three concepts: professional identity (What I profess); professional location (The profession to which I belong); and professional role (My role within the profession). These three components are useful in examining how the academic identity is changing. It is axiomatic that as the sector and context alters, then so must the individual's identity. One's sense of self is embedded in the way the professional role is enacted and when roles and responsibilities alter in emphasis, so the individual's sense of distinctiveness will also shift. It follows then that professional identity develops where agency and structure (Briggs, 2007), or the self and context, interact.

Linking academics as individuals to institutions as structural contexts does not need to be adversarial. Gidden's (1984) work on structure and agency, provides an opportunity to examine the academic as a powerful agent. At a logical level, structure (in this case the tertiary institution) and the agent (the academic) are necessarily connected, but not necessarily opposed. The recursive relationship between the individual and their context provides an opportunity for each to alter the other. However, social structures influence but do not determine actions and events, so while academic identity may be affected by changes within the tertiary sector, it need not be fully transformed. Identity becomes a process of development (Giddens, 1991; Henkel, 2000) which Whitchurch (2008) explains (through reference to Giddens, 1991) as having an ability to mature as the individual interprets, adapts and remodels behaviour.

Whitchurch (2008) has suggested that the reality of academic roles and responsibilities is often more complex and multi-faceted than outlined in employment documentation. Indeed, this may explain why academics retain a fluid identity as duties and expectations fluctuate. While identities are influenced by individual values and beliefs as well as by institutional culture and positioning, it is accepted that identity affects one's "sense of purpose, self-efficacy, motivation, commitment, job satisfaction and effectiveness" (Day, Kington, Stobart & Sammons, 2006, p. 601). Thus, how an individual identity is both developed and maintained, has a significant effect on the effectiveness of workplace positioning. Stronach, Corbin, McNamara, Stark & Warne (2002) point to the tension between the economy of performance (how professionals are assessed & evaluated) and the ecologies of practice (one's own beliefs and practices which have developed during work over time). The result may be a struggle to articulate the identity of both themselves and their colleagues (Churchman, 2006), sometimes resulting in the development of transitory identities in response to shifting circumstances (Stronach et al., 2002).

Whilst change can impact on the individual's notion of their relationship with the social and economic environment through both threats and opportunities, academics still have the ability to negotiate their roles and responsibilities through the process of prioritising. Lee and Boyd (2003) view this reaction as part of the process whereby "academic identities, including identities as researchers, are forged, rehearsed and remade in local sites of practice" (p. 188). It appears that academics as individuals prefer a sense of belonging, either through accepting the temptation to align and identify with disciplinary silos (Macfarlane, 2006), or being part of sub-cultures (Viitanen & Piirainen, 2003). In her explanation of the reformation of the academy, Harris (2005) has referred to the change to the autonomy of the academic, as

education and research have become more marketised. In this context she noted that academic identity is more related to subject discipline than the institution itself. Consequently, the lure of being part of a group conflicts with the heterogeneity of academic staff and this hinders the development of a cohesive organisational identity (Silver, 2003). Thus academic identity and the higher education context are inextricably linked.

The changing nature of higher education

Academic work in higher education has been re-shaped, particularly in the Western world, as the sector changes to become consumer-driven (Harris, 2005) and increasingly bureaucratised (Debowski, 2007). In a shift to address economic priorities, there has been increased competition with other higher education institutions to attract more fee-paying students. Institutions are re-structuring and re-orientating their focus to address changed government funding, revised government priorities and expectations (Gordon, 2005) as well as the demands of students as consumers. One outcome has been increased entrepreneurship involving the creation of initiatives that address stakeholder requirements and the acquisition of external funds. Harris (2005) notes that marketisation has been applied to both education and research, which has resulted in a movement away from the traditionally accepted notion of academic autonomy and capability.

