

# RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT SERIES

**Professional Managers in UK Higher Education:  
Preparing for Complex Futures**

**Final Report**

**Celia Whitchurch**

Centre for Higher Education Studies

Institute of Education, University of London

**Leadership  
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## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The study described in this report builds on an earlier Interim Report, *Professional Managers in UK Higher Education: Preparing for Complex Futures*, published by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education in July 2006<sup>1</sup>. This reviewed understandings in the literature about the roles and identities of professional staff in higher education, of movements that might be occurring in relation to these, and the implications for career paths and professional development, and is available at <http://www.lfhe.ac.uk/publications/research.html>. It showed that understandings of professional staff have, hitherto, derived principally from the concepts of administration and management, from a perceived shift from the former to the latter, and from a sense of increasing specialisation and professionalisation. By overlaying these understandings with an analysis drawn from theories of identity, the study provides additional perspectives on this group of staff, their professional development, and possible career futures.

Drawing on evidence gathered from interviews with middle- and senior-level staff in seven institutions in the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States, and from questionnaires sent to graduates of three dedicated professional development programmes in the UK, the study explores the impact of more complex higher education environments, and the emergence of increasingly diverse forms of professional. It builds on contemporary ideas about the fluidity of identity<sup>2</sup> to describe ways in which individuals are not only interpreting their given roles more actively<sup>3</sup>, but are also moving laterally across functional and organisational boundaries.

The analysis is based on a plotting of four categories of professional in relation to the spaces they occupy, and the knowledges, relationships and legitimacies that they construct. Thus, *bounded professionals*, who locate themselves firmly within organisational and functional boundaries, perform their roles in ways that are relatively prescribed and pre-determined. *Cross-boundary professionals* actively use their understanding of boundaries to perform interpretive and translational functions across the institution, and thereby to build institutional capacity. *Unbounded professionals*, less cognisant of boundaries, are more likely to be influenced by knowledges and networks external to the

university, and to be exploratory in their approach to these, performing roles that might be seen as institutional research and development. While *cross-boundary* and *unbounded professionals* actively grow their given roles, a fourth category, *blended professionals*, represents staff who are increasingly being appointed on the basis of experience that enables them to carry out mixed portfolios, and to contribute to activity that straddles both professional and academic domains. Such experience may have been acquired in a contiguous environment such as adult or further education, regional development, or the charitable or voluntary sectors.

Arising out the study, it is suggested that professional identities are informed by a number of variables:

- The given role and institutional positioning of an individual, as enshrined, for instance, in a job description or organisation chart.
- The agency brought to bear by the individual interpreting this given role.
- The relationship between an individual and the boundaries that they encounter. Such boundaries represent the established “rules and resources”<sup>4</sup> of an institution, and may be functional or organisational. They may also be perceptual, reflecting the potential that the individual sees for interaction with these given structures.
- The mobility of an individual in performing their role or series of roles, both in terms of progression over time along a career path, and lateral movement in gaining experience of different functional or project areas.

The study suggests that the situation is more dynamic and multi-faceted than might be suggested solely by an examination of job descriptions or organisation charts, and points to the emergence of a *third space* between professional and academic domains, in which less *bounded* forms of professional work alongside academic colleagues in an expanding institutional community of professionals. In *third space*, individuals are not only interpreting their roles more actively, but are also undertaking significant ‘identity work’ in relation to their own career futures. Institutions and individuals, therefore, may wish to understand these phenomena in greater detail: institutions when reviewing the appropriate balance, distribution and development of their staff; and individuals when considering future career

<sup>1</sup> Whitchurch (2006a)

<sup>2</sup> Delanty (2008); Taylor (2008)

<sup>3</sup> Whitchurch (2004)

<sup>4</sup> Giddens (1991)

pathways and possibilities.

**Section 2** outlines the contexts for the study, and the methods used to gather and analyse the data.

**Section 3** presents the four categories of professional identity outlined above, and offers a conceptual model relating these categories to institutional spaces, knowledges, relationships and legitimacies.

**Section 4** describes the emergence of *third space* and the interpenetration of professional and academic activity there.

**Section 5** provides discussion and analysis of the implications of the outcomes of the study, for individuals and their careers, and for institutions.

**Section 6** notes international comparisons that can be drawn with Australia and the United States.

**Section 7** considers issues raised in relation to professional development needs and provision.

**Section 8** reviews the outcomes of the study, and offers pointers for the future.

This report should be read in conjunction with the earlier Interim Report, and also alongside other research projects commissioned by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, which deal with contiguous groups of staff, in particular:

- *UK Universities and their Executive Officers: the Changing Role of Pro-Vice-Chancellors* by Dr David Smith, Dr Jonathan Adams and David Mount, Higher Education Policy Unit, University of Leeds and Evidence Ltd (2007).
- *Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education* by Dr Richard Bolden, Dr Georgy Petrov and Professor Jonathan Gosling, Centre for Leadership Studies, University of Exeter (2008).
- *Top Team Structures in UK Higher Education Institutions: Composition, Challenges and Changes* by Dr Tom Kennie, Ranmore Consulting, and Steve Woodfield, Kingston University (2008).

## 2: INTRODUCTION

### CONTEXTS

The project arose out of a sense that, as higher education institutions, and their workforces, have expanded and diversified to meet the demands of contemporary environments, the identities of professional staff could no longer be described solely in terms of a shift from 'administration' to 'management', or of a collective process of professionalisation<sup>5</sup>. Boundaries are being breached between, for instance, functional areas and internal and external constituencies, and in particular, a *third space* is opening up between professional and academic domains, requiring contributions from a range of professionals, and creating new dimensions to the workforce map. In this space, the concept of administrative service has been re-oriented towards one of partnership, both with academic colleagues and with the multiple constituencies with whom institutions interact. However, while considerable attention has been paid to the impact of a changing policy environment on academic identities<sup>6</sup>, the implications for professional staff have been less clearly articulated. The aim of the study, therefore, was to achieve a more nuanced understanding of these identities, of the topology of the professional landscape, and of the implications of the changes that are occurring, both for institutions and for individuals.

The administrative and management functions performed by professional staff in UK higher education derive from both a public administration tradition in the pre-1992 sector<sup>7</sup>, and a local government tradition in the post-1992 sector<sup>8</sup>. Early commentators viewed this supporting infrastructure, particularly in the pre-1992 sector, as an "academic civil service"<sup>9</sup> or "academic administration"<sup>10</sup>. Professional staff at all levels would be expected to provide technical, regulatory and policy advice as members of a homogeneous cadre, incorporating both generalist and specialist roles. The prime purpose of these functions was to support decision-making by academic colleagues, who undertook their management responsibilities on a part-time, fixed-term basis. There was a clear boundary between what was seen as 'The Administration' and academic activity, whereby professional staff performed service roles in relation to the latter, and also to academic staff themselves. While the term 'academic administration' continues to be used to describe activities

associated with registry and secretariat functions<sup>11</sup>, it tends increasingly to imply activity that is process-oriented and even clerical in nature. One legacy from the 'administrative' tradition is that professional staff are seen as a source of continuity, as "guardians of the regulations"<sup>12</sup>, and "keeper[s] of the community memory"<sup>13</sup>. However, as knowledge becomes more accessible, for instance via institutional web pages, it may be that the value in acting as a repository of accumulated knowledge, and preserving it in one location, is reduced.

This tradition provided a unitary professional framework, so that an individual in one institution would be assumed to have a similar set of skills and knowledge to those of someone occupying a similar post in another institution. In the case of the pre-1992 sector, there was a national pay structure, with common role and career patterns between institutions, which were reflected in generic job titles. Career paths were, therefore, relatively predictable, and professional staff were likely to undertake a range of tasks, from academic appointments to research grant administration, from student admissions to examination boards, from committee servicing to publications. Thus, the professional identity of an individual would be drawn principally from their position, about which there were common understandings, and individuals were nested within a well-defined structure associated with a nationally recognised cadre of staff. Professional authority, therefore, derived from generic roles or institutional positions. Until the 1980s, generalist staff with their roots in this tradition still occupied specialist roles in personnel, finance and estates<sup>14</sup>, which in contemporary institutions would require people who were in possession of the appropriate professional qualifications.

Institutions in the former polytechnic sector had a tradition of appointing permanent, full-time managers at the directorate level. There was less evidence of a permanent 'administrative cadre' such as those which supported academic managers in the pre-1992 sector<sup>15</sup>. This tended to create a gap between senior, full-time managers and staff undertaking lower-level, clerking roles, who regarded themselves as local government employees rather than identifying with their institution or sector:

*"To all intents and purposes, the non-academic staff were employed by the local authority, and just happened to be working in the polytechnic"*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Whitchurch (2006a)

<sup>6</sup> Deem and Johnson (2000); Henkel (2000); Prichard (2000); Becher and Trowler (2001); Barnett (2005); Deem et al (2007)

<sup>7</sup> Sloman (1964); Shattock (1970); Lockwood (1986)

<sup>8</sup> Scott (1995); Pratt (1997)

<sup>9</sup> Sloman (1964); Lockwood (1986)

<sup>10</sup> Shattock (1970)

<sup>11</sup> for instance (Barnett, 1993)

<sup>12</sup> Barnett (2000: 133)

<sup>13</sup> McNay (2005: 43)

<sup>14</sup> Metcalfe (1998)

<sup>15</sup> Pratt (1997: 197-200)

<sup>16</sup> Pratt (1997: 199)



Terms and conditions, as well as roles and careers, therefore, were more localised than in the pre-1992 sector. At the professional level, 'generalist' staff were less prominent than specialist staff who were distinguished by their technical expertise, such as finance and estates, which was likely to be transferable between different local government environments. The absence of a national cadre of staff with a common pay structure gave greater scope for postholders to develop their roles according to their specific locale, building credibility in terms of their specific contribution. While there was a stronger tradition of 'management' at the directorate level in the post-1992 sector, the absence of an administrative cadre at other levels meant that established career paths did not exist for professional staff in the same way as in the pre-1992 sector. It was more difficult, therefore, for individuals to move from junior clerking roles to a senior management level, as the latter roles tended to be filled by academic staff.

The contemporary disposition of professional staff is, therefore, influenced by different employment cultures inherited from the pre- and post-1992 sectors, between which there was not a great deal of movement until after they merged in 1992. After this date, there was a cross-fertilisation of professional staff and working practices inherited from the following traditions:

- Public administration roles in an environment of collegial management from the pre-1992 sector.
- Local government roles in an environment of directorate management from the post-1992 sector.
- Specialist roles in both sectors, filled by experts with nationally recognised professional qualifications.

In both sectors, activity in higher education institutions has been viewed traditionally in binary terms: of an academic domain, and an administrative or management domain that supports this. However, over time, the separation of work between academic activity and a separate, supporting infrastructure has become less clear-cut. Whereas administration and management were seen as something 'done' by one group of people to another, professional staff have become involved in constructing new forms of knowledge and relationships that are integral to institutional survival in contemporary higher education systems and markets. Although there has begun to be recognition in the literature of movements in professional identity<sup>17</sup>, these tend to have been noted in the context of changing institutional environments, rather than being explored in a detailed way in

relation to the staff themselves. Studies are emerging of changing relationships between academic and professional managers, for instance, in faculty settings<sup>18</sup>, and in relation to research management<sup>19</sup>. However, there has not been any empirical work on a possible coalescence of activity between professional and academic domains, or on new forms of institutional space that may be being created.

Arising from these considerations, therefore, the study sought to review:

- Changes in the nature of the roles performed by professional managers in UK higher education, in the light of developments in institutional contexts and structures.
- Changing career paths and patterns, and likely future directions for such staff.
- The outcomes and effectiveness of existing development provision, such as the impact of dedicated diploma and master's courses.
- Future leadership and management development needs for professional managers in the light of the above.
- International comparisons that might be drawn.

As noted in the earlier literature review<sup>20</sup>, the terms 'administration' and 'management' not only lack precision, but are also contested in an academic environment, administration for its association with unwanted bureaucracy, and management for its association with what is perceived as an erosion of academic autonomy as institutions respond to competitive markets and government accountability requirements. Nevertheless, 'administration' tends to be a more acceptable currency than 'management' in the UK, and professional and academic staff may collude in perpetuating the term 'administration' to downplay 'management'. Moreover, as the capacity of staff expands and diversifies to cope with the ongoing demands, professional roles and identities are subject to constant revision. However, these identity movements have tended to occur by default, and have remained relatively unremarked and under-theorised, either in the literature or by professional staff themselves.

Professional staff are, increasingly, involved in activities that in the past might have been regarded as the sole preserve of academic staff, such as:

- Writing bids for funding, quality assurance submissions, and tutorial handbooks.
- Speaking at outreach and induction events, conducting

<sup>17</sup> Rhoades (1996, 1998, 2005); Rhoades and Sporn (2002); Lambert (2003); Middlehurst (2004); Gornitzka, Kyvik and Stensaker (2005)

<sup>18</sup> McMaster (2005)

<sup>19</sup> Poon (2005); Shelley (2006); Allen Collinson (2007)

<sup>20</sup> Whitchurch (2006a)

overseas recruitment visits, and undertaking study skill sessions.

- Negotiating with business or regional partners.
- Having membership of national bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency.
- Moving into pro-vice-chancellor posts, for instance, with a portfolio such as quality, staffing, or institutional development.

The situation is, therefore, more dynamic and multi-faceted than job descriptions and organisation charts might suggest. These movements arise partly from the development of broadly based, extended projects across the university, which are no longer containable within solid boundaries, creating new functional portfolios<sup>21</sup>. These projects, such as student transitions, community partnership, and professional development, require staff who are capable of moving across boundaries and understanding ways in which different elements impact on the project as a whole. For instance, the student transitions project now encompasses contiguous activities such as marketing and recruitment, widening participation, student funding, welfare and disability, careers advice and alumni relations. Human resources, as well as encompassing all the legislative requirements associated with employing staff, also incorporates staff development, equality and diversity, and work-life balance. These extended projects are capable not only of merging and coalescing, but also of splitting and forming new fields of activity, in amoeba-like fashion. Professional staff in these kinds of areas, therefore, are increasingly mobile, physically and intellectually. They are able to apply their expertise to a range of issues and, rather than confining themselves to specialist silos, collaborate in multi-functional teams. On a day-to-day basis, therefore, such individuals may relate more to tasks and teams than to formal organisational structures and hierarchies. Therefore, alongside increased functional specialisation to meet, for instance, legislative and market requirements, there has been the emergence of project-oriented individuals who are capable of creating new forms of practice. This creates a 'twin dynamic', which institutions and individuals seek to manage in ways that are optimal for them.

Professional staff also work increasingly with colleagues outside the university. For instance, data managers work with technical and design staff from information system providers; business enterprise staff work with partners in regional development agencies and innovation centres; and student support staff work with colleagues on offshore campuses.

There has also been an influx of staff from outside higher education, bringing expertise in areas such as marketing and regional partnership, with movements in and out of the system more common than before 1992. The lives of professional staff, therefore, are nested within a broader narrative of the university's developing role within a mass higher education system, with expanding markets in a global environment. To cope with major environmental change and heightened uncertainty<sup>22</sup>, institutions require increasingly sophisticated understandings about, for instance, student expectations, public relations, marketing, and regional and business partnership. The development of these understandings frequently involves professional staff in performing an interpretive role at the boundaries between institutions and external constituencies.

These trends also reflect wider movements in the workplace. Commentators have drawn attention to the premium placed by Generation X (in their 30s) and Generation Y (in their 20s) on information access, networking, feedback, a balanced lifestyle, socio-economic and environmental issues<sup>23</sup>. In this type of environment, experience counts for less than awareness of current issues:

*"... unwillingness to go by precedents and suspicion against accumulated experience ... are now seen as the precepts of effectiveness and productivity. You are as good as your successes; but you are only as good as your last successful project."<sup>24</sup>*

Thus, while some long-serving staff may have remained in the sector by default, younger staff do not necessarily anticipate a career for life with clearly defined transition points, and wish to acquire experience and qualifications that will be distinctive, equipping them for a future that is more uncertain than it was for their predecessors.

In order to address the shortfalls in understanding outlined above, the study used the concept of identity to theorise empirical work undertaken in the UK, Australia and the United States, and to explore the increasingly diverse forms of professional that are emerging. It builds on contemporary ideas about the fluidity of identity<sup>25</sup> to describe ways in which individuals are not only interpreting their given roles more actively, but are also moving laterally across functional and organisational boundaries to create new professional spaces, knowledges and relationships. Thus, while for some staff identity remains fixed within a pre-determined role or job description, for others it becomes a project that can be

<sup>21</sup> Whitchurch (2006b)

<sup>22</sup> Barnett (2000); Bauman (2000); Hassan (2003); Urry (1998, 2003)

<sup>23</sup> McCrindle (2005)

<sup>24</sup> Bauman (2005: 44)

<sup>25</sup> Delanty (2008); Taylor (2008)

<sup>26</sup> Henkel (2000: 13-14)

constructed both over time and across functional boundaries<sup>26</sup>. This approach to identity allows for the possibility of growth and maturation, so that identity becomes a process of development, whereby individuals work on and modify their identities throughout life. It implies choice on the part of the individual, and the possibility of influencing events, as well as being moulded by existing structures. The “project”, therefore, involves interaction between the individual and the structures that they encounter, such as a job description or functional location, and becomes “Not an essence but a positioning”<sup>27</sup>, arising from the act of “producing accounts of oneself”<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore, it is an open-ended process and may never be completed.

Although role and identity are likely, in practice, to be intertwined, it may be helpful to distinguish between the two. Thus, individuals may assign different meanings to, and take different approaches to, the same role. This can, for instance, be in a passive way, through “behaviour associated with, and dictated by, incumbency in the positions of social structure”, or more actively through “behaviour emitted in negotiation with self, others’ idiosyncratic needs or utilities, and positional prescriptions”<sup>29</sup>. A person’s role might be seen, therefore, as “the point of interface between the individual person and the larger social structure”<sup>30</sup>, and the way that they interpret the role contributes to the person’s overall identity. The relationship between individuals, as agents, and their roles, as well as the contexts in which those roles are played out, therefore, may offer additional insights:

*“In simple terms, identities organize the meaning while roles organise the functions”<sup>31</sup>*

Thus, while to some extent, and at a purely practical level, changes in professional roles and identities might be seen as arising from external pressures such as the emergence of more market-oriented approaches, or the introduction of online data management, this does not take account of the agency of individuals as they interact with contemporary environments, or the “inordinately high levels of . . . ambiguity” that they may encounter<sup>32</sup>. The study, therefore, by moving beyond the ‘administration or management?’ debate, aims to provide new discourses that take account of a range of variables involving both the individual and the structures and boundaries that they encounter.

From the considerations outlined in the above sections, the following research questions were established:

- How do contemporary professional staff construct their identities in terms of:
  - The space they occupy.
  - Their contribution to institutional knowledge.
  - Their relationships, in particular with academic colleagues?
- What factors facilitate and inhibit the construction of these identities?
- How are these identities legitimised in the contemporary university?

## DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of the project, ‘professional staff’ were defined as individuals having management roles but not an academic contract, and included:

- General managers in faculties, schools and departments, and functional areas such as student services.
- Specialist professionals with accredited qualifications such as those in finance and human resources offices.
- ‘Niche’ specialists who have developed functions such as research management and quality audit specifically in a higher education context.

Because no dedicated study existed of these groups of staff, and in order to give the project a clear focus, it was restricted to the professionals described above and did not, therefore, include academic managers such as deans and pro-vice-chancellors (the subject of other Leadership Foundation projects), staff in academic practice or professional development roles<sup>33</sup>, or staff in library and information management roles<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, when references are made to ‘professional’ staff, this refers to staff who are not on mainstream academic contracts, although increasing numbers of these staff are undertaking activity in areas such as widening participation and student transitions<sup>35</sup>. It is not, however, intended to imply that academic, or other categories of staff, are not also professionals in their own right.

The lack of a vocabulary with which to provide a more precise perspective on professional staff is illustrated by the range of terms currently in circulation. These include ‘non-academic staff’, ‘academic related staff’, ‘professional staff’ and ‘support staff’, all of which are used in different official classifications<sup>36</sup>. These terms refer to an increasingly heterogeneous

27 Hall (1990: 226)

28 Woodward (2002: 3-4)

29 Outhwaite and Bottomore (1998: 564-565)

30 Outhwaite and Bottomore (1998: 564)

31 Castells (1997: 7)

32 Duke (2002: 32)

33 on which see, for instance, Land (2004; 2008)

34 on which see, for instance, Corral and Lester (1996)

35 Whitchurch (2006b)

36 for instance Dearing (1997); Bett (1999); HESDA (2002); HESA (2005)

patchwork of professionals, who are represented by a range of specialist bodies, as well as the more broadly based Association of University Administrators (AUA) including, for instance:

- Academic administrators (clustered around regulatory and secretariat functions).
- Accredited professionals, such as directors of human resources, finance, estates and facilities.
- People in niche areas in higher education, such as quality and widening participation.
- People who build a portfolio as project managers, either of one-off projects such as applications for funding, or in relation to larger projects stretching across, for instance, student services or partnership activity<sup>37</sup>.
- A growing number of staff who have academic credentials paralleling those of their academic colleagues (for instance, doctoral qualifications, or teaching or management experience in the adult or further education sectors), some of whom might see themselves moving into academic management roles, for instance, as a pro-vice-chancellor for administration, quality, or staffing.

As outlined in the earlier literature review, the “managers and administrators” category in a report by the Higher Education Staff Development Association (HESDA) is used to define the target group<sup>38</sup>. This represents 38,000 staff or about 8% of the workforce, and corresponds to an estimate of 7-9% calculated from figures in the Bett Report<sup>39</sup>, and an estimate of 7.4% calculated from the 2003-2004 Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics<sup>40</sup>. In the report, individuals are referred to in generic terms, for instance, as “managers” or “officers”, regardless of their specific title or seniority. As a general rule, “manager” would denote a senior role, equivalent to senior lecturer or above, and “officer” a middle management role, equivalent to “lecturer” in terms of pay.

## METHOD

A method was sought that would illustrate the diversification of professional staff identities outlined above, and that would, as suggested by Lumby<sup>41</sup>, “explore multiple constructions of [selves] which [can] change and [be] understood differently over time and in different contexts.” One-to-one interviews were chosen, therefore, which could be analysed on a number of levels: for instance, in relation to a biographical narrative; the

degree of agency and mobility adopted by an individual with respect to their role; and the way that they achieved legitimacy in their institution. Following Hammersley<sup>42</sup>, the approach was an exploratory one, to collect detailed qualitative data from a limited number of cases, with analysis focusing on the interpretation of meanings. The aim was to capture “lived reality”<sup>43</sup> that might be viewed against the background of more public accounts derived from the literature.

The interviews aimed to elicit understandings about ways in which individuals construct and use their professional knowledge, the types of relationships they build with academic colleagues, and the professional legitimacies that they develop. Through the empirical work of the study, the dissonance that was identified in the literature about ‘administration’ and ‘management’<sup>44</sup> was explored in local contexts. The conduct of the study was, therefore, a multi-layered process, leading to “knowledge formation [that is] iterative and spiral rather than as linear and cumulative”<sup>45</sup>. By generating a description of what was happening in situ (that is “what is”), suggestions are provided as to possible future directions in professional identity (that is of “what might be”<sup>46</sup>).

The interviews were conducted in three stages:

### Interviews with heads of institution and heads of administration

Because the issues arising for professional staff from the changing higher education environment had not been addressed previously in a detailed way, a system-wide view was sought from senior commentators before embarking on the main study. This involved interviews with three vice-chancellors and seven heads of administration, and provided a meta-level frame of reference. The individuals concerned were drawn from a range of pre- and post-1992 institutions in England and Scotland, and were asked to comment on the following five topic areas, to obtain understandings about, and expectations upon, professional staff:

- Changes that had occurred in the roles and identities of professional staff.
- Distinguishing features of their contribution vis-à-vis, say, academic managers.
- The influence of professional staff in decision-making and involvement with risk.

37 Whitchurch (2006b)

38 HESDA (2002)

39 Bett (1999)

40 HESA (2005)

41 Lumby (2008)

42 Hammersley (1999; 2002)

43 Scott and Usher (1999: 87)

44 Whitchurch (2006a)

45 Scott and Usher (1999: 227)

46 Denzin and Lincoln (1998)

- Their positioning vis-à-vis the implementation of government policy.
- Understandings about the concepts of administration and management, and the value placed on them.
- How respondents would identify heads of administration of the future.
- Whether the role of head of administration would continue to exist in future.
- Differences between management in universities and other public/private sector organisations.

In the case of heads of administration, information was also sought about the individual's own career path. These questions focused on:

- Motivations that led to a career in university administration and management.
- Critical influences/turning points.
- The nature of their influence as head of administration.
- Relationships with other groupings (such as the senior management team, academic and professional managers, external reference groups).
- What they would do differently if starting their careers in 2004.
- Where they saw themselves going next.

All the respondents had worked in more than one university, and two had been head of administration in more than one, so their range of experience enabled them to make comparisons both over time and across institutions. The commentaries of these senior university managers reinforced the conclusions of the literature review of a perceived shift from 'administration' towards 'management', alongside a process of 'professionalisation'. In addition, the following changes over time were noted:

- An influx of specialists in areas such as marketing, enterprise and employment law, to deal with more market-oriented environments.
- A shift from provision of a service solely to academic staff to provision of a service to students and other clients.
- Distinct cultural differences between the pre- and post-1992 sectors, with less openness about, for instance, market-oriented activity and language in the pre-1992 sector.
- The importance of recruiting staff who were able to contextualise institutional activity in both policy and market environments.

- Varying membership of, and degree of influence on, senior management team decisions, by professional staff. (While it was not unusual for heads of administration and, increasingly, directors of finance, to be members of the senior management team, there was variability vis-à-vis other senior staff, who would, nevertheless, be likely to be invited for specific issues).
- Significant variability in the allocation of responsibilities associated with the head of administration role, and the incorporation of these into other roles such as those of pro-vice-chancellors.
- Variability as to the extent to which a head of administration would influence what were primarily academic policy decisions.
- Increasingly informal and lateral relationships between senior managers, including vice-chancellors, and professional staff at all levels.
- Increasing competition between institutions to attract and retain talented individuals to professional staff posts.

All those interviewed, whose ages varied from 40s to 60s, had made their careers in university administration and management, rather than being appointed from another sector, although a number of the younger respondents spoke of the possibility of moving into, for instance, consultancy work at a later date. Three had worked in both pre- and post-1992 sectors. All had a generalist background, for instance in academic services or policy and planning, and none had undertaken specialist roles such as finance or human resources, although there are beginning to be examples of such people in the system.

### Interviews with second- and third-tier managers

Secondly, interviews were conducted with the three heads of administration and twenty-one second- and third-tier managers in three different types of UK university: a multi-faculty, research-intensive institution ('Multi-faculty'); a green field, campus university ('Green-field'); and a post-1992 institution serving a mass higher education market ('Post-92'). The institutions were selected on the basis that they occupied different positions in the higher education system in relation to their mission, size, history, and teaching and research orientation. Since this was an initial study on a group of staff that had not been explored in detail before, the case interviews were restricted to three institutions. This was, therefore, a "purposeful sampling" approach, with cases selected that were likely to "show different perspectives on the problem"<sup>47</sup>.

<sup>47</sup> Creswell (1998)

The second stage of the study, therefore, sought understandings from second- and third-tier managers, at functional director level and below, of their own professional identities. The second-tier staff were people who reported directly either to the head of administration, or to a pro-vice-chancellor, or to the vice-chancellor. They were either permanent members of the senior management team, or invited to meetings when an issue involving them was to be discussed. They also managed teams of staff in their own right. Third-tier managers were a tier below that in the organisational hierarchy. The interviews, therefore, involved senior and middle-grade staff on what were in 2003-2004 grades 3 to 6 of the Academic-related Staff pay scale in the pre-1992 sector, and on management or senior management grades in the post-1992 sector. Thus, 72% were on grades equivalent to Senior Lecturer (pre-1992) or Principal Lecturer (post-1992). They worked in a range of functional areas including finance, human resources, student support, external relations, planning and enterprise, and came from different age bands, with a 42:58 male to female gender ratio. The overall gender balance, including the interviews with the seven heads of administration in the first part of the study, was 51:49 male to female.

The head of administration in each institution, as 'gatekeeper', was asked to provide a sample of four second-tier and four

third-tier managers, so that the choice of interviewees depended partly on the selection made by the gatekeepers, and partly on practical issues such as availability. The gatekeepers provided respondents who, apart from one case, matched the brief in terms of seniority and background. One interview was discounted in the analysis in order to maintain consistency of the overall profile of respondents.

The age profiles are shown in Figures 1 and 2 (below).

An institutional pilot for the case studies was undertaken in a pre-1992 university, comprising the head of administration, two second-tier managers and one third-tier manager. This pilot enabled a refinement of the main themes and the topic guides, but was not used to provide evidence in the final study.

Interviews began with a request for an autobiographical account of respondents' careers, including key influences, critical events and turning points. This led into discussion of the broad themes of a topic guide (Appendix 1), though not necessarily in the same order. The same questions were asked of the heads of administration at the three sites as were asked of those providing an overview of the system, although they were couched more in terms of the local institutional contexts and structures. The second part of the interviews explored respondents' understandings about 'administration' and

**FIGURE 1**

AGES OF SECOND-TIER MANAGERS AND HEADS OF ADMINISTRATION IN CASE INSTITUTIONS				
AGE	GREEN-FIELD	MULTI-FACULTY	POST-1992	TOTALS
20-29	0	0	0	0
30-39	0	0	0	0
40-49	2	1	2	5
50-59	2	3	3	8
Totals	4	4	5	13

All second-tier managers were over 40, and 62% were over 50.

**FIGURE 2**

AGES OF THIRD-TIER MANAGERS IN CASE INSTITUTIONS				
AGE	GREEN-FIELD	MULTI-FACULTY	POST-1992	TOTALS
20-29	1	0	0	1
30-39	4	1	2	7
40-49	0	2	0	2
50-59	0	1	0	1
Totals	5	4	2	11

82% of third-tier managers were under 50.

‘management’; their knowledge base and the way that they used this; their key interfaces and relationships; their involvement in decision-making; their sources of allegiance; and where they saw themselves going next.

During the case study interviews it emerged that not only were individuals interpreting their roles more actively, but also that institutions were recruiting individuals who could perform, on a dedicated basis, roles that crossed between professional and academic domains. A further five interviews, therefore, were conducted at two of the three case institutions, with managers who were undertaking such *blended* roles in areas such as learning and business partnership, professional practice, equity and diversity, and institutional research. They had mixed backgrounds and portfolios, as well as external experience in contiguous environments such as further or adult education, regional development, or the charitable or voluntary sectors. For these interviews, the topic guide was adjusted to include understandings of management and leadership (Appendix 2). Both sets of respondents were asked to complete a pro-forma giving factual details about their career histories and qualifications (Appendix 3). This was suitably modified for the overseas groups.

### Overseas interviews

At the third stage of the study, interviews were conducted in Australia with ten respondents from a research-intensive, sandstone institution (‘Sandstone’), and a teaching-oriented, post-merger institution, the latter created from a number of colleges of technical and further education (TAFE), (‘Post-merger’); and in the United States with fifteen respondents from two public universities. One of the latter two institutions was a state university with a balanced teaching and research profile (‘Public 1’), and the other a world-class, research-intensive institution (‘Public 2’). In the overseas institutions, an attempt was made, via the ‘gatekeepers’ in each institution, to target individuals with mixed backgrounds and roles that crossed academic and professional boundaries, to see whether there were any lessons to be learned for the UK about possible future trends in professional identities. The same topic guide was used as for the UK interviews with people with mixed backgrounds and roles (Appendix 2).

The overall study was, therefore, based on a total of sixty-one interviews (Figure 3).

The following section describes the process of data analysis.

**FIGURE 3**

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS WITH PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN THE UK, AUSTRALIA AND THE US									
COUNTRY	HEADS OF ADMIN'N	MULTI-FACULTY	GREEN-FIELD	POST-1992	SANDSTONE	POST-MERGER	PUBLIC (1)	PUBLIC (2)	TOTALS
UK	7	8	11	10					36
Australia					5	5			10
US							7	8	15
<b>Totals</b>	7	8	11	10	5	5	7	8	61

### 3: RECONSTRUCTING PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES: FROM *BOUNDED* TO *BLENDED* PROFESSIONALS

One of the aims of the study was to achieve a more nuanced understanding of professional identities than was available from, for instance, a binary division between administrators and managers, or between generalists and specialists. As an initial step in the analysis, therefore, the research questions outlined on page 6 were used to develop “descriptive codes” for factual details arising from the accounts of respondents, “interpretive codes” for possible latent meanings, and “pattern codes” for links or themes across the accounts<sup>48</sup>. From the descriptive codes, a preliminary chart was constructed, initially describing each respondent in terms of a prime allegiance to one of four domains: the *knowledge domain*, representing the professional knowledge acquired by an individual, the *institutional domain*, representing the employing institution, the *sector domain*, representing the UK higher education system, and the *project domain*, representing projects with which an individual might be involved<sup>49</sup>. However, it became clear from this process that while some individuals were located primarily within a single domain, a second group demonstrated a mobility between two or more, and a third group identified primarily with broadly based tasks in the *project domain*. The *sector domain* was the weakest in terms of there being any evidence of individuals who saw themselves primarily as belonging to a national cadre of professional staff dedicated to higher education. Furthermore, those people in the *project domain* appeared to demonstrate greater self-determination in actively constructing their identities than those who drew their identities primarily from a sense of belonging to one of the other domains.

Thus, as the process of analysis took place, it became apparent that individuals were not only constructing their identities from a sense of belonging to specific functional or professional groupings, but also by the degree of agency that they adopted towards the structures and boundaries that they encountered. These structures and boundaries, in turn, related to major activity dimensions of professional space, knowledge, relationships and legitimacy, which emerged as “major organizing ideas” for the study<sup>50</sup>. The process of analysis, therefore, resembled a “data analysis spiral”<sup>51</sup> of data collection, reading, describing, classifying, interpreting and representing,

with loops back as the material was re-visited. This provided a basis for undertaking further analysis at the conceptual level, and for developing more detailed categories that would lead to the construction of a typology of professional identities. Following the summary of factual details, the analysis was approached at three levels: at a factual level, drawing out information about working practices and careers; at a conceptual level, around four main themes of professional spaces, knowledge, relationships and legitimacies; and at a theoretical level around understandings of identity. This led to a categorisation of *bounded*, *cross-boundary*, *unbounded* and *blended* forms of professional identity, comprising:

- Respondents who located themselves firmly within the boundaries of a function or organisational location which they had either constructed for themselves, or which they perceived as having been imposed upon them. They were, therefore, governed by the “rules and resources”<sup>52</sup> within that space, were characterised by a desire to maintain boundaries, and performed their roles in ways that were relatively prescribed. These were categorised as *bounded professionals*.
- Respondents who actively used boundaries to build strategic advantage and institutional capacity, capitalising on their knowledge of territories on either side of these boundaries. They used their understanding of the “rules and resources” of more than one type of space, and were likely to display negotiating and political skills to perform interpretive functions and become actors in institutional decision-making. Although they were likely to have internal and external networks, they tended to see their futures within the sector. As in the case of *bounded professionals*, boundaries were a defining mechanism for them, and they were categorised as *cross-boundary professionals*.
- Respondents who demonstrated a disregard for boundaries, or for the “rules and resources” that they might represent, having a more open-ended and exploratory approach to the broadly based projects with which they were involved. They undertook work that contributed to institutional development, tended to draw on external experience and networks, and were as likely to see their futures outwith higher education as within the sector. In a sense, therefore, they were willing to ‘let go’ of structures and boundaries, tolerating a degree of risk and ambiguity, and embracing innovation and creativity. These individuals were categorised as *unbounded*

<sup>48</sup> Miles and Huberman (1994: 57)

<sup>49</sup> Whitchurch (2006b)

<sup>50</sup> Creswell (1998: 144)

<sup>51</sup> Creswell (1998: 143)

<sup>52</sup> Giddens (1991)



*professionals.*

- Respondents who had been appointed specifically to posts spanning professional and academic domains, on the basis of mixed backgrounds and portfolios. They were also likely to have academic credentials, including higher degree qualifications, and/or teaching, research or management experience in a contiguous environment such as adult or further education, regional development,

or the charitable or voluntary sectors. These individuals were categorised as *blended professionals*.

By placing the four types of professional against the four activity dimensions, sixteen categories of identity characteristics were developed from the data (Figure 4, overleaf):

**FIGURE 4**

TYPOLOGY OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES				
ACTIVITY DIMENSIONS	CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS</i>	CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS</i>	CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS</i>	CHARACTERISTICS OF <i>BLENDED PROFESSIONALS</i>
<b>Spaces</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trusteeship (knowledge; budgets)</li> <li>• safety (audit; assurance)</li> <li>• prescribed/closed off (processes; systems; regulations)</li> <li>• space used to position/frame identity</li> <li>• 'own' space differentiated from 'other' space</li> <li>• offer a detailed map</li> </ul>	<p>Boundaries used as device to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• traverse space</li> <li>• facilitate interpretation between functions</li> <li>• translate functional knowledge into institutional knowledge</li> <li>• offer signposts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a disregard for boundaries</li> <li>• functional space overlaps and merges</li> <li>• few fixed points</li> <li>• create new activity and knowledge space</li> <li>• accommodate complexity</li> <li>• little differentiation between internal and external space</li> <li>• offer a compass</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple understandings of the university</li> <li>• accommodating duality of professional and academic domains</li> <li>• working with ambiguity</li> <li>• re-definition, modification of existing space and boundaries</li> <li>• find a way round structures ("an invisible maze")</li> </ul>
<b>Knowledges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• process, information-oriented</li> <li>• technical</li> <li>• regulatory</li> <li>• represent fixed core; institutional memory</li> <li>• reflect history; precedent; continuity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• drawn from multiple organisational spaces</li> <li>• cross-functional</li> <li>• applied/'mode 2' knowledge</li> <li>• interpretive; translational</li> <li>• can be politically-oriented</li> <li>• can involve negotiated trade-offs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• construct new institutional knowledge</li> <li>• use knowledge, experience from outwith sector</li> <li>• move beyond processes, systems, institution</li> <li>• fluid/provisional approach to knowledge</li> <li>• contextualising</li> <li>• future-oriented</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building interface knowledge</li> <li>• embedding, integrating professional and academic knowledge</li> <li>• research into <i>blended</i> activity</li> <li>• creating interactive knowledge environment</li> </ul>

**FIGURE 4 (CONTINUED)**

<b>TYPOLGY OF PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES</b>				
<b>ACTIVITY DIMENSIONS</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS</b>	<b>CHARACTERISTICS OF BLENDED PROFESSIONALS</b>
<b>Relationships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• based on service/support</li> <li>• formal, hierarchical</li> <li>• clear distinction between academic and professional roles</li> <li>• strong ties within boundaries of locale</li> <li>• minimal weak ties</li> <li>• potential for 'us' and 'them' positionings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• negotiated across boundaries</li> <li>• politically astute</li> <li>• used to build advantage</li> <li>• opportunistic</li> <li>• strong ties within prime functional area (s)</li> <li>• weak ties to institutional, sector and external networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• free wheeling; mobile</li> <li>• negotiated on a personal basis</li> <li>• represent nodal points of networks</li> <li>• based on ability to take the part of others</li> <li>• strong ties within project</li> <li>• weak ties to institutional and external networks</li> <li>• minimal weak ties to sector networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• based on ability to enter and understand academic discourse/ debate</li> <li>• alliances with key supporters of blended activities</li> <li>• facilitation of autonomy of own staff</li> <li>• construction of new institutional networks</li> <li>• strong ties to these networks</li> <li>• weak ties to external professional arenas</li> </ul>
<b>Legitimacies</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide advice, definition, control</li> <li>• know the answer</li> <li>• provide certainty, reliability, order, continuity</li> <li>• instrumental action</li> <li>• institutional regulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interpret, translate, across boundaries</li> <li>• construct institutional alliances</li> <li>• build competitive advantage</li> <li>• construct a case</li> <li>• negotiate agreement</li> <li>• contribute to ongoing decisions and outcomes</li> <li>• strategic action</li> <li>• institutional capacity building</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• investment of personal capital</li> <li>• creativity and innovation</li> <li>• working with uncertainty, provisionality, complexity</li> <li>• maximising human potential</li> <li>• invest in longer-term future</li> <li>• communicative action</li> <li>• institutional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• acquisition of academic credentials</li> <li>• ability to achieve credibility in academic debate/ space</li> <li>• ability to challenge the status quo</li> <li>• ability to manage duality of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' to academic space</li> </ul>

The typology in Figure 4 should be read with the ‘health warning’ that the four categories of professional are not necessarily fixed or immutable, in that individuals may, for instance, display different characteristics according to the locations in which they find themselves, or at different times in their career. The model is, therefore, offered as a device to illustrate dispositions or tendencies towards the four ‘strains’ of identity that were evident in the narratives of respondents. It is also offered as a tool which institutions may find helpful in considering the positioning of their staff; and which individuals and institutions may find helpful in planning professional and career development.