When institutions react to external demands, so organisational leadership and management processes change to reflect those directions. One example of an external driver is that of the Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) in New Zealand. When the government separated higher education funding between teaching and research activities, institutions that conduct research were compelled to compete with each other for contestable funds. These institutions now receive income that reflects the PBRF graded status of their individual members. The PBRF is effectively an outcomes-based model, where achievements rather than research inputs and related activities are recognised. Such funding regimes for research now require different forms of assessment of research outcomes and this has altered institutional expectations and accountabilities (Ashcroft, 2005). A further result of this policy-based funding has been the increased tension between supporting research and the demands of teaching and learning. While working to enhance teaching portfolios, there is increased role conflict with the requirement of the research roles (Debowski, 2007). These changes pose both threats and opportunities to academic staff, whose identities are subject to continual review and revision (Lee & Boyd, 2003).

I concur with Henkel (2007) who believes that in the wider context of changing social identity, universities are no longer academically autonomous. External influences, such as research assessment policies, have shifted the way in which higher education institutions prioritise functions and outcomes, although this external pressure has been somewhat alleviated by new forms of governance and the identification of alternative funding sources. Marginson (2000) refers to the danger of research being policy led and research identities being colonised as a result of the new research economy. As institutions strategise to meet increased competition and changed expectations, academic staff will have to modify their role (Middleton, 2005) to increase their research outputs as well as provide quality teaching. In this way, collectively, the changing institution and the social and economic context in which it is positioned, are affecting the identity of the individual academic. Thus higher education is facing a professional identity crisis (Nixon, 1996), in which it is deemed that the reconfiguration of an individual's professional identity accompanies sector restructuring.

The shifting employment terrain has caused employer-employee relationships to become stretched and not always in alignment. Academics may re-trench to safer spaces and concentrate in discipline-specific units, which reflects Nixon's (1996) assertion that there is no longer a single academic profession. On the positive side, Henkel (2000) suggests that academic responses are adaptive and evolutionary, so while individuals seek to retain a professional identity that reflects their teaching and research roles, institutional objectives can be linked to those of individuals. Consequently, this imperative remains an issue for those leading organisational change.

In summary, changes to governmental policy, such as the public funding of research activities, are changing the nature of academic work. As institutions seek to remain competitive, tasks and productivity are prioritised over staff responsibilities and career development. Some of these changes may pose threats as well as opportunities for staff, affecting their fundamental understandings of self and self-worth. People may not fully engage with changing circumstances, when they are unable to make sense of their situation. In the next section, I provide narratives from academics who were enthusiastic to explain their views and identify their concerns. The academic voice makes a compelling read.

The academic voice

Theory assists us with examining conceptual identities, but it is the voice of those who hold the positions in question that can illustrate what is perceived, imagined and experienced. The study undertaken by Billot and Smith (2007) provides some examples of how academic staff articulate their sense of self and how their experiences align with institutional expectations. Participant quotes provided below (italicised) illustrate some of the perceptions and frustrations held by individuals. The main issues that academics identified as significant include: the changing nature of their role with increased responsibilities; the challenge to be a quality teacher while producing assessable research outputs; role conflict; insufficient institutional support; and continual organisational change. When I listened to the academics, I realised that individuals meet and manage change in a working environment very differently. Whilst there were some favourable comments made about both institutions, most of the frustrations were centred around the imposition of change and a perception that institutional support did not indicate adequate consideration of the individual.

While this paper refers to the higher education sector in general, the research project that is now outlined was located in two New Zealand institutions. One is a newer university of 10 years and the other, a polytechnic aspiring for university status. The experience of staff in these two institutions identifies some of the challenges being faced within less established tertiary institutions. The primary aim of the project was to examine staff perceptions of the research funding regime, the PBRF and its impact on professional identity and research productivity. Three case studies were selected, namely the Schools of Education (Educ), Design (Des) and Nursing (Nur) in both institutions. These particular disciplines were chosen as they had performed less well than others in the 2003 PBRF assessment round, during which staff research outputs were evaluated and graded. The researchers were interested in discovering possible reasons for this diminished performance and the impact of the assessment on staff morale and motivation. Questions were also asked about whether staff had modified their work practices and how this may have affected their perception of their professional identity. An online survey (with both closed and open-ended questions) of 240 staff was undertaken, to elicit staff views on their roles and responsibilities, their perceptions of institutional demands and support and the degree to which individual and institutional expectations aligned. Subsequently, in-depth interviews were held with the two institutional

Heads of Research to contextualise the strategic initatives to develop a research culture and then semi-structured interviews occurred with 31 staff members (marginally more participants from the Schools of Education). The narratives provided here have been extracted from the interviews held with the staff.