Of the twenty-four individuals interviewed in the initial round of interviews, twelve (50%) were categorised as *bounded*, eight (33%) as *cross-boundary*, and four (17%) as *unbounded*. For the second round of interviews, a further five individuals were targeted as displaying the characteristics of *blended professionals*, working between professional and academic domains. Because, in practice, individuals may be on the border of different forms of identity, or move between these according to circumstances, respondents were categorised according to the dominant characteristics that they displayed. A number of them also displayed characteristics of another category, or the potential to achieve these. For instance, a

number of *cross-boundary professionals* displayed *bounded* characteristics in ensuring a timely and consistent service in relation to more process-oriented aspects of their roles; others had external networks, and demonstrated *unbounded* characteristics in relation to these. After the second round of interviews, two of the *cross-boundary professionals* from the first round of interviews were re-categorised as *blended*, because of their mixed backgrounds, and because the work they undertook had academic elements.

There were more senior than middle managers in the *bounded* category, and vice versa in the case of the other two categories, suggesting that individuals may become more *bounded* as they progress up the career ladder. Those categorised as *bounded professionals* were all in their forties and fifties, *cross-boundary* and *blended professionals* in their thirties, forties and fifties, and *unbounded professionals* in their twenties, thirties and forties, which also suggests that there is a generational effect. In the case of the ‘generalists’ in the *bounded* category, their identities tended to reflect ‘academic civil service’ roles drawn from the pre-1992 sector, and specialists in the *bounded* category were likely to have been strongly influenced by their experience within their professional specialism (Figure 5):

**FIGURE 5**

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATEGORIES OF PROFESSIONAL AND LEVELS OF SENIORITY**

CATEGORY OF PROFESSIONAL	MIDDLE MANAGERS	SENIOR MANAGERS	TOTALS
<i>Bounded</i>	4	8	12
<i>Cross-boundary</i>	4	2	6
<i>Unbounded</i>	3	1	4
<i>Blended</i>	3	4	7
<b>Totals</b>	14	15	29

As shown in Figure 6, it would appear that generalist staff are likely to find it easier to cross boundaries, although this was not universally the case:

**FIGURE 6**

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CATEGORIES OF PROFESSIONAL AND GENERALIST AND SPECIALIST ROLES			
CATEGORY OF PROFESSIONAL	GENERALIST eg STUDENT SERVICES; DEPARTMENTAL MANAGEMENT	SPECIALIST eg FINANCE; HUMAN RESOURCES	TOTALS
<i>Bounded</i>	6	6	12
<i>Cross-boundary</i>	4	2	6
<i>Unbounded</i>	3	1	4
<b>Totals</b>	13	9	22

**Notes to Figure 6:**

(i) For the purposes of the study, data managers with professional qualifications such as membership of the British Computer Society were regarded as specialist; those working in research and enterprise, while they might develop specialist expertise, were regarded as generalists.

(ii) The five *blended professionals*, rather than having a generalist or specialist professional background, had backgrounds that straddled professional and academic domains, as noted above, and are therefore not included in this table. However, none of them had externally accredited specialist qualifications.

**BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS**

Managers with predominantly *bounded* identities, in both generalist and specialist roles, are likely to be responsible for the stewardship of regulatory requirements, be they academic regulations, human resources practices, or financial audit. They are likely to abide by structural “rules and resources”<sup>53</sup>, as articulated, for instance, in a job description or organisation chart, and these provide the defining parameters of their identity. Their authority is based on their knowledge of these requirements, about which they exercise judgement and are able to give advice in a measured and neutral way, as in the case of the following finance manager:

*“The pro-vice-chancellor (resources) wanted to proceed with a project, and I ... did a risk assessment ... and I came down very firmly on the side of not going ahead with it, because there were some risks that we couldn’t mitigate to a satisfactory level ... I wrote to him on several occasions, and I said to him my advice is, and my advice continues to be, that we should not do this ...”*

Such staff might be seen as being aligned with the concept of the disinterested professional or civil servant, who offers a

reliable service in accordance with recognised standards. In Handy’s organisational terminology, they are likely to be associated with maintaining the requirements associated with a role culture<sup>54</sup>, drawing their authority primarily from their locale in the institution. They are valued because they maintain order and control, and are likely to identify with others in similar roles, with whom they share the same “rules and resources” which legitimise their activity. They are, therefore, less likely to be involved in negotiating their own position.

*Bounded professionals*, therefore, operating within clear regulatory frameworks or guidelines, might be said to draw their authority principally from their execution of the technical aspects of their roles, and the expertise that that requires. They do this in what Habermas terms a “non-social action situation”<sup>55</sup>, putting the facts in a neutral and disinterested way. In Habermas’ typology of “instrumental”, “strategic” and “communicative” action, therefore, such an approach might be categorised as “instrumental” action, in that:

<sup>53</sup> Giddens (1991)  
<sup>54</sup> Handy (1993: 185)

<sup>55</sup> Habermas (1984: 285)

*“We call an action ... instrumental when we consider it under the aspect of following technical rules of action and assess the efficiency of an intervention into a complex of circumstances and events.”<sup>56</sup>*

*Bounded professionals*, therefore, can be relied upon to meet the expectations enshrined in their job description, and their expertise is essential to institutions in ensuring that regulatory and legislative requirements are met, and in providing continuity of service. Using Bernstein’s<sup>57</sup> conceptualisation of knowledge boundaries, they might be said to represent strongly classified, strongly insulated identities, and to represent an “ideal” form of professional<sup>58</sup> in that they offer judgements in accordance with knowledge that is accumulated via professional training and/or experience as a practitioner, and which carries an “aura of certainty”<sup>59</sup>. However, because *bounded professionals* derive what Bernstein terms their “integrity”<sup>60</sup> from the structures in which they are located, this can place them in difficulty when they try to relate to other locales that are also well insulated.

Within the category of *bounded professionals*, however, some respondents could be distinguished by the fact that their

boundedness was largely a result of their own volition, whereas for others it reflected constraints that were perceived as ‘given’ by fixed organisational parameters.

### Self-imposed boundaries

*Bounded professionals* who constructed their own boundaries tended to base their world-view on a clear definition of their locale, of which they felt they had guardianship, and from which their authority derived. They were likely to describe an orderly positioning of the organisational spaces, knowledges, and relationships for which they are responsible. Box 1 gives examples of the identity tendencies of this group. Their narratives suggest that there is a disposition to use boundaries as a protective device against perceived external threats, for instance the impact of marketing activity on admissions and recruitment processes. Thus, while appearing to provide security, self-imposed boundaries may also create a sense of vulnerability, if they are invoked as a defence mechanism rather being adapted to cope with change. These identities, therefore, can come under strain when flexibility is required to deal with multiple and even competing agendas in ambiguous environments.

## BOX 1

### IDENTITY TENDENCIES OF BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS WHO ESTABLISH THEIR OWN BOUNDARIES

- **Definition of role in terms of maintaining well-defined processes:** “there are ways of doing things and that’s the way you do them ... there’s a sense in which your job is keeping the show on the road [and] maintaining cyclical continuity ...”
- **Define themselves in terms of essential characteristics**, for instance as a repository of expertise, which does not become redundant: “At heart, I’m a personnel officer ... people will come to me about anything and everything.”
- **A lack of comfort about ambiguous conditions or shared space:** “I don’t know how it works when you’ve got a PVC [with functional responsibilities] hanging around as well. I’m ... glad we don’t.”
- **Satisfaction deriving from maintaining continuity:** “trying to keep people happy” and “serving the university”.
- **Contentment with same role and/or institution:** “I didn’t want to go anywhere else ... The job was so interesting ... there is nothing I do now that I wouldn’t have done ten years ago”.
- **Reluctance to deviate from core function**, for instance, to enter political negotiations or pursue a case for additional resources: “What I’ve always tried to do is judge as best I can whether it is worth making a case ... there are some times when you just have to be told ‘no.’”
- **Separation of own views from professional role:** “I don’t actually mind policy being not what I would choose, because it’s not my role ... If the university takes a different view to some things than I would, that’s up to it really.”

<sup>56</sup> Habermas (1984: 285)

<sup>57</sup> Bernstein (2000)

<sup>58</sup> Eraut (1994)

<sup>59</sup> Eraut (1994: 15)

<sup>60</sup> Bernstein (2000: 6)

IDENTITY TENDENCIES OF *BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS* WHO PERCEIVE THEMSELVES AS RESTRICTED BY 'GIVEN' BOUNDARIES

- **Tension from the co-existence of lateral and hierarchical responsibilities and relationships**, for instance between an academic department and the central administration.
- **Feelings of being caught between different sets of obligations**, without full legitimacy in either locale, and therefore "open to the elements ..."
- **An uneasy co-existence between, for instance, service activity** that supports academic colleagues so as to "take a burden of work off [their] shoulders ..."; **and management activity** that involves participation in decision-making.
- **A sense of being 'stretched' between a number of possible locations**, creating feelings of indeterminacy and anomie, described by one manager as "Kafka-esque".
- **A perception of there being barriers to interaction with peer groups or networks**, for instance time constraints and/or physical isolation.
- **Dissonance between an individual's professional opinion and the views of those they are representing**, whereby a manager feels obliged to 'ventriloquise' a 'party line', even though they "... don't want to have to defend [it]."

**'Given' boundaries**

Other respondents categorised as *bounded professionals* reported feeling restricted by boundaries that they perceived as being externally imposed, and which they had difficulty in adjusting or crossing. Box 2 (above) gives examples of identity tendencies that characterise this group.

Thus, both types of *bounded professionals*, who voluntarily or involuntarily draw their identities from established structures and boundaries, may have difficulty in reconciling multiple sets of "rules and resources"<sup>61</sup>. They may express this either by an uncomfortable juggling of identity within formal boundaries, or by apparent subversion outside them. They may also seek to "insulate" themselves via:

"... a system of psychic defences ... which ... then reveal the suppressed contradictions, cleavages and dilemmas ... [which are] rarely silenced"<sup>62</sup>

These "contradictions, cleavages, and dilemmas" may come to the surface when individuals seek to accommodate to boundary pressures, but are only able to articulate this indirectly, for instance through feelings of alienation or anomie.

Thus, while *bounded professionals* may appear to have identities that are cohesive, well understood by themselves and others, and focused round an essential core, there is also

potential for identity strain. In the case of those who draw their identity from establishing their locale within self-imposed boundaries, this can include threats to or loss of their identity space. In the case of those who feel constrained by boundaries that they perceive as being externally imposed, it can include frustration arising from an inability to realise multiple identity potentials. Of the twelve individuals categorised as *bounded professionals* in the UK study, only two appeared to achieve an accommodation between role and identity, with no sign of strain or tension. It may be, therefore, that in contemporary environments it is difficult to sustain the role expectations of the "ideal" form of professional<sup>63</sup>, notwithstanding the fact that there remains a need for the services that they offer.

Some *bounded professionals*, particularly those who see themselves as being restricted by external boundaries, might well, in other circumstances, become *cross-boundary professionals*. This could be facilitated by more flexible organisational structures, and the support of a group of colleagues who could assist in influencing the nature of these structures, through what Archer<sup>64</sup> terms "corporate agency", that is a dialogue and alliance amongst social actors with similar interests, to achieve goals that are mutually advantageous. As will be seen in the following section, *cross-boundary professionals* who not only cross, but also actively use, boundaries are able to create more identity possibilities for themselves.

<sup>61</sup> Giddens (1991)

<sup>62</sup> Bernstein (2000: 6)

<sup>63</sup> Erant (1994)

<sup>64</sup> Archer (2000)

## CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS

Like *bounded professionals*, *cross-boundary professionals* are aware of the significance of structures and boundaries, and even dependent on them for their identities, although for different reasons. However, unlike *bounded professionals*, they actively use boundaries, and the spaces on either side of them, to construct and modify their identities, undertaking interpretive roles and developing cross-institutional understandings. Rather than perceiving boundaries as a means of achieving definition and containment, *cross-boundary professionals* actively work across a number of locales to contribute to institutional capacity building. They demonstrate greater mobility than *bounded professionals*, and also an ability to hold together multiple identity components. They are pragmatic in the way that they do this, relinquishing elements of these components if necessary, and taking opportunities that arise to invest in alternative spaces. Thus, while *cross-boundary professionals* recognise the significance of boundaries, they do not necessarily regard the space at either side of these as being mutually exclusive, actively using boundaries to achieve superordinate goals across more than one area of activity.

A comparison of two finance managers, one categorised as *bounded*, and one as *cross-boundary*, illustrates different approaches to a similar role. When asked about relationships with heads of schools and departments, one saw these primarily in technical terms:

*"The [main] contact that we have with academic managers is in terms of how they manage their financial resources ... we have oversight of that and report to the requisite authorities."*

By contrast, the other manager conceptualised their role as bringing together academic and institutional agendas:

*"... we try to bridge this divide between 'let's keep the core academics happy and the RAE is all important...' [and] developing these massive activities elsewhere [widening participation, regional partnership]."*

This manager saw the development of a dialogue about "where we are, what we're doing, why we're doing this, or what we might need to change" as one of the key elements of their job. This was expressed in terms of developing lines of communication with academic colleagues, and obtaining two-way feedback:

*"I've had a few compliments recently... people saying 'we like your report', 'you explained this, etc etc.'"*

This approach reflected a recognition of the need to contextualise the financial aspects of institutional activity in a broader envelope:

*"We're growing, not just in size, but in diversity and complexity... you can't have a finance director who is just number crunching, just looking at the bottom line..."*

Although this comparison of two finance managers, who were in different institutions, demonstrates that it is possible to adopt different approaches to a similar role, individual approaches and identities are likely to depend on a combination of what the individual has the will to achieve, and is able to achieve, in their local circumstances.

*Cross-boundary professionals*, therefore, are likely to be proactive in relation to the structures they encounter, and to recognise that boundaries can offer possibilities and opportunities as well as constraints. Thus, individuals categorised as *cross-boundary* are comfortable inhabiting more than one form of space, and actively use boundaries to build the capacity of their institution, and also to invest in their own future roles. One such manager, for instance, described how their role straddled student admissions as well as recruitment activity. While the former was largely process-oriented, the latter involved intelligence gathering about international student markets, and might otherwise have fallen between admissions and external relations departments. This person flourished in their dual identity because they understood, and were comfortable with, both types of activity. Nor were they obliged to suppress one in favour of the other:

*"It's a job I've very much enjoyed, because it's not one or the other."*

Another *cross-boundary* respondent saw themselves as managing "the interconnecting interfaces" of a corporate information system, having a detailed understanding of, for instance, student profiles and programme structures, which enabled them to "step back and articulate a problem to people who aren't technical". They also contributed to the development of what they referred to as the institution's "business environment", and maintained a dialogue with commercial suppliers about system developments. They were therefore able to use a combination of technical, institutional and business knowledge to contribute to institutional capacity building.



Box 3 illustrates identity tendencies of *cross-boundary professionals*, and ways in which they actively use boundaries to strategic advantage.

*Cross-boundary professionals*, therefore, are able to tolerate simultaneous occupation of different spaces for the purpose in hand. One admissions manager described how, on the one hand, they were in a formal, hierarchical relationship with faculty deans as the final arbiters of admissions, to whom they would be required to provide technical advice about, for instance, A-level scores and target numbers. On the other hand, they also played an expert role in a flatter management coalition of academic admissions officers in schools, with shared responsibility for decision-making. In the latter case, it would be open to the professional manager to pursue their line of argument, and win or lose according to the strength of their case and powers of persuasion, for instance in relation to a policy discussion about whether the university should enter an emerging overseas market. The manager described the formal hierarchical relationship as “this façade, that we pretend exists”, although in practice decisions were made at a local,

team level, with delegated authority.

*Cross-boundary professionals* are also pragmatic in achieving their objectives. Their understanding of different functional areas of an institution can give them an overview that is politically advantageous. In so doing they are likely to adopt influencing strategies, in a “purposive-rational manner”, reflecting Habermas’ “strategic action” orientation in a “social action situation”, involving “action oriented to success ... following rules of rational choice and assess[ing] the efficacy of influencing the decisions of a rational opponent”<sup>65</sup>. In Archer’s terminology, *cross-boundary professionals* display the ability not only to “animate” their roles<sup>66</sup>, that is to act them out, but also to actively contribute to, and “personify” these roles “in a unique manner”<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, they are able to negotiate their position, and are “aware of what they want, can articulate it to themselves and to others ...”<sup>68</sup>. By negotiating their position, and interacting with different constituencies across the institution, therefore, *cross-boundary professionals* are able to overcome the tendency for isolation that can occur for *bounded professionals*.

### BOX 3

#### IDENTITY TENDENCIES OF *CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS*

- **Seek to integrate knowledge:** “... things work best when you actually have a working knowledge about allied areas ...”
- **Capitalise on opportunities created**, for example, when: “... there aren’t an awful lot of necessary ground rules ... [and] you don’t have the oversight [from others]”.
- **Work between different spaces without experiencing tension or conflict.**
- **Contribute to institutional capacity building by looking beyond institutional boundaries:** “spotting trends ... getting ahead of the game ... keep[ing] an eye on what’s happening elsewhere, rather than getting too caught up in what’s happening at [one’s] own institution”.
- **A pragmatic approach to self-identity**, for instance, an ability to switch between ‘administration’ and ‘management’ to optimise relationships and to achieve the desired outcomes: “It’s safer to call it administration, although we all know we mean management.”

<sup>65</sup> Habermas (1984: 285-286)

<sup>66</sup> Archer (2000: 288)

<sup>67</sup> Archer (2000: 296)

<sup>68</sup> Archer (2000: 265)

*Cross-boundary professionals* demonstrate that boundaries, and the tensions arising from them, can present opportunities and well as constraints in the construction of identity. Rather than operating as representatives of a particular process or function, and drawing their legitimacy solely from structural “rules and resources”<sup>69</sup>, therefore, they become their own agents in establishing their identities in negotiation with academic and other colleagues. However, their ability to do this is likely to be influenced by the nature of the institutional structures and boundaries that they encounter.

## UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS

*Unbounded professionals* distinguish themselves from *bounded* or *cross-boundary professionals* by a lack of cognisance of organisational structures and boundaries, or for their positioning in relation to these. Rather, they locate themselves in broadly based project areas such as student transitions or community partnership, which are likely to have developed out of mainstream functions in, for instance, registry, personnel, or research office environments. Less mindful of fixed points of reference, they have a fluid and open-ended approach to their activity. In this situation, as one respondent observed, it is possible for a job description to become “what you want it to be really”. They are, therefore, likely to work in an exploratory way with tension, and even conflict, seeking a common basis for understanding between interest groups. This may involve entering messy, or even dangerous, space that others might avoid, working with, rather than being challenged by, conditions of ambiguity. *Unbounded professionals*, therefore, contribute towards institutional development by, if necessary, re-conceptualising existing space, and also by contributing to the construction of new space.

Their approach might be said to reflect a “communicative action” orientation<sup>70</sup>, whereby they endeavour to establish a common definition of a situation with their colleagues before deciding on a course of action, which is “oriented to reaching understanding”. Their activities are, therefore:

*“not primarily oriented to their own individual successes; they pursue their individual goals ... [by] harmoniz[ing] their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions ... ”*<sup>71</sup>

They are, therefore, more oriented to “coming to an understanding *with* [others]” than “exerting an influence *upon* others”<sup>72</sup>, whereas *cross-boundary professionals*, with their facility for negotiating solutions across boundaries, might be

said to be more inclined towards the latter. In working towards “communicative action”, they endeavour to contextualise their work within academic and institutional agendas:

*“Personnel is a strategic function. It’s not just something that turns over the contracts. It is something that should be on board”* (personnel manager).

Their open approach to relationships is further characterised by a lack of status consciousness. Rather than referring to positions or titles in the organisational hierarchy, they tend to identify themselves via broad areas of activity, such as “work[ing] in student support”, thus representing Bernstein’s “weakly classified” approach to knowledge. Such an approach may assist in developing lateral relationships and team working with people at different organisational levels, and also foster what more than one respondent referred to as “open relationships”, reflecting Bernstein’s suggestion that:

*“Relaxed frames ... change the nature of authority relationships by increasing the rights of [those lower down the hierarchy].”*<sup>73</sup>

Box 4 (opposite) describes the identity tendencies displayed by *unbounded professionals*.