Whilst the project focused upon the effect of the PBRF and not specifically on identity, the findings do offer some insights into staff perceptions about their work, their relationship with their employing institution and the impact on their sense of professional self. Initially it became apparent that for many staff in both institutions and across all three selected disciplines, the imposition of the PBRF and internal drivers to undertake research and to publish, were resulting in a significant shift in academic roles and responsibilities. There was significant pressure for staff to undertake multiple responsibilities, some of which remained in conflict. The following comment indicates how work has been re-prioritised. "*I think the PBRF has made me more aware that there needs to be some outputs and I need to play the game to a certain extent, but I am careful not to let it override my other commitments"*(Educ). Another participant expressed his concerns in this way:

> *A feeling of 'being torn' is one of the problems being faced by the staff to do research. Increase in the work loads, research commitments, lack of funding to attend conferences, time allocation, space, access to resources, not enough help and support such as mentoring to achieve research, more administrative work, (these) are some of the problems being faced by the staff.* (Educ)

The academic's role involves a combination of priorities and there are additional professional commitments in the disciplines of Education, Nursing and Design. Staff in these disciplines view the practical application of their teaching (linked by student practice in the field) as critical to the development of student efficacy. One staff member identifies her academic purpose: "*They're (research, teaching, administration) each a priority but I think that teaching is what I'm employed to do. That's my core role I think*" (Educ). Some staff acknowledge that they cannot undertake research as well as commit professionally to their field of practice and the effective teaching of students. This combination of responsibilities is time-consuming and teaching, managerial/administrative and research expectations may conflict with each other. The outcome of this role conflict may be a feeling of alienation from other staff: "*Research expectation is also termed as 'obsession with publication' that leads to a more competitive environment, bringing in a division such as (an) 'us' and 'them' culture*"(Educ).

Staff also mentioned their frustration at being 'stretched' to manage multiple tasks, causing "*pressure on the staff at the expense of quality.*" The impact of this pressure on the sense of professional self appears to be profound and, as voiced by some, not what they envisaged their academic life to comprise.

> *My focus more often than not is outside of myself or my own necessary personal kind of interests, whereas when I was just a lecturer, I didn't think that it was like that, I could afford to, if you like, be a bit more sort of self indulgent.* (Des)

At the same time, staff perceive that they may be defaulting on research expectations, prescribed in their job descriptions as "*significant compliance expectations*" (Nur). Some interviewees expressed their feeling of failure, lack of control over their performance and a distrust of the organisation to understand their position. "*I begin to feel that I am turning into a machine*" (Des) Sixty nine per cent of all the staff who were surveyed stated that their institution did not provide sufficient research support. One interviewee said: "*I feel that (the institution) is doing an insufficient amount to aid these staff who are putting in exhausting*

hours and contributing to (the institution's) research income" (Des). Another participant explained how they reacted to this issue:

> *Well I actually think the expectations of both the school and the institution are entirely unrealistic...My understanding is that the undergraduate programme I teach in, is one of the few highly viable programmes in the whole outfit and the only reason it's highly viable is because we have large classes and a very heavy workload and yet the expectation of us in terms of producing research outputs doesn't change at all and there's no extra support in terms of teaching for us, which would then enable our research outputs to increase. So I am an entirely frustrated active researcher to the point where I'm practically inactive.*(Nur)

In the context of the polytechnic, it was observed that organisational change has been continuous, through repeated restructuring in an attempt to manage financial problems. This has added pressure on teaching and research staff who, while showing frustration at institutional expectations, also understand the complexity of the issues.