Rather than moving between different functions, like *cross-boundary professionals*, *unbounded professionals* are likely to be involved in bringing together activities that had previously been conducted in different locales. One respondent had merged financial support, pastoral care, disability, and the co-ordination of academic and pastoral advisers into a single student life office, developing cross-institutional networks so that decisions about student welfare could be “embedded” in institutional agendas, rather than being seen as an “optional extra”. Another respondent described how they had a portfolio in which institutional strategy, professional practice and management development activity “mingled together”; and another had reconfigured a research office to incorporate research and development as well as community and regional partnership. The latter had created links between academic directors of research, mainstream academic staff undertaking research and consultancy, and external partners such as regional development agencies. Thus, whereas *bounded* and *cross-boundary professionals* are clear about their positioning in relation to others, and feel that it is important to know where they stand in this respect, *unbounded professionals* are less likely to see themselves in terms of fixed or pre-defined relationships. Their work, therefore, might be seen as

<sup>69</sup> Giddens (1991)

<sup>70</sup> Habermas (1984: 285)

<sup>71</sup> Habermas (1984: 286)

<sup>72</sup> Habermas (1984: 286)

<sup>73</sup> Bernstein (1970: 61)

IDENTITY TENDENCIES OF *UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS*

- **The creation of space in which issues can be problematised and explored:** “I work better under that kind of circumstance when I’m allowed to explore things that I think need exploring.”
- **A clear task or project orientation:** “In another language I’d have been a project manager for the last nine years ...”
- **Experience of, and openness to, external environments:** “I’d be quite confident about working ‘out’ if I needed to.”
- **Acting as a pathfinder:** “I didn’t have a job description. I wrote my own, effectively... if there’s a need I pick it up, [and] do my best to make a contribution”.
- **Working in difficult space,** for instance managing staff under pressure: “part of my motivation is to support the staff that I’m managing... I can see that their workload is unmanageable.”
- **Dealing with specific problems in a wider and longer-term context:** “You don’t just sit on the end of the phone and tell [academic colleagues] do this, do that... You coach them through it the first time, so then they’ll know how to do it the second time.”
- **A sense of being ‘keyed into’ networks** that facilitate the exchange of information and intelligence that can be invested in the institution.
- **An ability to comprehend issues that are not being articulated:** “...academics [talk] about bureaucracy and administrative interference... when [they’re actually] saying ‘I’m busy and I’m stressed’”

dissolving rather than crossing boundaries.

Furthermore, there is a sense in which *unbounded professionals* become their project and develop their roles in such a way that role and identity become synonymous. They are creative in promoting institutional “interest” in their projects<sup>74</sup>, and might be said to reflect Middlehurst and Kennie’s idea of “A new professionalism” drawn from “creative, multi-skilled and enterprising professionals”, who are capable of developing “long-term partnerships with many different kinds of clients”<sup>75</sup>. In a wider context, they also resemble Florida’s “creative class” of professionals, who are open to experience:

*“...[which] means lack of rigidity and permeability of boundaries in concepts, beliefs, perceptions and hypotheses. It means a tolerance for ambiguity... the ability to receive much conflicting information without forcing closure upon the situation... openness of awareness to what exists ...”*<sup>76</sup>

Such people wish to work in “stimulating, creative environments – [in] places that not only offer opportunities ... but openness to diversity, where they feel they can express themselves and validate their identities”<sup>77</sup>. Although Florida’s study refers to geographical locations, the same is likely to be true of institutional settings.

Thus, *unbounded professionals* demonstrate an ability to hold things together in uncertain and unpredictable conditions, that may be permanently unfinished and un-finishable, in a form of practice characterised by the ability to improvise. They complement *bounded* and *cross-boundary professionals* by an approach that contributes to institutional development in its widest sense, beyond, for instance, the provision of data in support of an evidence base to inform decision-making. However *unbounded* approaches can also create challenges vis-a-vis formal structures, and can be risky, both for the institutions and individuals. More than one manager spoke of a backlog of paperwork, suggesting that those categorised as *unbounded professionals* may err on the side of too little regard for systems, which could cause a loss of confidence in their activities if it occurred too frequently. There could also be the risk that *unbounded professionals* over-extend their projects in an uncontrolled way, without taking account of, for instance, resource constraints, time deadlines, or audit requirements. Thus, a single project could unbalance an institution’s overall activity profile or, conversely, fail, if it were too dependent on an enthusiastic manager who left the institution. Too many *unbounded professionals*, therefore, without fixed job descriptions or other forms of definition, could become, or be regarded as, a liability.

<sup>74</sup> Archer (2000: 279)

<sup>75</sup> Middlehurst and Kennie (1997: 67)

<sup>76</sup> Rogers (1961: 348), quoted in Florida (2002: 168-169)

<sup>77</sup> Florida (2002: 11)

## BLENDING PROFESSIONALS

While those respondents categorised as *cross-boundary* and *unbounded professionals* were likely to be active in extending their roles beyond their given job descriptions, and to operate on the boundaries of academic space, they nevertheless originated in mainstream roles, for instance in a student services or research office. By contrast, the study revealed that a fourth group of respondents, categorised as *blended professionals*, are increasingly being recruited to dedicated appointments that span both professional and academic domains. Thus, one respondent working in research partnership was “increasingly [recruiting] people with doctorates”:

*“... somebody who’s got a PhD in a relevant academic subject like biotechnology, who may have sat on the board of a spin-out company at some point... they look sexy in that way, because they’ve got an academic background... but they also have some experience of harsh and brutal business realities.”*

These people were not only likely to have mixed backgrounds, but also to be appointed to work with ‘bundles’ of activity such as learning and community partnership, student welfare, equity and diversity, or regional and business development. Three of the seven UK staff characterised as *blended* had doctorates, the others having a master’s degree, and one of the latter was considering registering for a doctorate.

Box 5 (below) illustrates identity tendencies of *blended professionals*, and ways in which they contribute to the development of new forms of working space between professional and academic domains.

## ‘Chinese walls’

The capacity to bring together professional and academic elements of activity, when organisational dynamics and the perceptions of colleagues tended to keep them apart, was a theme that recurred in the narratives of *blended professionals*. It was apparent that being able to work in such space involved navigating a series of ‘chinese walls’ and contextualising day-to-day work in multiple dimensions, as well as establishing the necessary credibility to work in partnership with academic colleagues. One person spoke of dealing with a “multi-layered reality”, which partly arose from the fact that, for instance, fluid areas such as learning partnerships might be represented in different ways in the same institution, so that “[my area of responsibility] sometimes features as an academic unit, and sometimes as an office”. There was also a balancing act to be undertaken between different foci such as providing a service to clients, contributing to policy and strategy, and meeting both operational and market requirements.

One respondent, categorised as a *blended professional*, described this process as:

*“... making friends, pulling out threads, weaving things together, building up networking and common practice ... and actually trying to take complexity and make it simple.”*

Another turned “usefully loose” structures to advantage by, for instance, developing “round table discussions” as a sounding board, that persuaded academic staff to take cognisance of, and contribute to, community and partnership activity, on which the institution increasingly depended. Other respondents entered “contested space” more directly:

## BOX 5

### IDENTITY TENDENCIES OF BLENDED PROFESSIONALS

- **An ability to work in ambiguous space between professional and academic domains**, capitalising on a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘not belonging’ to both, so as to persuade colleagues of “the sort of things that my involvement can bring...”
- **Actively using a mixed background to advantage**: “I’m leading the bid, even though it’s an academic bid, because I’ve got the understanding of the institutional context that’s needed to put something like that together.”
- Working with, for instance:
  - **Multiple constituencies and perceptions**: “We have very different versions of reality, where the institution is, or should be going, and how we should get there...”
  - **Less than optimal structures**: “...working within a flawed system and finding the flexibility to do that...”
  - **Uncharted territory**: “... history and tensions between different factions and groups ... an invisible maze.”
  - **Uneven levels of commitment**: “Just because you have one department on board, it doesn’t mean you have the other fifteen on board.”

*"... part of what makes life interesting are the power struggles and the battles that go on, and the fighting over contested areas."*

Individuals with the capacity to do this were likely to have an academic as well as a professional interest in their emergent area of activity, with the ability, for instance, to undertake practical, in-house research, which would help to 'grow' new forms of activity, such as foundation degrees or local business links, and integrate them within the institutional portfolio, thus:

*"... work[ing] out some good practice, some evidence-based case studies... that academics can then buy into..."*

Sometimes this involved 'going the extra mile' to facilitate an initiative, "doing work you wouldn't normally undertake", to bring an academic initiative to fruition:

*"... someone in an [academic] department has an idea and wants to take it forward, so we work quite closely with that person ... and then it's not our responsibility to disseminate it to the rest of the department; it has to go back through their own channels."*

There were, nevertheless, issues for *blended professionals* in relation to the perceptions of colleagues about where they 'belonged'. Such people would be likely to be employed on professional rather than academic contracts, and the lack of formal academic status was a challenge:

*"... the particular activities I undertake have an academic component to them, and I think people find that difficult because I'm not an academic, and I think that notion that you can encompass academic activities within an administrative set up is very uncomfortable for a lot of people."*

This person described how they had "always worked at interfaces", and tended to be seen as a "maverick" by both academic and professional colleagues. In this role they felt able to challenge the "status quo": "I think my strength in leadership terms is being able to stand on the outside and look in."

Issues raised by this kind of 'identity stretch' across the two domains is illustrated by another respondent, with ambitions to become a pro-vice-chancellor, who sensed their own re-positioning in relation to academic colleagues as they consciously built their identity as a "professional higher education manager". They were doing this because they felt that their professional credibility was reinforced by activity such as fighting for institutional resources, rather than by their

association with student affairs. However, there was a sense of strain in being seen as not 'belonging' entirely to either professional or academic constituencies:

*"You're unpopular anyway, because [academic colleagues] don't like the work you do, and then it's even more unpopular because you're seen to be the person making them jump through [quality assurance] hoops. I mean, you wouldn't want to particularly..."*

### **Achieving credibility in academic space**

More than one *blended professional* described how they had moved into higher education with what they regarded as a transferable portfolio, for instance from further education, even though the academic experience they had gained there might be perceived by higher education colleagues as:

*"... less worthy than [that of] a person who came out of university and went into university... [although] people in the further education context have often got higher education qualifications, they've juggled so many things, and haven't had as much luxury and support as you can get in the higher education environment."*

Individuals were sometimes obliged, therefore, to overcome negative perceptions, and also dislocations between individual profiles and expectations arising from formal briefs. A number of respondents, for instance, mentioned how they were expected to take minutes at meetings, even though they might have a doctorate and were located outside the academic administration. One described how their academic colleagues "were totally shocked" when they discovered that they had been appointed on the basis of their legal qualifications. Such individuals were obliged, therefore, to build their credibility on a personal, one-to-one basis:

*"... those academics that you have worked with have a different view of you in that committee, even though you are taking the notes."*

Impression management was therefore seen as important. Several respondents referred to the importance of being "booted and suited" when performing in a public arena, although this may have reflected a gendered approach (six of the seven UK respondents categorised as *blended* were women, and this also suggests that women may be attracted to, and perform well in, roles that involve working in ambiguous space).

Nevertheless, it was often a question of working with an ongoing dissonance between credibility achieved on a

personal basis and respect accorded to their particular organisational location or office:

*"If it is me talking to individuals in my capacity as a head of section that is fine, but I think probably as an entity we are quite difficult."*

Overcoming this dissonance was likely to involve finding, or creating, forms of language that would 'speak to' academic agendas, and developing 'champions' for the activity or area:

*"... there are people I've always got on with, because they have always understood a modular credit system and we've talked the same language from day one. Other people ... I am always trying to win over but I don't make much headway, it's just kind of 'why would we be here; what's our purpose! ...'"*

This person felt that appreciating how "academic mindsets" are located in disciplinary, rather than in organisational or institutional frameworks, had enabled them to persevere with the dialogue. Other managers working in *blended* roles also described how they developed the confidence to hold their own in a disinterested, academic debate, learning "to divorce argument from people" so as not to be distracted by, or take personally, criticism of an activity with which they were involved:

*"You have to have the debate to move forward... Many administrators do not appreciate this ... [but] no amount of training courses will ever prepare you for that."*

Possibly as a result of multiple allegiances, more than one *blended professional* spoke of not knowing what kind of professional they were any more, which was not the case with respondents in the other groups. This suggests that new forms of identity were being created, for which there was as yet no definition or framework of understanding. A number of them had ambitions to move to a pro-vice-chancellor role, although there were several perceived obstacles. For instance, more than one person with a background in further or adult education felt that it counted against them because they had not had mainstream teaching and research experience in higher education. Such factors have implications for the experience that individuals might seek to gain, and the career paths that they might take.

## SUMMARY OF CHARACTERISTICS OF THE FOUR CATEGORIES OF PROFESSIONAL AND THEIR APPROACHES TO MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

While *bounded professionals* might be said to represent Friedson's "standard" group of professionals<sup>78</sup>, undertaking tasks that, although requiring specialised expertise, are geared to "standardised production" that is pre-determined, the other

three categories could be seen as representing different forms of "elite" professional, who apply their expertise to more complex, individuated tasks<sup>79</sup>. The recurrence of words such as "exploration", "innovation" and "creative" in the narratives of the latter groups point to a more extended view of professionalism.

Both *cross-boundary professionals* and *unbounded professionals* demonstrate greater mobility than *bounded professionals*, and might be said to work in conditions of "weak boundary maintenance" in relation to the spaces they operate in, the structuring of their knowledge, and the organisation of their relationships<sup>80</sup>. However, the two are distinguished by the fact that *cross-boundary professionals* recognise and actively use boundaries, and the space on either side of them, to build institutional capacity. Boundaries, therefore, remain a defining mechanism for them, as they do for *bounded professionals*.

By contrast, *unbounded professionals*, with their more open-ended approach, are more oriented towards institutional development for the future. For those categorised as *unbounded professionals*, boundaries neither represent defining parameters, as in the case of *bounded professionals*, nor a tool for the construction of identity, as in the case of *cross-boundary professionals*. Although they may be obliged to take account of boundaries as conceived by others, they are less likely than *cross-boundary professionals* to enter political negotiations, for instance, in a competition for influence or resources. They distinguish themselves, rather, by their ability to work in conditions of fluidity, often acting as nodal points<sup>81</sup> in extended networks<sup>82</sup>. However, although they are creative in extending their projects, they may, at times, be insufficiently aware that boundary recognition is necessary.

While *blended professionals* shared with *unbounded professionals* an orientation to broadly based projects, the fact that they came with a specific brief to develop these, and have both professional and academic credentials, appears to give them a stronger focus as well as a clearer sense of obstacles that they might need to overcome. While *unbounded professionals* tended to be exploratory, opening up and extending strands of activity on the basis of their own interest and initiative, *blended professionals* demonstrate a determination to what was described by one respondent as "pull all the strands together", redefining spaces, consolidating the basis for new forms of activity, and contextualising and integrating these within institutional agendas. The narratives suggest that some *unbounded professionals*, particularly in

<sup>78</sup> Friedson (2001: 212)

<sup>79</sup> Friedson (2001:111)

<sup>80</sup> Bernstein (1970: 61)

<sup>81</sup> Urry (2003: 9-10)

<sup>82</sup> Castells (2000: 469)

middle management roles, might well develop *blended* identities in due course if they are able to acquire the experience and credentials that enable them to cross into academic space. It might also be that some *blended professionals* will, in time, develop *bounded* characteristics as developing fields of activity such as community partnership become mainstream. A longitudinal study would be required to understand how these forms of identity might develop over a period of time.

The identities of the different categories of professional also reflect the use made of “strong” and “weak” ties<sup>83</sup>. On the one hand, the relationships of *bounded professionals* could be said to consist of “strong ties ... of long duration, marked by trust and reciprocity”<sup>84</sup> within the boundaries that they inhabit, with few “weak ties” extended outside this framework<sup>85</sup>. They, therefore, focus their time and effort on close and regular relationships, for instance with line managers and key individuals, and have less investment in “weak ties” with professional contacts in lateral networks, either across the institution or externally. They are, therefore, less able to take advantage of the opportunities for the exchange of institutional intelligence and professional practice that “weak ties” would provide. By contrast, less *bounded* forms of professional are likely to invest in the development of institutional intelligence and professional practice through extended networks. Whereas “strong ties” are less adaptable to turbulence and change, and “consume much more ... time and energy”<sup>86</sup>, “Weak ties allow us to mobilise more resources and more possibilities”<sup>87</sup>.

From the respondent accounts in the UK, there was a sense that in higher education ‘leadership’ tended to mean ‘academic leadership’, and that even though professional managers might be leading staff in a functional area, this was seen more in terms of ‘management’. The issue tended to be more about whether they were ‘administrators’ or ‘managers’ than ‘managers’ or ‘leaders’. While *blended professionals* were more likely to acknowledge their role as leaders, this tended to be downplayed as a separate activity, and to be seen as embedded and implicit in management. As one person put it, “it’s a massive challenge to do both ... managing the expectations of leadership from those above you, and the expectations of management from those around you.”

Another respondent, with a teaching and management background in the college sector, described how they had emerged, somewhat reluctantly, as a manager:

*“... my professional identity would have to be to see myself as an academic. I’d sort of drifted into ... programme management. Then someone told me ‘you are a manager’. I do remember the moment of being told ... and it was quite a difficult idea.”*

Perhaps because ideas of ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ are not generally seen as consonant with institutional discourses about academic autonomy, ways in which *blended professionals* described leadership of their staff tended to be in terms of facilitation and development, in the sense of “bringing others with you”, “bringing others on”, and:

- *“... be[ing] open and transparent ... you need to be able to show that you understand the agendas... fairness, firmness and fun I’d say.”*
- *“... work[ing] with the grain ... and to listen with your ears open.”*
- *“... [staff] need someone to articulate to them this is the way it is ... looking at the bigger picture.”*
- *“taking a unit forward in terms of priorities and aligning staff towards that vision.”*

The idea of setting the local situation in context, translating and interpreting, therefore, was a key one:

*“...you have to work out your rules of engagement really... you can’t really manage without being a leader, and you can’t be a leader without managing... there’s a time for command and control, there’s a time for recognising that this is a management decision that you can’t make on your own... that’s why I’m interested in collaborative leadership, collaborative management...”*

There was also awareness of the benefits of ‘spreading’ leadership capability, for instance by promoting what one respondent referred to as “self-managing teams”, which would enable others to develop as managers and leaders, using a cascade process to assist with both succession planning and career development. Rather than being located with a single person, therefore, there was a sense of encouraging leadership to ‘grow’ and ripple out across an area of activity.

83 Granovetter (1973; 1974)

84 Florida (2002: 276)

85 Granovetter (1973, 1974); quoted in Florida, (2002: 276-277)

86 Florida (2002: 276)

87 Florida (2002: 277)

## 4. A CHANGING WORKFORCE MAP: THE EMERGENCE OF *THIRD SPACE*

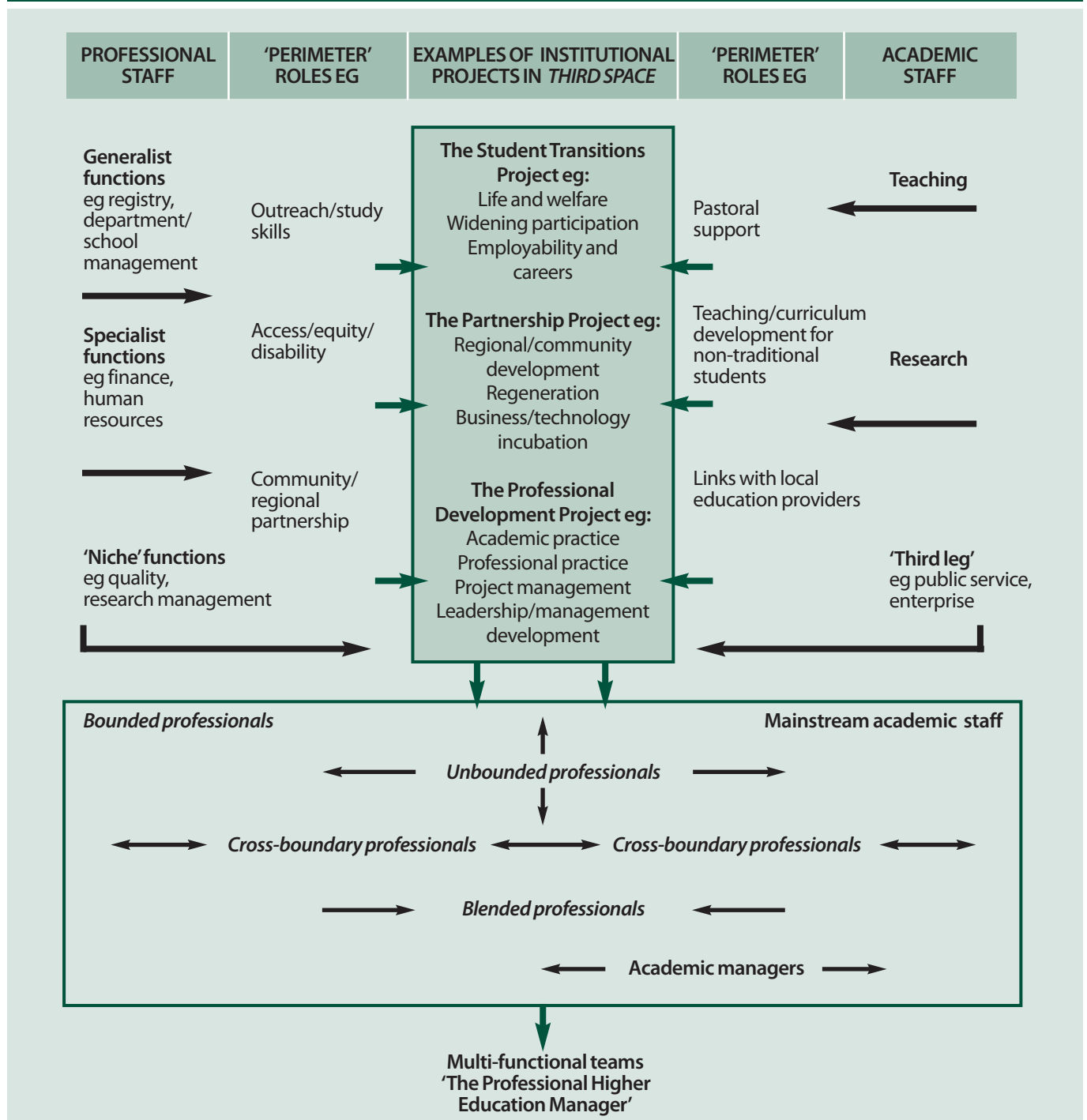
From the narratives of *unbounded* and *blended professionals* in particular, it became apparent that not only was activity taking place across and outwith boundaries, but that “in-between space”<sup>88</sup> was also being created between professional and academic domains, described in Figure 7 as *third space*. This space is also inhabited by academic staff who

undertake project-oriented activities, both short- and long-term. At the same time, *cross-boundary professionals* are likely to move in and out, actively using the boundaries between *third space* and professional and academic domains for superordinate purposes.

As with the typology of professional characteristics (pages 13-14), the model in Figure 7 is offered as a device to illustrate a disposition towards one location rather than another. Thus, *third space* is likely to exist in pockets of activity across an

**FIGURE 7**

**A CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION WORKFORCE MAP: THE EMERGENCE OF *THIRD SPACE* BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND ACADEMIC DOMAINS**





institution. It should, therefore, be read with the 'health warning' that individual positionings are not necessarily fixed or immutable, in that individuals may occupy different forms of space at different times in their career, or move between these according to circumstances, even within a single role. The model is, nevertheless, intended to provide institutions and individuals with an additional perspective when considering the positioning of activity, and staff locations and potentials.

On the left and right hand sides of the diagram respectively are professional and academic staff, performing their traditional roles, professional staff in generalist, specialist and 'niche' functions, and academic staff undertaking teaching, research and 'third-leg' activity. Alongside these roles, 'perimeter' roles have grown up around, for instance, in the case of professional staff, outreach and study skills, access and equity, community and regional partnership; and in the case of academic staff, pastoral support, curriculum development for non-traditional students, and links with local educational providers. Over time, these 'perimeter' roles have increasingly converged in *third space* around broadly based projects such as student transitions, community partnership and professional development. *Bounded professionals*, voluntarily or involuntarily, tend to be clustered on the left hand side of the diagram, within a well-defined organisational or functional location. If they cross into *third space*, this is likely to be on the basis of clear temporal and spatial parameters. Likewise, mainstream academic staff, who are primarily concerned with teaching and research, would be located predominantly at the right hand side of the diagram.

The narratives of respondents suggest that successful working in *third space* involves a recognition of, and an ability to navigate, the dualities created by the co-existence of professional and academic activity. The building of communicative relationships and networks were seen as of greater significance than the observance of organisational boundaries, so much so that *third space* work was likely to occur in spite of, rather than because of, formal structures. This was likely to include a bringing together of professional, 'quasi'-academic, and academic activities and agendas, with a sense of finding connections between different strands, and weaving them together, so that, for instance:

*"... policies [become] living, breathing, evolving documents that embed ... [widening participation] in all our work"*

There was, therefore, a sense of embedding activity so that issues such as equity or disability were not simply 'bolted on' as

an 'optional extra'. This was less a question of using the committee system, or even of individual managers taking executive action, but of making sure that issues such as student welfare or professional development were integrated into day-to-day thinking via activity networks. In this sense, collaborative working in *third space* might be said to mirror the breakdown of boundaries in academic disciplines<sup>89</sup>. Where this occurs, it becomes difficult to pinpoint, for instance in a discussion about how an academic development relates to institutional strategy, where ideas emerge from, and whether they are attributable to a manager with an academic or a professional background.

A key element in *third space* working was finding the appropriate language, for instance about partnership activity, that 'spoke to' both academic and professional world-views in articulating new forms of activity, so that they resonated with academic colleagues. As one respondent recognised:

*"I do management development with them, what I would call management development. They wouldn't call it that, so what they'd say and what I'd say are two very different things."*

This person was able to sense discomfort when they spoke in their own professional language:

*"... that's our jargon and that's our language... you can see they are fidgeting"*

However, by listening, responding, and translating, this person was able to create a dialogue that would "meet [colleagues] half way, because they [too] have a language of their own, that has been developed culturally". Another respondent described how they were able to 'unpack' an equal opportunities policy, that had been "wrapped in professional speak", by establishing a web-based module simulating visual impairment. This had transformed the response of academic staff in making appropriate provision for visually impaired students within their programmes. This example illustrates how a project could fail, whatever its inherent value, if the communication process did not take account of language and presentation.

*Third space* also gives staff the opportunity to grow into new roles, for instance by relinquishing more process-oriented functions, as suggested by the following respondent working in community partnership:

*"I'm quite happy to ... be in ... [an] area of the university which is growing, that is serving a timely need and agenda. I'm happy to have lost all of that administrative function of [processing] ... students ... [The role] gives me the opportunity to re-package myself for new jobs outside of the sector..."*

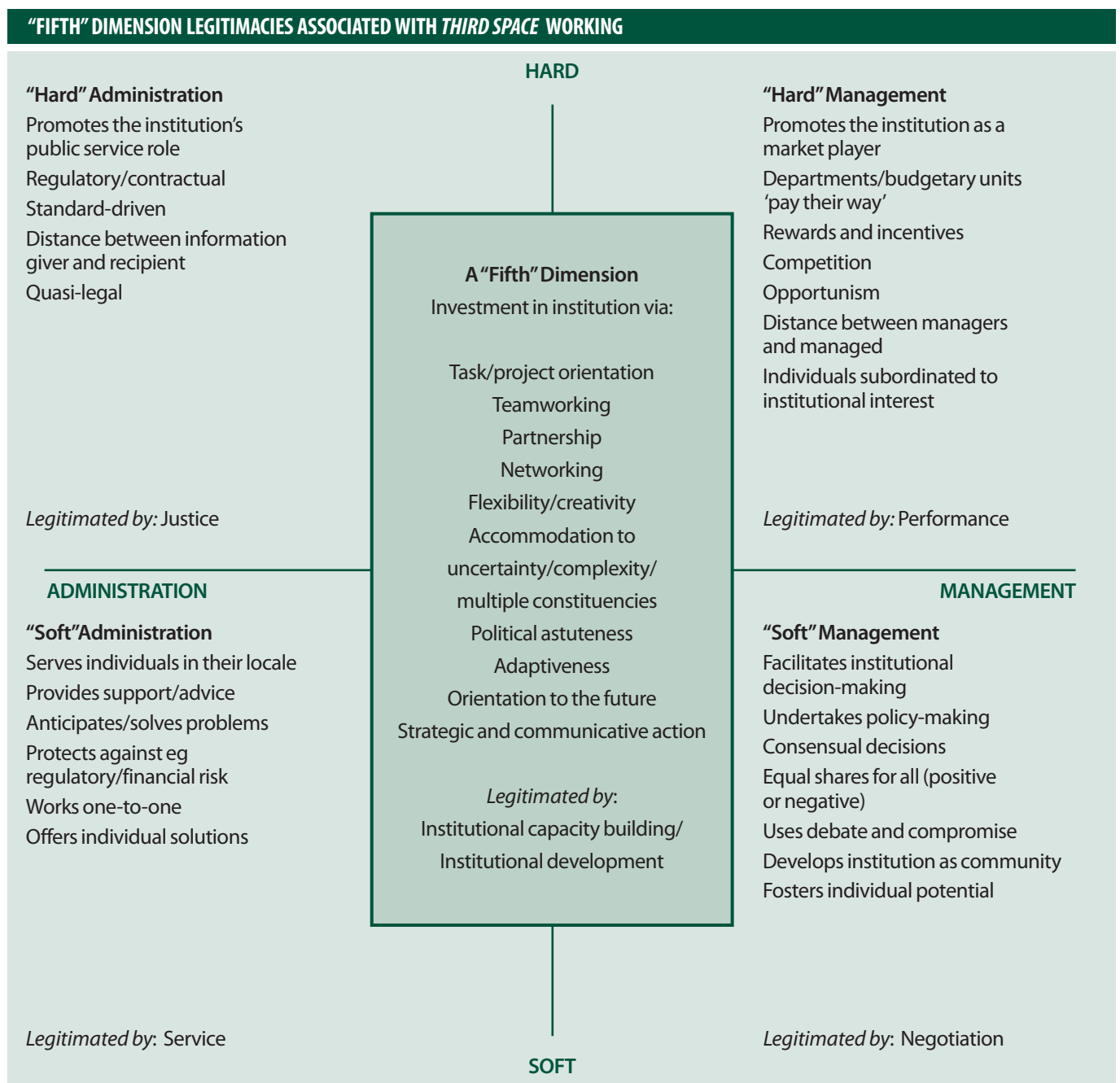
<sup>89</sup> Gibbons et al (1994)

It would appear, therefore, that in Handy's terms, less *bounded* forms of professional are operating in a 'task' culture and even a 'person' culture<sup>90</sup>, and might be seen increasingly to resemble academic colleagues in this respect. In doing this, they "invest" themselves in<sup>91</sup>, as opposed to merely "animating", or acting out, pre-determined roles<sup>92</sup>.

*Third space* working may also be suggestive of future trends, whereby professional identities increasingly coalesce with those of academic colleagues who undertake project- and management-oriented roles, to create a generic form of

'higher education manager'. It may also be that the concept of the generalist manager in higher education is being supplemented, if not replaced, by that of the project manager, who is concerned to maintain an up-to-the-minute portfolio of experience rather than a fixed body of knowledge, reflecting Bauman's suggestion that "You are only as good as your last successful project"<sup>93</sup>. Thus, individuals may increasingly see themselves as building *third space* identities, rather than as being associated with a specific function or organisational location.

**FIGURE 8**



<sup>90</sup> Handy (1993)

<sup>91</sup> Archer (2000: 11)

<sup>92</sup> Archer (2000: 288)

<sup>93</sup> Bauman (2005: 44)

There are also implications for the nature of teams, which may coalesce, split and re-form in relation to specific projects. Such teams may be large and diverse, with temporary and permanent memberships, and some members attending only for specific items and meetings. Membership may, therefore, be transitory. While this can provide a spread of experience, it may also create a lack of focus and communication. Institutions, therefore, may wish to review the relationship between the composition of teams, and ways in which outcomes are achieved, as suggested in the literature on organisational groups<sup>94</sup>. There are also issues about when and how *third space* activity might be mainstreamed, in order to make way for new projects that come along.

Furthermore, the study suggests that in *third space*, the legitimacies associated with 'administration' and 'management' are, through less *bounded* and more project-oriented ways of working, being extended into a 'fifth dimension', as described in Figure 8<sup>95</sup>. There is evidence, therefore, that staff are constructing new forms of authority, rather than drawing these solely from specific functional or organisational positionings. These changing legitimacies may be illustrated by considering the relationship between administration, management and academic activity as "fields of practice", that is:

*"a configuration of relations between positions objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon the occupants, agents or institutions"*<sup>96</sup>

Each "field" has its own rules or principles that structure the behaviour of individuals, so that they acquire a disposition or "habitus" associated with that field. Behaviour arising from this disposition is a result of both the agency adopted by the individual, and the positions that are available to them within the field. The value of activity within a field (or its "capital") depends on the degree of recognition accorded to it by dominant actors<sup>97</sup>.

The traditional primacy of the academic field in institutions of higher education means that, in Bourdieu's terminology, the field of professional staff has been "embedded" within this, as administration, rather than being accorded its own status, either as management, or as more project-oriented or developmental activity. Thus, in traditional service relationships, administrators accept the dominance of the

academic field. In Bourdieu's terms, therefore, actors in the field are obliged to accept the discourse of administration that is created via the academic field as given or "natural", and this becomes their "habitus". Thus, staff who use 'administration' as a disguise for 'management' do this in order to maintain legitimacy whilst establishing a new field of practice, as in the development of *third space* work. They therefore use 'administration' as a "euphemism", whereby they "earn credit, show loyalty, [and] maintain confidence"<sup>99</sup>. This accounts for the dissonance noted in the earlier literature review<sup>100</sup> in relation to understandings of administration and management. Thus, professional staff are, through less *bounded* identities, developing their professional practice as an independent rather than as an "embedded" field, even if administration remains, for the time being, the "ruling principle ... accepted as one thing, while the operations of the field are another"<sup>101</sup>.

As new fields of practice emerge, with differing degrees of dependence on the established academic field, less *bounded* forms of professional are obliged to deal with "inconsistent status"<sup>102</sup> while they are constructing new forms of legitimacy. This can involve an ongoing process of negotiation. As one *blended professional* commented, "There's no kind of authority that you come with"; and another, that professional credibility depended on "what you are and not what you represent". A further respondent described their relationship with their academic colleagues as being characterised by an unspoken agreement that "If you solve a problem for us, we'll come back and work with you again".

The narratives suggest that gaining acceptance of these new legitimacies is one of the key challenges arising for contemporary professional staff. As a result, they manage their own positioning by editing their identities, for instance by identifying themselves as administrators rather than managers, if this helps to maximise the opportunity for their projects to be accomplished. Re-legitimation of changing professional identities, therefore, may require a "resocialisation" of interest groups<sup>103</sup>, and involve a time delay before these are validated. Awareness and management of positive and negative perceptions of changing roles and identities on the part of professional staff themselves is also likely to be a significant factor in the effective use of *third space*.

94 Miller et al (1998); Smith et al (1994); Amason and Sapienza (1997); Sveningsson and Alvesson (2003)

95 Whitchurch (2008)

96 Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992: 72-73)

97 Grenfell and James (1998)

98 Whitchurch (2008)

99 Hanks (2005: 78)

100 Whitchurch (2006a)

101 Grenfell and James (1998: 23)

102 Lenski (1954)

103 Bernstein (1970: 65)

Achieving credibility in *third space*, therefore, appears to depend increasingly on an individual being able to build their profile in the local situation. Respondents suggested that this process could be facilitated by a number of factors, including:

- The accessibility of and support provided by their head of administration, or other key individual such as a pro-vice-chancellor.
- Obtaining academic credentials such as a master's or doctoral degree: "I need to keep going academically in order to be taken seriously at higher levels."
- Finding 'safe space' in which to experiment with new forms of activity and relationships.
- Being comfortable with organisational complexity and "messiness"<sup>104</sup>.
- Being able to use ambiguity to advantage, for instance capitalising on the lack of a clear association with academic or professional domains to build common ground with different constituencies.

Nevertheless, individuals who seemed to flourish in *third space* could also be challenged by hierarchical line management arrangements, both in relation to their own line managers, who they felt did not always understand them, and in relation to the management of their own staff, whom they expected to be able to operate as autonomously as they did themselves. Some respondents said that they felt disempowered because they did not have control of a budget. Lateral relationships and *third space* working, therefore, also raise issues for institutions and for individuals in relation to, for instance:

- The leadership and management of both small- and large-scale projects, where expertise may not only be deeply embedded in a team, but even reside with, or be distributed between, more junior members.
- Communication between mid-level teams and top-level institutional management and leadership, when a team has no formal status in terms of, for instance, representation on committees or senior management groups.
- Diffuse sources of leverage across teams and networks, involving multiple layers of institutional activity and knowledge, as in the 'hypertext' organisation<sup>105</sup>.
- The development of, to quote one respondent, "mature" relationships "to sound off" ideas, which supplement formal reporting lines, particularly for staff who have moved into the institution from a contiguous sector.
- A sense that management and leadership reside more comfortably in *third space* when they are implicit and embedded, and also softly articulated.
- Assessing the effectiveness of activities involving, for instance, creativity, networking and partnership, and managing performance, including rewards and sanctions.
- Preparing the next generation of leaders from mid-career professionals who may move in and out of *third space*.
- Sub-optimal positionings in formal organisation charts, for instance people with project portfolios located in registry environments, possibly with an inappropriate reporting line (for instance, there was an example of an equity manager reporting to an examinations officer).

## 5. CAREERS AND CAREER ROUTES

Less bounded ways of working, and the emergence of *third space* activity, are likely to have an impact on careers and career routes. While for some, possibly increasing numbers of staff, higher education may comprise a segment of their career that also incorporates other sectors, others will see themselves as making a longer-term commitment. For the latter group, prospects are less clearly defined than they were for those who entered the pre-1992 sector twenty or thirty years ago and followed a traditional career route, comprising generic roles of increasing seniority, as outlined in Figure 9. In a smaller, more homogeneous, system, individual roles would be expected to be of a comparable nature in different institutions, with relatively common expectations on the part of both individuals and institutions. In the UK study, twenty-two of the twenty-nine respondents had had what might be seen as ‘traditional’ career routes, with significant experience in one or more institutions.

Reasons given for entering higher education administration were often serendipitous, and included:

- Part-time or vacation work at their institution while a student.
- Contact with someone who worked in a university.
- A wish to be in a particular locality where the university was a major employer.

- A desire to stay in academic environment after undertaking a programme of study.
- A belief in the transferability of an individual’s skills and experience from another sector, and that working in higher education would extend this experience.
- (More senior roles) head-hunted by vice-chancellor or senior manager.

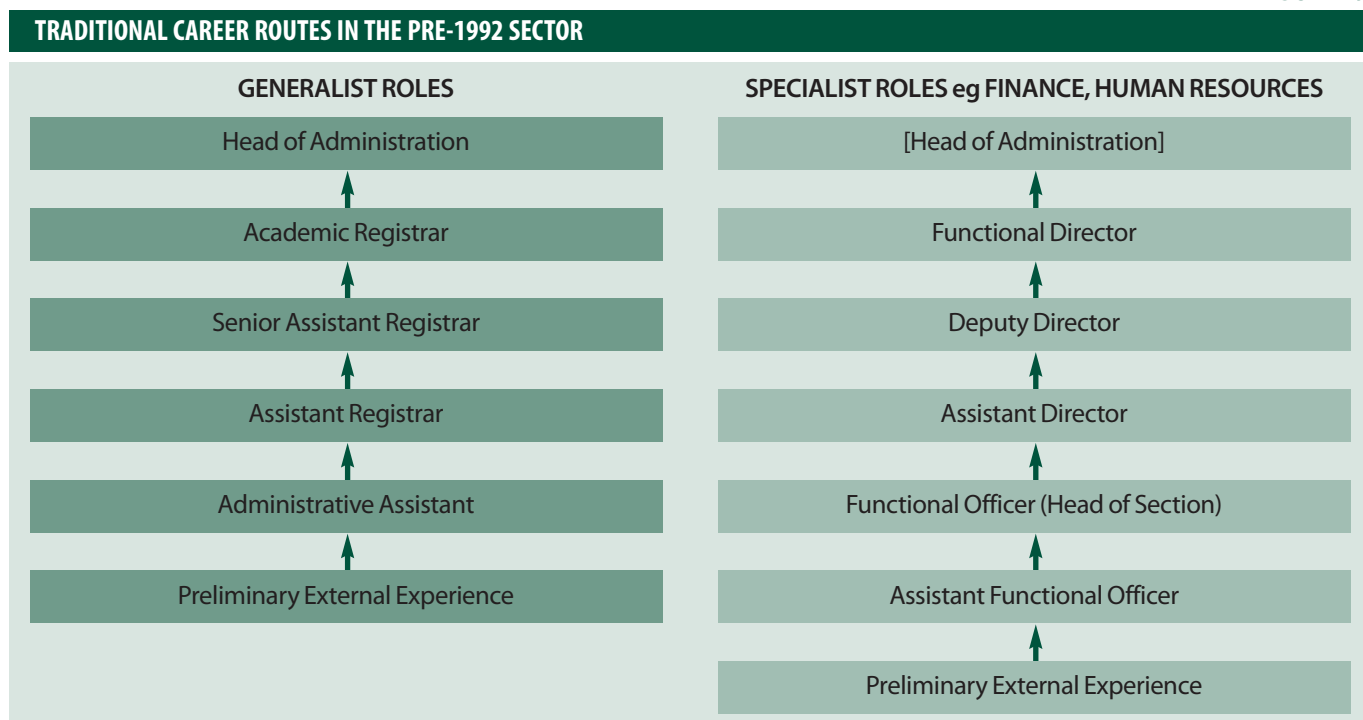
Traditional, ‘universal’ career routes, as outlined in Figure 9, have tended to be implicit, rather than explicit, despite attempts by, for instance, the Association of University Administrators to give more detailed guidance about possibilities<sup>106</sup>. When respondents in the study were asked about their careers, it was apparent that a significant number experienced a lack of career horizons or knowledge of possibilities:

- “... there’s not a[n] ... obvious career path ... there’s side channels. It’s a strange career really. I’ve always thought ‘What do you do?’”
- “Academic administration is not taken seriously enough as a career ... we are always second best to academics.”