> *The balance I think between research and teaching, I always struggle with this, that there's a kind of a message out there connected to PBRF or heightened by PBRF that to be an effective researcher, or an academic, you have to have a lot of outputs and you have to you know, do that, and there isn't the same amount of attention and value given to actually what we're here for, which is to educate teachers and to be good teachers. So that's my biggest challenge, working that out for myself that I also want to be an effective teacher and I want to be involved with my profession and my early childhood community, so I try and balance both. At the same time I know that if I want to develop in my career, I need to play the game a bit. I want Heads of Schools and people within institutions to recognise teaching, but at the same time that sounds ridiculous when, you know, we now get our funding based on research outputs.* (Educ)

In addition, it was noted that experienced staff (especially those in the study sample who had worked for as an academic for more than 9 years) were less content with the need to change. Anderson et al. (2002) have identified that it is the older academic staff who are more likely to report that their working environment has deteriorated, particularly in terms of collegiality among peers and their relationship with those decision-makers in the institution who appear to be less well connected to the academic staff body. Management changes displaced collegial participation in institutional direction. In this way academics transfer the blame for their sense of loss to their managers, particularly for the erosion of their discretionary time. The concern raised by these assertions focuses on how such negative voices may impede younger academic staff being engaged in the academic culture, thus threatening future university development.

It became apparent from the study, that there is a need to align institutional and individual objectives. One staff member linked the importance of good leadership to the support of research:

> *People in formal roles of leadership need to remove the obstacles that prevent people from doing research. Now I think one of the biggest obstacles is time, but then you need to turn that around the other way and say how can we also help those people manage their time really effectively. It's a two way thing.* (Educ)

While some of the academics in the study identified their efforts to fulfil institutional expectations, not all were happy to do so:

What I value in a humane and critical education is not counting of numbers. I don't see that the PBRF ends up with a solution that measures the quality of research. I don't think it measures research culture. I think it's a mechanism for the distribution of funds rather than the enhancement of educational research and so I'm disappointed and so I won't play the game. (Educ)

These narratives provide examples of how staff express the complexity of being an academic and their concern about how they might manage their altered responsibilites subsequent to organisational change. From what academics voiced during their interviews, there appears to be a gap, between what academics may want, or feel is warranted for their work, and that which is perceived as implicit to an academic's role. The result is discomfort in the workplace, as expected and imagined conditions are replaced by unaligned conditions and expectations. Taylor (2008) believes that the sense of loss of freedom and autonomy, as expressed by academics, constitutes something greater, namely a loss of respect and public regard. Whitchurch (2008) helpfully contributes to this discourse by explaining the disjuncture between academics as professionals and a distanced servicing infrastructure, recommending an acceptance of multiple identities to enhance the likelihood of positive survival.

So how stable is the academic role and what effect does it have on academic identity? Whilst it is acknowledged that identity is fluid and "part of the lived complexity of a person's project" (Clegg, 2008, p. 329) are we faced now with continual reconstruction and revising of the academic? In the current context of a changing world, how much should an academic professional learn to anticipate and deal with uncertainty? Within education's multiple systems environment, it would appear that professionals need to be able to withstand differing, and sometimes conflicting, expectations. Taylor (2008) in his examination of staff reactions to changing higher education circumstances, refers to the academic wistfulness for a past freedom of choice and utilisation of time as a "yearning for a golden age" (p. 31). This notion is echoed by Anderson, Johnson and Saha (2002) who detail similar feelings from academics in Australia. Nevertheless, it has been noted by Winter (2009) that academics who work in, and accept the norms of, a market-driven period would deem such clinging to past identification as "fanciful" and "steeped in a bygone age" (p. 123). This disparity merely serves to exemplify the tension between and within academic groups, creating a further area of discord and an illustration of the heterogeneity of higher education staff. Thus exists a collection of differing staff groupings, rather than a unified homogeneous collective with shared values and objectives. This reality has implications for potential institutional goal-setting and the attainment of those goals.

Conclusion

Academic professionals are grappling with a fluid identity during continual change within the tertiary sector. Over time, academics have developed a professional sense of self, an identity which is now being challenged by institutional change. Roles and responsibilities are becoming more demanding and conflicts occur where priorities clash. The higher education community is now viewed less as a collective and more as a "mosaic" or "kaleidoscope" of staff (Whitchurch, 2008, p. 88), where the identities and voices of academics are subject to continuous revision. This paper has outlined some of the tensions facing academics and how it is becoming increasingly apparent that it is time to put aside perceptions of academic identity that are no longer aligned with post-millenial tertiary expectations. Tertiary institutions are places of great complexity and rather than focusing on an "imagined past" (Taylor, 2008, p. 39), a greater focus could be placed on the opportunities that embrace

multiple subject positions and context-specific identities. Such a view is more appropriate within the dynamic environment of the current university.