Others felt thrown back on their own resources in planning and developing their careers:

- “Rather than growing into something naturally you’ve got to think about what you’ve got to offer in a much more strategic way.”

FIGURE 9



- “[Other members of the project team] didn’t really grasp the nettle and move on, and ... you’ve got to put your head above the parapet don’t you, and go for it.”

Thus there was evidence of a need for more careers advice, particularly in the early stages of a career, to assist individuals in seeking opportunities and making career choices.

Those in *blended* roles were unlikely to have had a conventional career path through higher education, and to have been appointed on the basis of significant external experience. Three respondents had had initial experience in contiguous sectors such as the NHS, charities or local/regional government, five had had teaching and/or management experience in the college sector, and three had experience of industry or the commercial sector. The developments in professional identities that have emerged from the study, therefore, suggest a broader spread of career possibilities and career pathways, that are more likely than hitherto to be unique to an individual. In this situation, career routes are likely to be less linear, and to be more difficult to plan, both for individuals and for their institutional managers or mentors.

Thus, one respondent, characterised as *blended*, saw moving laterally as being as important for career progression as moving up a hierarchical career ladder:

“I’ve always tried to take the next step in another area, so that it moves you forward.”

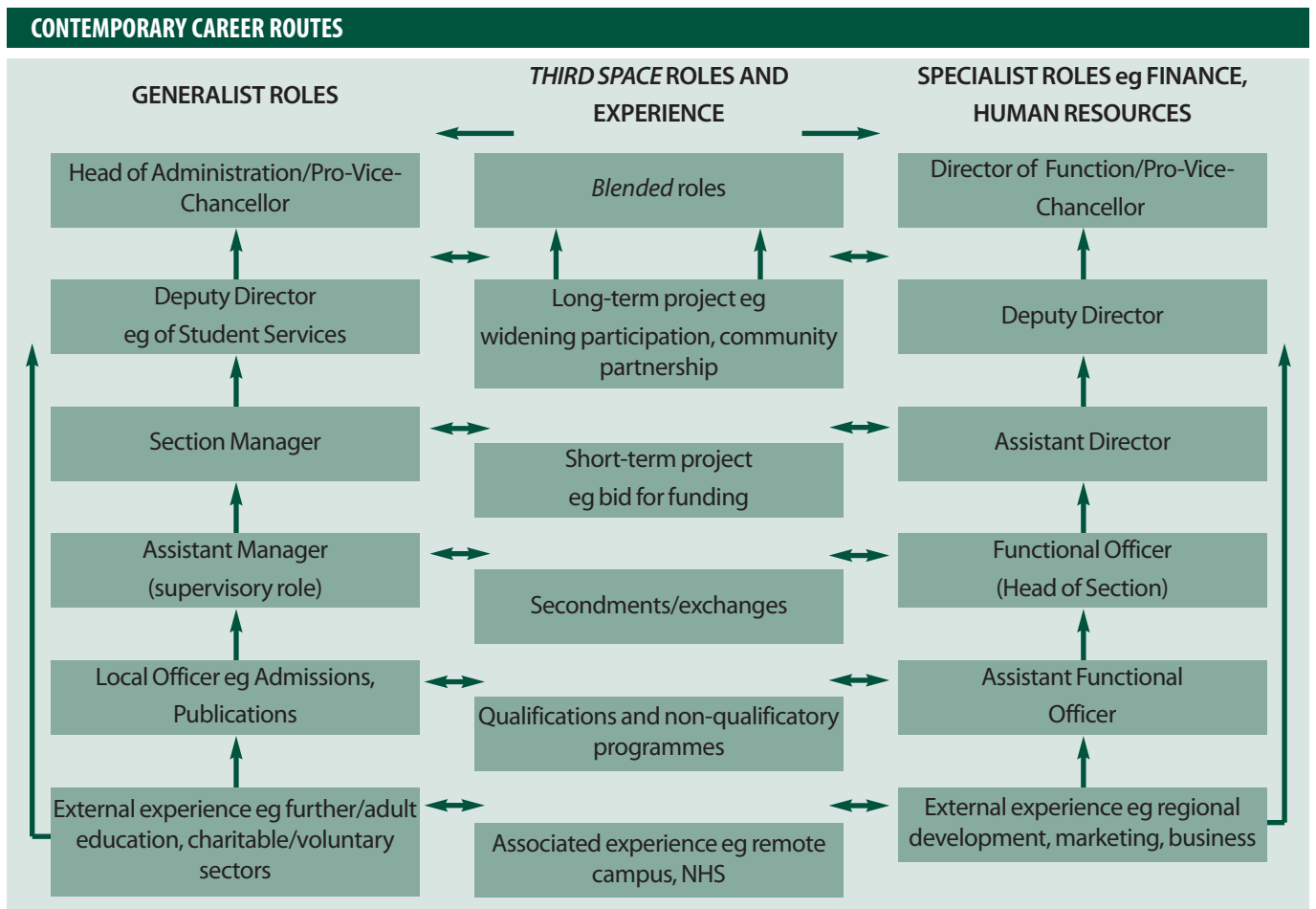
This more fluid situation is shown in Figure 10, which illustrates how, alongside formal career paths, people are increasingly extending their experience via, for instance:

- Short-and-long-term project work.
- Institutional outreach and partnership.
- Secondments and exchanges.
- Qualifications and professional development.

Such opportunities may involve lateral crossovers, and/or activity that is parallel and supplementary to a formal role, and can be used to reinforce an individual’s profile in preparation for the next formal, career move.

Of the four categories of professional, *cross-boundary professionals* appeared to be more explicit than the other groups about consciously planning a career in higher

**FIGURE 10**



education. They might be seen, therefore, as supplying a cadre of system professionals who move between institutions, whereas *bounded professionals* were more inclined to find a role that they enjoyed, and either stay in it or seek progression in the same institution. Although *unbounded professionals* were aware of career possibilities that might be open to them in higher education, and were likely to seize opportunities that came along, their approach appeared to be less pre-meditated. They were, at the same time, open to possibilities that might arise outside the higher education sector, and appeared to have less allegiance to it *per se* than *cross-*

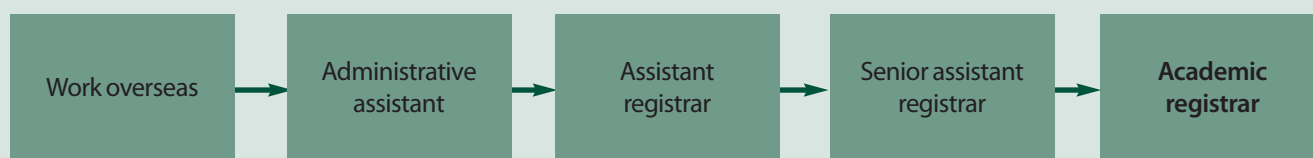
*boundary professionals*. For *blended professionals*, developing and embedding their broadly based areas of activity into an established field appeared to be a priority, and while all had ambitions to achieve a pro-vice-chancellor or senior management post, they appeared to keep their options open as to whether this might be in higher education or in a contiguous sector or whether, for instance, their work might provide the basis for future consultancy activity.

Examples of career routes taken by people categorised as *bounded professionals* are given in Box 6:

## BOX 6

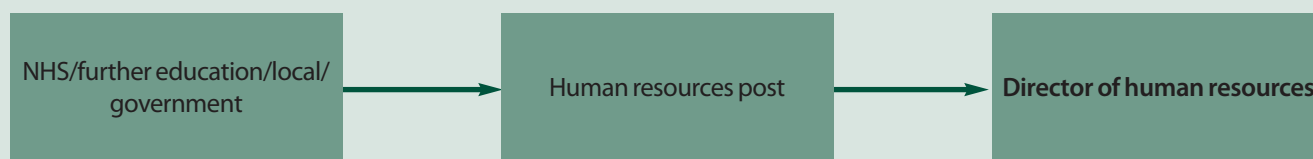
### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF BOUNDED PROFESSIONALS

#### Academic administrator, master's degree



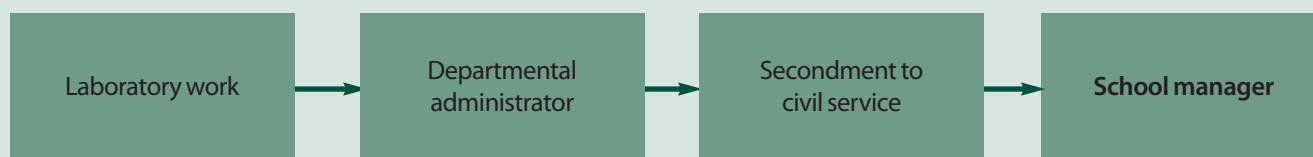
(Three pre-1992 institutions)

#### Human resource specialist, professional qualifications



(Two pre-1992 institutions)

#### General manager, bachelor's degree



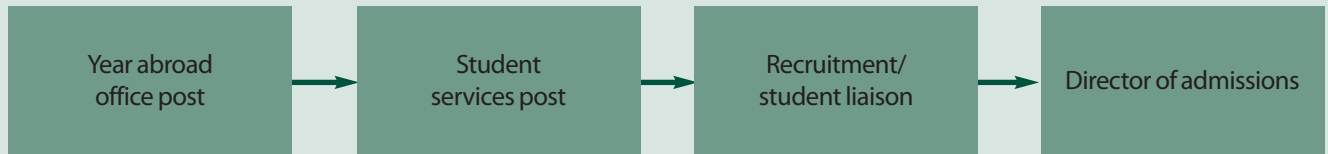
(One pre-1992 institution)

Examples of career routes of people categorised as *cross-boundary professionals* are given in Box 7:

## BOX 7

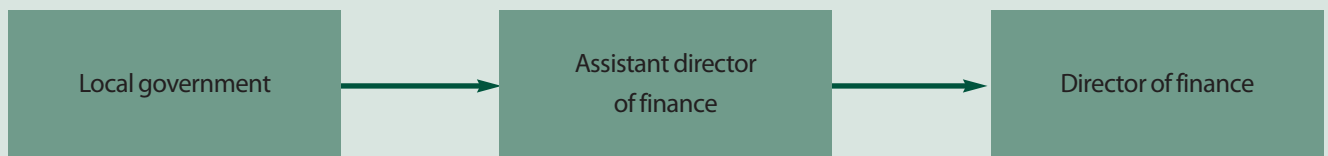
### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF *CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS*

#### General manager, bachelor's degree



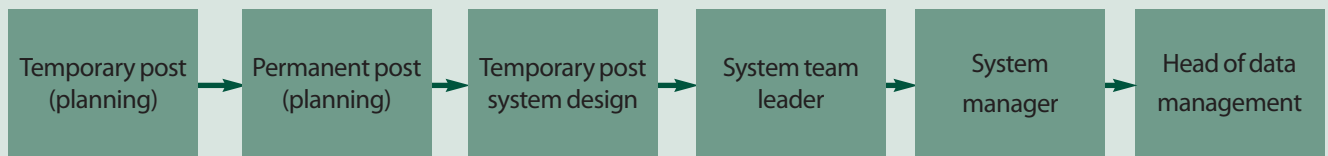
(Four pre-1992 institutions)

#### Finance specialist, bachelor's degree, professional qualifications



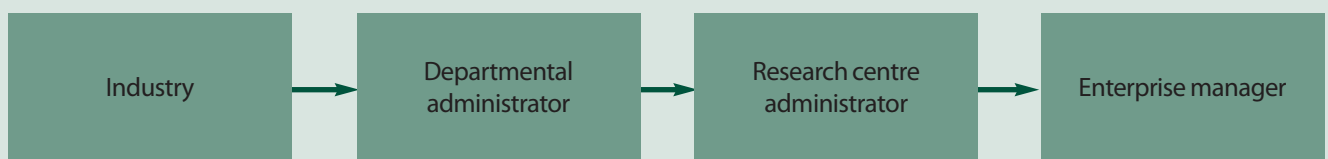
(Two pre-1992 institutions)

#### Data specialist, master's degree



(One post-1992 institution)

#### General manager, master's degree



(Three pre-1992 institutions)

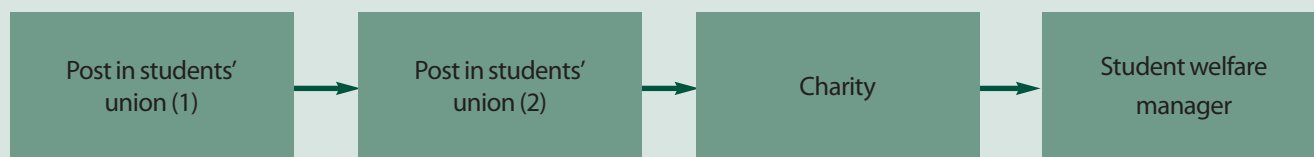


Examples of career routes of people categorised as *unbounded professionals* are given in Box 8:

## BOX 8

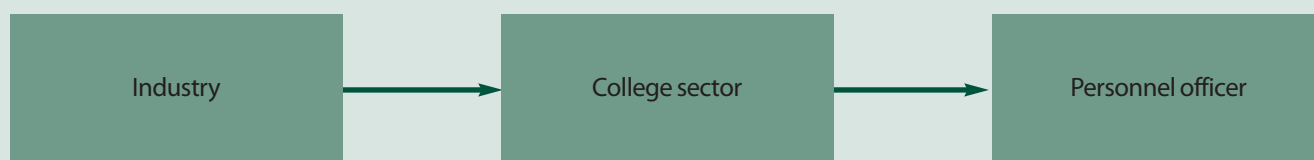
### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF *UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS*

#### General manager, bachelor's degree, postgraduate diploma



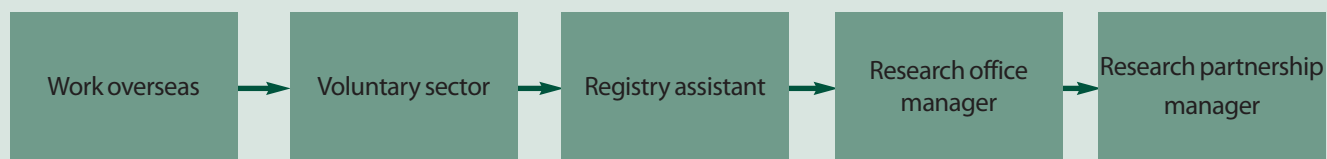
(One pre-1992 and one post-1992 institution)

#### Human resource specialist, bachelor's degree, professional qualifications



(One pre-1992 institution)

#### General manager, master's degree



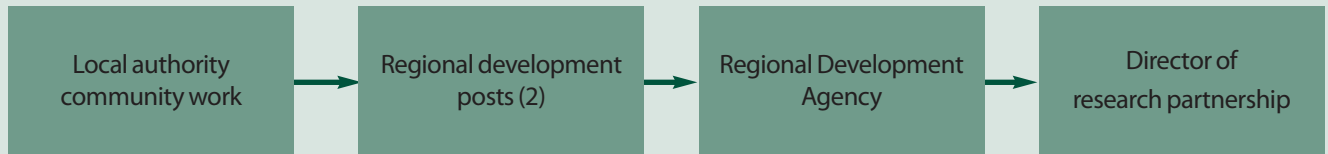
(One post-1992 institution)

Examples of career routes of people categorised as *blended professionals* are given in Box 9:

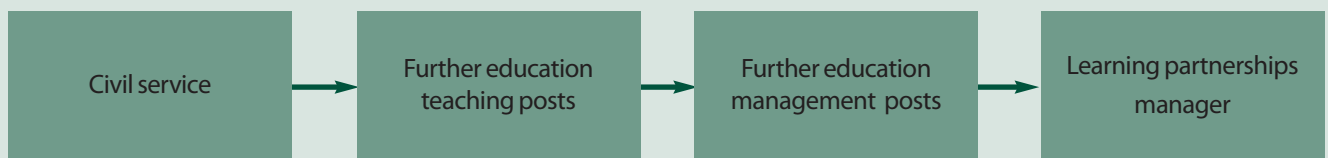
## BOX 9

### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF *BLENDED PROFESSIONALS*

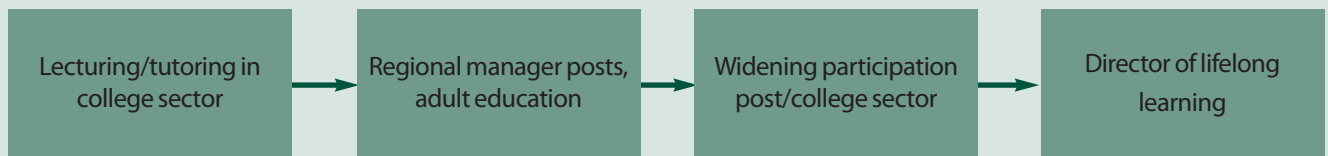
#### Regional economist, master's degree



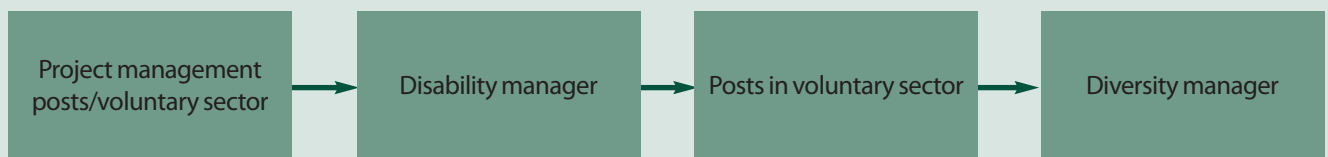
#### College lecturer/manager, doctorate



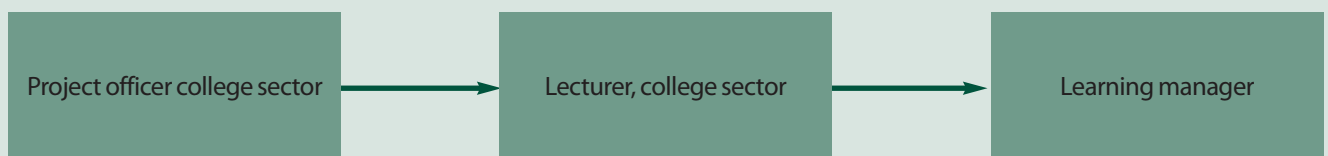
#### College lecturer/manager, master's degree



#### Project manager, bachelor's degree/vocational qualifications



#### College lecturer/manager, doctorate



**Note:** all these respondents had worked in one institution after experience in other sectors, two in pre-1992 institutions, and three in post-1992 institutions.

*Blended professionals*, particularly, seemed to experience dilemmas about possible career directions. Several people spoke of whether they might develop the strategic/policy or service side of their activities, and the difficulty of doing both concurrently. There was a sense of wanting to achieve greater breadth of experience as well as moving up a career ladder:

- *"I want to develop a regional or national profile ... to be recognised as having some success in developing the university's profile ... [and] to be involved in some of the networks at a more decision making level, rather than at the operational level..."*
- *"I'm very ambitious... I'm a jack of all trades, I've got knowledge of legislation, budget management, fundraising, staff management, strategic planning ... I want to grow these skills some more... It may well be that I might end up at another university or in the voluntary sector trying to move towards higher management."*

Nevertheless, there could be risks attached to getting out of the mainstream in order to develop a broader portfolio.

Thus, it would appear from the study that contemporary staff are less likely than their predecessors to regard themselves as members of a homogeneous professional cadre. The value of a peer group is likely to be seen more in terms of opportunities for networking, raising one's profile, and providing development opportunities. In contemporary institutions, therefore, the term 'professional' may increasingly imply experience that is validated by a portfolio of successfully completed projects, as well as qualification(s), that give external credibility. It may also imply the possession of a network of "weak ties", which "are critical to ... creative environment[s] because they allow for rapid entry of new people and rapid absorption of new ideas"<sup>107</sup>.

It was significant that a number of less *bounded* forms of professional spoke not only of writing their own job description, but also of the use of annual review to set an annual agenda, which effectively became a rolling job description. This suggests that fixed and detailed job descriptions are not only unrealistic, but may be unduly constraining, and that roles increasingly reflect the receptiveness of the individual to changing institutional contexts and environments. This corresponds with a view of professionalism as being acquired by the construction of an activity portfolio, rather than by membership of a grouping of professionals with a similar profile, and is illustrated by a

comment by one manager that staff want titles that will reinforce their association with a task area, rather than with a generic cadre:

*"Very few people want to be known as administrative assistant, so if you give them the title of ... student recruitment assistant, or publications assistant, they often feel a lot happier and a lot more confident about talking about their professional competence."*

Thus, professional legitimacy would appear increasingly to derive from a link with functional or project areas, about which individuals feel that they can speak with authority. Furthermore, there was evidence that less *bounded* forms of professional look outside conventional roles and career routes:

*"I saw quite an interesting job recently and thought 'that looks interesting', simply because it doesn't fit any model."*

Less generic roles and career paths are likely to make it more difficult for individuals to plan in advance, and achieve steady progression in their careers, for instance staying five years in a post then moving on. It may be that people will make more rapid lateral moves to gain experience that they could not achieve by waiting for a sequential progression. The issue of mobility was mentioned by a number of respondents, particularly by those who saw themselves as higher education career professionals, as being an advantageous in building a career:

*"It is difficult to progress in one institution – those who are able to move have an advantage."*

On the one hand, greater mobility can engender a view of professional staff as a:

*"...national (and international) cadre of mobile and unattached ... managers without loyalty but with their own (not an institutional) portfolio—the new portfolio successional career managers..."<sup>108</sup>.*

On the other hand, the study suggests that it may be helpful for institutions to modify any belief that such mobility represents 'disloyalty', in that such individuals may make a more significant contribution to an institution in the period that they are there than longer serving staff who have "low external allegiance ... [and] high commitment to the employing institution"<sup>109</sup>. There may need to be, therefore, a revision of the value accorded to professional staff who bring expertise from elsewhere, but move on to gain further experience when they have completed a specific project. There were suggestions by more than one respondent that there was merit in coming into an institution to set up a project

<sup>107</sup> Florida (2002: 276-277)

<sup>108</sup> Duke (2002: 146)

<sup>109</sup> Lockwood (1996: 45), quoted in Kogan (2007: 168)

with no preconceptions, whereby their opinion would be listened to, whereas after a period of time they would no longer be seen as an “impartial observer”.

The introduction of a common National Framework Agreement for staff in UK higher education in 2006, permitting institutions to design and customise their employment structures around a single pay spine, could give greater latitude for rewarding individuals who extend their roles outwith the precise parameters of a job description<sup>110</sup>. However, the emphasis of the Framework on a job evaluation process may, at the same time, restrict the ability of individuals to interpret and develop their roles. Institutions will be obliged to address such issues if they wish to encourage more extended ways of working.

During the interviews with the three heads of administration in the case institutions concerns were voiced about:

- Attracting and retaining talented staff.
- How to release the potential of all levels of professional staff.
- The advantages and disadvantages of specific organisational structures.
- How to enable professional staff to:
  - Develop confidence in, for instance, making executive decisions.
  - Contextualise their work in the wider environment.
  - Understand and manage risk.
  - Take a view about institutional futures.

What appeared to be less recognised, or at least articulated, by heads of administration either in these interviews or in the initial set of interviews described on page 7, which also included heads of institution, were the implications of, for instance:

- An increased project orientation in relation to the type of broadly based projects outlined in the study.
- Changing relationships between professional and academic staff as a result of team working arising out of such projects.
- Increasing numbers of staff with master’s and doctoral qualifications, as well as professional qualifications such as counselling.
- Increasing traffic between adult, further and higher education in the college sector and universities, or between pre- and post-1992 sectors, to create a more diverse pool of talent.
- The potential contribution of professional staff having mixed or *blended* backgrounds and roles to institutional outcomes.
- The career possibilities and futures available to this group.

Senior institutional managers may wish, therefore, in reviewing recruitment policies and the construction of job descriptions, not only to review the balance of professional staff that might be appropriate for their particular mission and direction, but also to consider:

- How those characterised as *bounded professionals*, for whatever reason, might obtain experience of less prescribed ways of working.
- How less *bounded* forms of professional might obtain appropriate mainstream experience for their career development.
- How the four categories of staff might, in their own ways, most effectively support institutional objectives.
- How the four categories of staff might be encouraged to interact with each other most productively.

## 6: AN INTERNATIONAL DIMENSION

The international component of the study was intended to explore whether there were indicators from overseas about professional staff futures, particularly in relation to the roles and trajectories of less *bounded* forms of professional. In the interviews outside the UK, therefore, respondents were sought who had mixed backgrounds and/or roles, and as shown in Figure 11, they were skewed towards the less *bounded* categories. There may be some significance in the fact that of the fifteen respondents in the US, nine (60%) were categorised as *blended*, whereas only three of the ten respondents in Australia (30%) fell into this category. Nevertheless, there was a slightly broader spread of categories in the US (where two respondents were categorised as *bounded*), although the small, focused sample means that conclusions cannot necessarily be drawn from this. In both cases, *blended professionals* were clustered in research-intensive institutions that were high in the international rankings, although again, because of the small sample, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions.

The most striking difference between respondent profiles in Australia and the US and those in the UK was that a much higher proportion had higher degrees. In the US, where professional staff would be expected to have completed a dedicated master's programme in, for instance, higher education administration or student affairs, 93% of respondents had master's degrees and 60% had doctorates. In Australia, where there was generous support for advanced study, and in-state students were able to gain exemption from tuition fees, 80% had master's degrees and 60% of respondents had doctorates. The comparable percentages for the UK were 27% and 8%. In the US particularly, this picture reflects an established knowledge base for professional staff, which might be seen as an academic, or applied professional, discipline in its own right. Individuals were more likely than in the UK to be involved with academic associations such as the

Association for Institutional Research (AIR) and the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), to contribute actively to professional networks and conferences, and to publish research undertaken as part of their work.

Moreover, the terms 'administration' and 'management' are understood differently in Australia and the US from the way they are understood in the UK. In Australia, professional staff refer to themselves more openly as 'managers', rather than modulating this via the use of 'administration'. This is reflected in their national Association of Tertiary Education *Managers*, and may account for a stronger polarisation of 'management' and 'academic' identities, and in some cases, 'us' and 'them' attitudes<sup>111</sup>. By contrast, in the United States, the most senior institutional managers, including presidents, are referred to as 'academic administrators'. Thus, the term 'administration' is associated with institutional policy and governance, and as something that is undertaken at a higher level than 'management', whereas in the UK 'administration' has tended to become devalued in that it is often used to refer to procedural, and even clerical, tasks. Furthermore, professional staff in the US appear to have a greater equivalence vis-à-vis their academic counterparts. As one UK *blended professional*, with experience of collaborations in the US and elsewhere, put it,

*"... administration [in the US] is not second class, and people move much more freely between [professional and academic activity]; they move this way and they move that way..."*

### AUSTRALIA

As in the UK, there is in Australia evidence of an 'academic civil service' tradition, illustrated in statements such as: "we try to ... take the burden [of administrative processes] away [from academic colleagues]" and in the following description of giving disinterested advice to academic managers:

*"I would put a reasonably concise case together... It's my job to advise [senior managers] if you like, given my experience and*

**FIGURE 11**

**DISTRIBUTION OF CATEGORIES OF RESPONDENTS FROM OVERSEAS INTERVIEWS**

CATEGORY OF PROFESSIONAL	AUSTRALIA	UNITED STATES	TOTALS
<i>Bounded</i>	0	2	2
<i>Cross-boundary</i>	4	2	6
<i>Unbounded</i>	3	2	5
<i>Blended</i>	3	9	12
<b>Totals</b>	10	15	25

<sup>111</sup> Dobson (2000); Dobson and Conway (2001)

*understanding of the area, and what I think the best judgement is, but at the end of the day it's up to them, and that's fine."*

Within this frame, as in the UK, the concept of 'service' had expanded to incorporate a customer service philosophy towards the student body.

Although the ten respondents in Australia were evenly divided between the three categories of *cross-boundary*, *unbounded* and *blended professionals* (see Figure 11), there was evidence that some of the *cross-boundary* and *unbounded* categories had the potential to become *blended*,

but felt restricted by their functional or organisational location. It may also be significant that in Australia professional staff are generally employed on fixed-term contracts, usually for a term of five years in the case of middle or senior managers. Although these contracts are renewable, this may have given individuals a stronger impetus to focus on developing their portfolios and career profiles.

### Career routes

Box 10 gives examples of the career routes taken by respondents in Australia:

## BOX 10

### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN AUSTRALIA

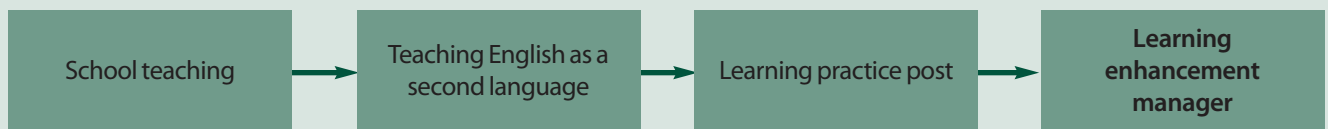
#### CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS

##### School manager, doctorate



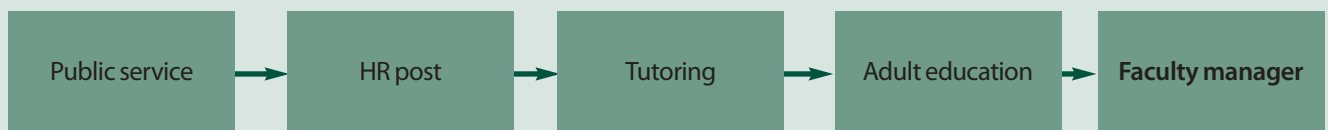
(Three institutions)

##### Learning support manager, doctorate



(One institution)

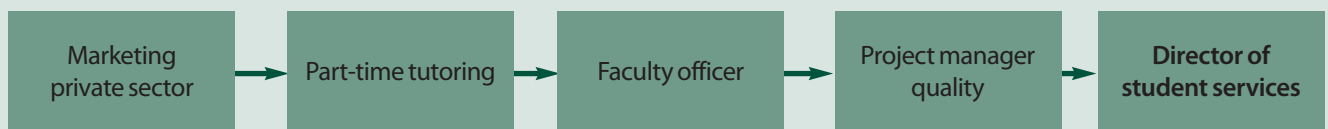
##### Faculty manager, doctorate



(Four institutions)

#### UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS

##### Student services manager, MBA



(One institution)

##### Project manager, vocational qualifications

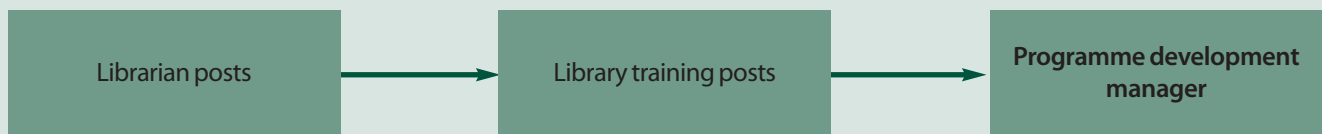


(One institution)

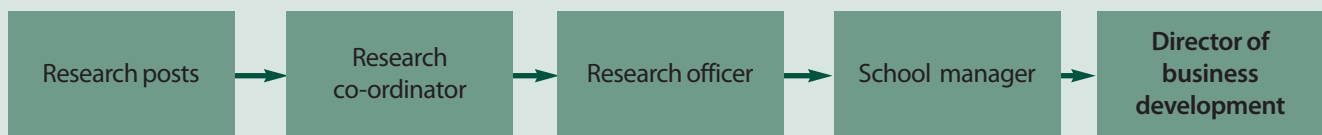
## EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN AUSTRALIA

**BLENDED PROFESSIONALS****Learning services manager, doctorate**

(One institution)

**Professional practice specialist, master's degree**

(Four institutions)

**Research manager, doctorate**

(Four institutions)

On the one hand, professional staff were 'squeezed' by a strict boundary with academic staff, and there were similar issues as in the UK about being able to overcome what one respondent referred to as "this silo mentality", so as to broaden experience. There was also recognition that "you often need to move a little bit sideways in order to move up" and, as in the US, individuals reported being able to gain valuable experience in smaller institutions where they were more likely to have a wider span of responsibility. On the other hand, escaping from boundary tensions, for instance through a series of project-oriented roles, also appeared to be a realisable option, in that the contractual situation in Australia appeared to give greater scope for individuals to work outwith formal organisational structures. One such person described a series of project management roles, including internal secondments, academic tutoring and programme development:

*"... the interesting thing is that most areas try to retain you when they know that you can actually do the job within the parameters... I've discovered that I'm better in a project type role rather than a maintenance role... and I can make things happen, and so I'm better for the university in that area as well... I've never been on a career path as such, and I don't consider myself on a career path."*

This may be a pattern of working that will become more widespread, although it was not easy for institutions to accommodate such arrangements: "HR systems aren't structured for me ... I've usually got three or four contracts going... starting and ending different dates, working for different areas..." Nevertheless, it may be a natural progression for people who wish to, and are able to, to build a varied portfolio:

*"... I'm a good networker, so I know people in lots of areas across the university, which is good because it means I can get work, but it also means that the word spreads that I do the job well... and there's always contract work going now.... connecting with people and communicating and facilitating and negotiating are probably my skills..."*

Furthermore, this person did not have to get involved in "the politic[s] that goes on... I'm actually committed to the project and to getting the work done for the university, and that's where my heart is... I don't have tensions." They therefore had a sense of belonging to two projects and also to an academic department: "I feel I have three homes right now and feel equally at ease in all of them." Their ideal was "to have a position that allowed you to have modules in your job

description that you could fill with activity..." It may be, therefore, that there are a growing number of project- and portfolio-oriented staff that operate more comfortably and effectively outside hierarchical organisational arrangements, and also outwith traditional career tracks and expectations. Furthermore, a number of respondents showed a desire to work in other sectors or environments:

*"I do want to work in another cultural environment... if I aspire to do anything it would be to do that, and probably to do some further study, so more about that than about a job or career."*

### A series of "disconnects"...

From the Australian narratives there appeared to be a strong demarcation between professional and academic domains. One respondent suggested that this was the result of an increasing specialisation of roles, and use of information technology for process-oriented tasks: "the activities where we used to interact a lot with each other like admissions, enrolment, and academic progression ... [academic staff] have been taken out of that." There also appeared to be perceptual issues. One respondent described how professional staff were "indoctrinated that there are boundaries, and that they ... step over boundaries at [their] peril." Such boundaries could be reinforced by the emergence of separate discourses within the same institution between professional staff, as representatives of 'the university', and academic staff, with "difficult interactions":

*"... I was almost a cultural 'other', because I worked in a section of the university that made policy that they didn't always agree with."*

On the other hand, it was acknowledged that:

*"... if we talk always about academics as 'others', and as naughty 'others', [who are] recalcitrant, difficult, then they will become so, or remain so."*

What appeared to be at times an uneasy interface could, therefore, give rise to what one person described as a "disconnect" between professional and academic staff.

Awareness of this "disconnect" meant that, as in the UK, professional staff working at the interface with academic colleagues invested a substantial proportion of their time in facilitating dialogue. However, perhaps because of the strong boundary between professional and academic domains, there remained a sense of positionality, and of moving back and forth between the two domains, rather than of creating new space between them:

- *"Nobody has the whole picture ... I'd like to think I have equal bits of both pictures [from the management and academic perspective]."*
- *"There are always two sides to every coin."*
- *"... we need to be advocates for the academic staff perspective ... but it's also about giving the management perspective to academic staff."*
- *"There is that sense of a divided whole... that we're trying to fit together but it doesn't always fit."*
- *"... it's about bridging that ... cultural divide."*

Thus, one person described their role as "... mediation... Sometimes I feel I haven't given a strong enough representation of the other person's perspective or the other group's perspective. And both groups need to respect you." Another spoke of the relationship with academic staff as a "delicate balance", in which "I can't afford to get either group offside." Professional and academic staff, therefore, tended to be perceived as operating separately, with negotiation occurring between them, rather than coalescing. This perceived divide would appear to have backened the development of *third space*, and respondents tended to talk about working round organisational structures rather than creating new space.

### But *third space* potentials...

Nevertheless, there were glimpses of *third space* language:

- *"... you find good people and network with them."*
- *"... we all need to work in multi-modal fashion, where there are partnerships on all sorts of levels."*
- *"[It's about] ... acquiring an academic headset."*

One manager with a research background described how they were able, through long-standing networks, to construct a "one-stop shop for the external environment to interact" with the university, and generate business and technology initiatives, often with an education component. They spoke in terms of "clusters" and "nodes" of activity interacting, with a view to spawning new developments. These examples suggest the existence of pre-conditions for *third space* working, particularly as those with potential for *blended* identities move into more senior positions where they can influence recruitment strategies. One such manager described how they actively sought people who could cross boundaries, who were able not only to give support and service, but also "had a role to play in the research agenda... to shape what's happening as an equal partner." As a generation



of senior managers emerge who recognise the *blended* potentials of more junior colleagues, therefore, it is likely that the boundary between professional and academic domains may begin to dissipate:

*“... there are increasingly role models for people showing that you can actually have a voice...”*

However, there was less evidence than in the UK of people having ambitions to move, for instance, to pro-vice-chancellor roles, and the removal of head of administration positions was felt by some respondents to have reduced the scope for professional staff to develop their careers to the highest level.

There was also some evidence of *blended* roles emerging. For instance, a co-ordinator of programmes in professional practice was creating a “participant network” in a “learning community”, underpinning this work with in-house research. They were perceived by academic staff as “somebody who is partly looking out for them, partly controlling them, keeping them on track [for instance with submission of assignments] ... but also someone with expertise.” Furthermore, this person saw developing an appropriate language as an important element of, for instance, advertising course programmes to the academic community: “we’re very careful about the language we use, and the setting up of expectations... how we present ourselves.” Offshore provision, for instance in south-east Asia, an area in which programme managers, academic staff and local tutors worked together, was another area in which *blended* activity could well develop. At a practical level, staff who had recently completed their doctorates noted that this had led to a positive shift in their relationship with academic colleagues, for instance:

*“there’s been a complete shift in engagement with a certain group of staff – not everybody – it has created a connection for us which certainly wasn’t there before .... It’s changed their level of respect for me.”*

This suggests that there is a supply of people in Australia who have the potential to undertake *blended* roles as opportunities became available:

*“There is a real mystique about academic work and it’s absolutely true that it is highly skilled work, but there is this exclusivity built around it that I think is a little artificial.”*

Another respondent mentioned the emergence of Executive Director roles, of “people with credentials but not necessarily who’ve come through an academic pathway... we have two of those in our senior management group who are not there as academic leaders, but who are there as leaders.” It may be

that these will increase and provide a pathway for less *bounded* forms of professional. However, others in *blended* roles reported structural difficulties for professional staff if they wished to undertake academically-oriented activity. For instance, one learning support office offering study skills, language training and counselling within regular academic programmes comprised staff on both academic and professional conditions of service. Although they worked side by side with academic staff, and made an equivalent contribution, professional staff did not have access to study leave, nor, despite having publications, did they have rights to intellectual property.

Perhaps as a result of what appeared, at times, to be boundary resistance, respondents in Australia were distinguished by their positive approach to developing their own career pathways by using whatever resources were available to them, be it opportunities to gain qualifications or to develop generic skills such as project management. Respondents also reported teaching on internal development programmes, presenting at conferences, and publishing, although, because this was not an expectation, they were obliged, as one person put it, to “carve out the space” for this. Thus, respondents in Australia appeared to be clear about their responsibility for their own futures: “I guess it’s all about challenging one’s views and one’s paradigms and where one’s come from and where one thinks one’s going...”