Stronach et al. (2002) have asserted that the academic's "professional self and its disparate allegiances (are) a series of contradictions and dilemmas" (p. 109) and as professionals, academics can develop ways of addressing these. In so doing, they "re-story themselves in and against the audit culture" (p. 130). The New Zealand project referred to in this paper, identifies the impact of economic policy through the examination of the PBRF. By aiming at a fiscally monitored and evaluated tertiary sector, the procedure also affects human agency and identity. Thus policy imperatives have a series of intended and unintended consequences. One concern expressed is that an academic's identity is influenced in its construction to achieve governmental and managerial aims, rather than primarily scholarly objectives.

The project findings indicate that there has been little preparation for role changes, resulting in tension as individuals re-assess their responsibilities and develop new ways of working. Staff referred to employment and identity issues that arise from increased workload, the conflict between the need to research while also teaching, reduced self esteem for inactive researchers, less co-operation with peers due to the individually designed system of assessment and inadequate funding for conference attendance. In addition, there appears to be poor alignment between institutional expectation and support structures. Frustration was expressed at the gap between espoused services and support and those provided in practice. Such a perception risks the development of resentment and resistance to institutional demands. The results of this study resonate with the work of Lee and Boyd (2003) who pointed to the challenges of an increasingly competitive environment, especially with the introduction of performance-based funding. Such challenges include individuals encountering greater self-questioning and experiencing fear and anxiety. Thus the identity of an academic emerges from the "nuances and complexities of the concept of the career life cycle" (Gordon, 2005, p. 40) and is repeatedly re-constructed as their institutional context adjusts to external demands and constraints.

In light of continual change in the tertiary sector, Lee (2007) and Gordon (2005) believe that academics constantly need to reassess their position amongst the uncertainty and variability of their own disciplines. Academic staff can have multiple and different interpretations of who they are, some of which may be imagined. When the character of an institution changes, staff roles and responsibilities may also change. The outcome may involve diverse compromises to which an academic has to adapt. Tensions may arise and exacerbate staff discontent and disillusionment.

The implications of this paper's assessment of academic dynamism, suggests that further research would be beneficial. In particular, if institutional objectives are to be achieved, research into the interactions between employer (institution) and employee (academic) could be constructive. At the same time, academics need to be flexible enough to develop their identities in alignment with the institutional direction (Harris, 2005). Harris couches it in this way:

> In redefining our sense of identity as academics it is important to recognise
> the possibilities and opportunities provided in the current climate in which
> we work, in order to successfully challenge the negative and destructive
> aspects of neo-liberal modes of governance. (p. 421)

It is within this changing academic environment that academic identity remains a dynamic and slippery construct. My intention within this paper is to encourage further

discourse on the alignment between institutional and academic staff expectations and the impact on how the individual assesses their academic identity. It is tempting to expect a profession in which the individual academic remains unique and distinctive, but this does not have adequate deference to the current reality. While academics would benefit from individually aligning their ideal existence with their changing reality (Henkel, 2000), the greater challenge for institutional leaders is to identify ways in which academics can be encouraged to do so. What barriers exist that prevent staff from adjusting to their new environment? At least some of these barriers identified in this paper relate to the alignment beween institutional and staff objectives. The development of mechanisms that recognise and surmount staff resistance to change would offer positive avenues for overcoming the institutional-individual divide.

It can be argued that institutions in the higher education sector need to adjust in response to wider societal expectations of their service provision and also actively engage in organisational change as funding demands. However, there is a simultaneous need to support academics in identifying new goals and relating productively within the changing environment (Lee & Boyd, 2003). Schein (1986) provides a useful recommendation that offers a mechanism for the healthy future of academe. He suggests that an institutional culture should reflect "the pattern of basic assumptions that the group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and that has worked well enough to be considered valid" (pp. 30-31). Further research into what comprises a working environment in which academic staff and their institution can work in concert, could facilitate both the attainment of collective goals and enable academic identity to become a more meaningful merger of the imagined and the real.

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