A number of respondents were conscious of what were perceived as ‘managerial’ approaches at the corporate level of their institutions, which gave them cause to distance themselves from being seen as ‘managers’ or ‘leaders’ per se. Thus, there was a distinction made between ‘management’ and ‘leadership’ on the one hand, and more creative roles that might have management and leadership elements:

- *“I prefer to be more in a leadership role for something that’s project related, that’s innovative, and is not constrained by administration and bureaucracy.”*
- *“I like to get the best out of people but I’d rather do it in a team environment, and I have a more equality-based ... philosophy about work ...”*
- *“... you have to manage up and sideways ...”*
- *“[it’s] this covert leadership stuff – I can’t be seen to do it.”*

Another person welcomed their shift from a more management-oriented to a *blended* role where they could “critically evaluate something, express an opinion, take a bit of time over a decision”, in contrast to a situation where “things

have to be seen to be done, you have to be seen to be doing the right things, and to tick it off the box.” This raises the issue of how management and leadership might be integrated with the more creative aspects of, for instance, project-oriented or institution development activity, and also with the demands of working with autonomous, self-motivated staff.

## THE UNITED STATES

In the United States, professional staff appeared to have both a stronger profile and a clearer sense of professional identity than in the UK or Australia. In particular, professional staff with mixed or *blended* backgrounds and roles were more established as a grouping. Such people were likely to be involved in research- or practice-oriented developmental activity, and to work in, for instance, offices of institutional research or student affairs (the latter incorporating student and campus life). Furthermore, more than half the respondents had ‘interface’ roles, involving, for instance, relations with students, the community, alumni, or the state legislature.

Key differences between respondents in the US, on the one hand, and their UK or Australian counterparts included:

- Respondents referred consistently to having the respect and trust of academic colleagues on the basis of their professional knowledge. This contrasts with, for instance, the ongoing efforts made by *blended professionals* in the UK to establish their credentials.
- There was greater involvement in, and expectation of, an academic element to roles and identities. Eleven of the fifteen people interviewed were, in their current roles, undertaking some form of teaching, tutoring, mentoring or research activity. This included teaching on dedicated master’s programmes for professional managers, and also supervising master’s and doctoral students. More than 50% of the fifteen respondents had published papers. Thus, one senior manager in a policy and planning office described their role as “very much like a research-based academic job...” Professional and academic domains, therefore, were contiguous and overlapping. As one senior manager remarked: “I can go toe to toe with faculty.”
- Staff in the US tended to operate in a more political environment, both within institutions and in relation to,

for instance, state legislatures. Many of them had a lobbying and translational role between the two, to quote one such manager “help[ing] them to shape the legislation in a way that’s not damaging to us”. There were expectations on them to be able to speak the language of politicians, and to translate, for instance, proposals by academic staff “who don’t [necessarily] know how to present their stuff in soundbites”.

### Career routes

As shown in the examples below, respondents with less *bounded* identities tended to have developed their careers within higher education, and in that sense to be ‘career professionals’, whereas in the UK they were more likely to have gained at least part of their experience in other sectors. In a number of cases, moving to a smaller, private college gave the opportunity of experience in a more senior post. However, it was suggested that the existence of private institutions, that were able to pay higher salaries, was creating competition for managers at the more senior levels, and as a result more recruitments were occurring from the private sector. As in the UK, mobility was also seen by some to be a factor in career progression, particularly if they felt themselves to be more restricted in terms of geographic locality. Box 11 (pages 46-48) gives examples of the career routes taken by respondents in the US.

Two broad areas of activity demonstrate the extension of professional roles to incorporate elements of academic activity:

- **Institutional research/policy analysis**

In the US, data collection (which would be undertaken in the UK in a planning office) is used for extensive institutional research and policy analysis, in what one manager termed a “data driven environment”. This would be likely to cover areas such as:

- Access and equity.
- Social trends and patterns of participation.
- Student participation and feedback.
- Enrolment, including recruitment, retention and graduation rates.
- Tuition fees and financial aid.
- University/state and international relations.

Offices of institutional research not only conduct in-house

research projects in such areas of interest, but also undertake policy analysis, presenting the outcomes in a way that is appropriate for a variety of internal and external audiences, including senior institutional managers, boards of regents and state governments. Communicating data so that it was helpful for decision-making was, according to one manager "... as much an art

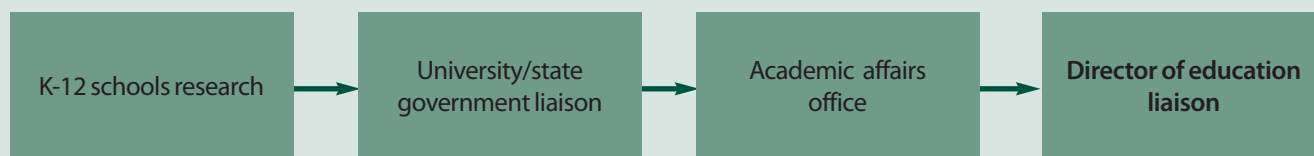
as a science. Timing, politics, means of communication, the media you use ... is probably more important than the actual findings of an analysis." Another described it as "repackaging" institutional knowledge. Furthermore, the analysis and presentation of local data might need to be set in a broader context, for instance, at the level of state legislatures, as "public service research."

## BOX 11

### EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN THE US

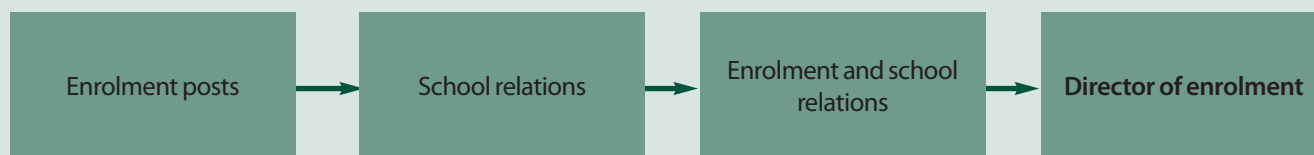
#### CROSS-BOUNDARY PROFESSIONALS

##### Policy analyst, master's degree



(One public institution)

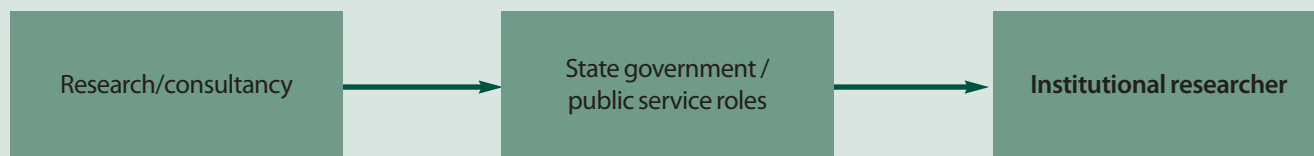
##### Enrolment specialist, doctorate



(Three public, one private institution)

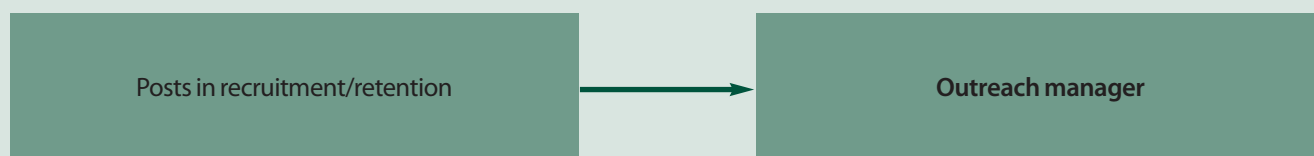
#### UNBOUNDED PROFESSIONALS

##### Research analyst, master's degree



(One public institution)

##### Outreach professional, master's degree

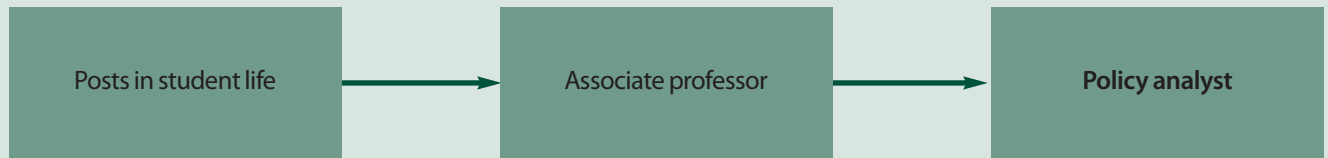


(One public institution)

**EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN THE US**

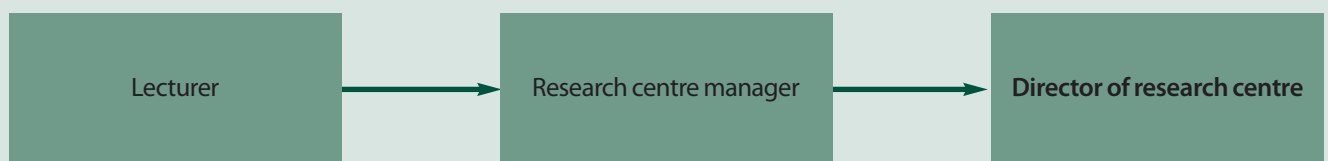
***BLENDED PROFESSIONALS***

**Policy analyst, doctorate**



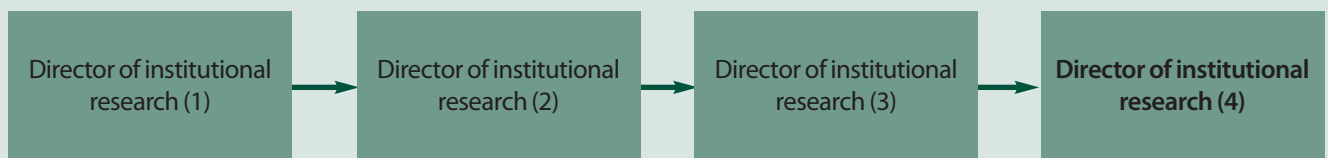
(Three public, one private institution)

**Policy researcher, master's degree**



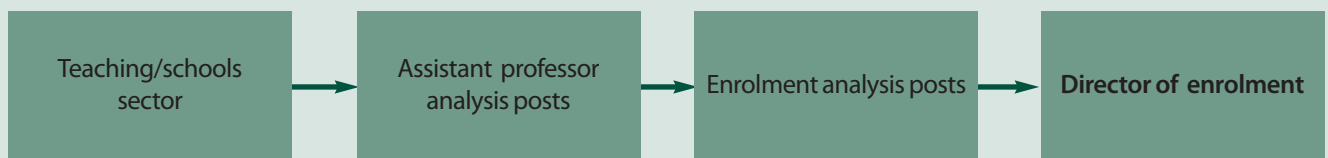
(Three public institutions)

**Institutional researcher, doctorate**



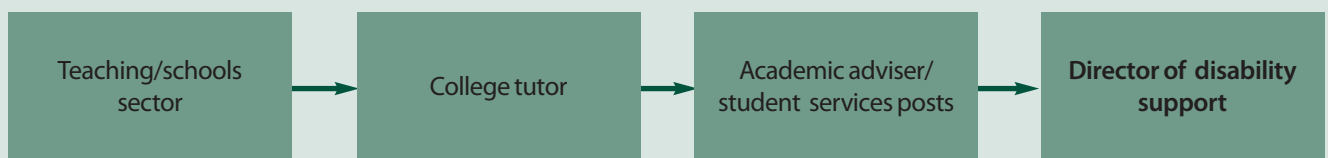
(Four public institutions)

**Enrolment specialist, doctorate**



(Two public institutions)

**Disability specialist, master's degree**

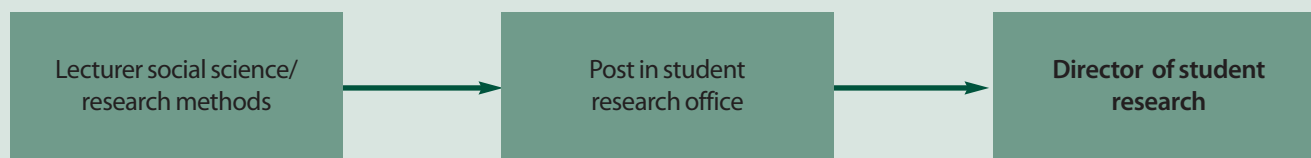


(One public institution)

## EXAMPLES OF CAREER ROUTES OF PROFESSIONAL STAFF IN THE US

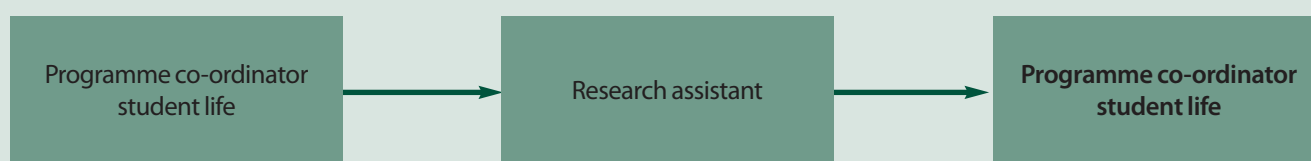
## BLENDED PROFESSIONALS (CONTINUED)

## Student experience specialist, master's degree



(One public institution)

## Student programme co-ordinator, master's degree



(One public, one private institution)

- **Student affairs**

Parallel to institutional research and policy analysis, the field of student affairs had, according to one senior manager in an office of student research, become “increasingly infused with academic content”, whereby pastoral functions traditionally undertaken by academic staff had been:

*“largely replaced by [professional] staff... [who supported students] in residential life programmes, student development programmes, organised student groups, all the kind of co-curricular aspects of student life, residential learning in the halls... Those people increasingly now have master's degrees, they have done a programme in counselling or developmental psychology or student affairs or higher education ... [they are] more academically informed in both the content and theory of student development and research...”*

There are, therefore, broad bundles of activity taking place on campus, which are not necessarily integral to a degree programme, but which are nevertheless attractive to students for the purposes of their future professional and career development. These are delivered largely by professional staff, who undertake tutoring, coaching and programme development in relation to, for instance, student leadership, community action or parent outreach, without having a tenured faculty post. These are often interface roles facilitating transitions and new

relationships, for instance encouraging academic staff to work with students from underserved local communities on ‘bridge’ programmes, and training student mentors to provide support in the first year of study.

The inclusion of roles involving research into, for instance, institutional policy and student affairs in offices of institutional research had created identities in which professional and academic activity were both integrated and co-dependent, providing *blended* pathways. Thus, one manager referred to a “shadow or parallel set of academic researchers within the infrastructure of the university, doing research on the university and research on students.” The impact on professional identity is illustrated in the following account from someone with a background in public policy research:

*“I view my principal role as being an effective manager of a public service programme based in an academic department ... the nature of my job places me in a position to be able to serve as an intermediary between members of the policy committee and the academic community. I see myself making the best contribution by serving that facilitation function, and that facilitation function involves a certain amount of professional creativity and ability to understand the limits of research as it relates to public policy decision-making, and the limits of public policy decision-making as it relates to research.”*

This merging of professional and academic strands of activity had a direct impact on this person's identity and career, in that it had “allowed me to feel that I could develop professionally in a way that allowed me to practise my management skills and

... also receive some professional recognition within the area of ... public policy." This duality, and its recognition by colleagues, was something that was not apparent from the study either in a UK or an Australian context. Furthermore, this person saw themselves as having "a variety of futures". Although there was no "direct career ladder", they saw the possibility of moving to another institution, to a national association or foundation, to the state government, or to a bi- or multi-national research project.

In institutions running dedicated programmes for professional staff there were likely to be close links with the relevant administrative offices, with internships taking place and professional staff being involved in teaching. Thus, those characterised as *blended professionals* would be likely to be involved in this type of activity, all of which fostered the overlap of professional and academic domains. The use of postgraduate students from a local master's or doctoral programme in higher education as 'interns' further reinforced the academic 'mix', as described by one institutional enrolment manager:

*"We find that we don't have time to do anything like a real research project, including a literature search, so we'll be using the interns to do that..."*

This office had a series of project teams working on a number of issues, each of which informed action plans that made up the institution's enrolment strategy. This embedding of research within an 'administrative' department illustrates the interlinking of professional and academic activity to create an applied research field. Fields such as 'institutional research' or 'student affairs', therefore, were likely to shade into what might be seen as applied disciplinary areas in their own right, on which there were significant literatures, produced by professional staff.

Moreover, some respondents saw themselves as having the possibility of moving into a full-time academic post, although they might be better placed to undertake the research that interested them by being in an office close to the subject of research, be it the student experience, university-state relations, or equity and access. Thus, one individual, who had held an academic post, preferred to be in a policy environment:

*"I was never 100% that I was going to stay along the faculty route, mainly because my interests were in areas of college access, choice, equity, and higher education policy in general... Ours is an applied field, which means that you can*

*take an administrative or industry job and still come back to faculty, as long as you keep writing and publishing."*

Furthermore, there appeared to be a clear distinction between roles with a research or tutoring orientation, that could lead to assistant or associate vice-chancellor positions (equivalent to academic pro-vice-chancellor in the UK), and what were seen as more process-oriented roles such as registrar, or director of financial aid, which were unlikely to do so.

## Challenges

Despite a greater integration of *blended* roles within the institutional community in the US, there was some evidence that tensions could arise if institutional researchers put too much emphasis on the academic aspects of their work, for instance by publishing and going to conferences, particularly if senior managers did not feel that they were obtaining the information they needed to make decisions, or if professional staff were perceived to be obtaining funding for conferences in preference to their academic colleagues. Moreover, it was also possible to detect some cleavages within *blended* identities, for instance in relation to the political dimension of activity. Thus, a number of respondents reported strains between their professional activity and, for instance, negotiating a position, or trying to reconcile multiple viewpoints:

*"I have a very deep personal view on the importance of collaboration and ... it's sometimes difficult for me to work in a highly charged, political environment ..."*

Despite this, there was awareness that political skills were likely to be a prerequisite for progression in a career.

The extension of professional activity in a more academic direction also appeared to have created a distinction for some respondents between their professional expertise in a policy or applied research field, and the management aspects of their roles. Although some had concerns about, for instance, managing a budget and fund-raising activity, there was more widespread concern about managing staff. This appeared to arise from the need to both co-ordinate and direct the work of highly qualified, autonomous and self-motivated professionals:

- *"I know the procedures and policies, but making a diverse group of people work well together is a challenge."*
- *"I've known [a junior colleague] for a few years through scholarly networks... so I feel uncomfortable thinking of myself as her boss ... My intuition is to give capable people the latitude to do the work without micro-*

*managing them... having high expectations but doing it in a way that's fair and respectful."*

There could also be issues about ways in which such individuals were themselves line managed, for instance not being given discretion over a budget so as to be able to re-invest savings elsewhere on a project, or being excluded from the outcomes of decisions:

*"I feel like I'm a kind of knowledge broker... [but] I don't hear the end result of the policy making ... I give them pieces of information and I don't hear ... exactly what happened, so I feel there is a disconnect. I would like to be more involved in the decision-making process. I would like to be more involved in the conceptualisation of the research questions."*

This suggests that managers of less *bounded* forms of professional may have difficulty adapting to highly qualified and motivated staff.

A further cleavage emerged in relation to leadership, for instance between the communication of a "vision" at strategic level, and day-to-day management, or even what one person termed "supervisory" activity. Leadership was described variously as acting as "a facilitator", "identifying new initiatives and projects", "creating opportunities" and "releasing potential". The inclination appeared to be to take "more of a relational than a positional approach", and a number of respondents spoke in terms of "servant-leadership", whilst recognising of the difficulty of reconciling rhetoric and reality:

*"I really like to talk about servant-leadership and that I'm really here to serve others and to serve my staff, but in reality I can't be that way every day... Sometimes I'm pretty authoritarian too and I'll just make decisions and deal with them afterwards. I do a lot of reading about different leadership styles and articulating your vision and getting the right people in the right places. It all sounds good as you're reading it..."*

As in the UK, more than one respondent referred to trying to cascade the practice of leadership amongst their staff, "getting them to exercise their own agency", saying to them that "you can each be leaders in your own way". Others saw themselves as exercising leadership in the community, for instance with students and families who were first generation entrants to higher education. It was also pointed out that there was a difference between leading the work of a team in one's own area of expertise, and giving breadth of leadership at the institutional level, across a number of domains. Making this transition could be a challenge for those who had ambitions to

achieve the equivalent of a pro-vice-chancellor role, especially if they became too embedded in a specific area of institutional research.

Although *blended professionals* represented a more established grouping in the US than in the UK, therefore, the emergence of these areas of concern suggests that it is possible for such identities to become over-'stretched'. As with *blended professionals* in the UK, there was a sense of working in multi-layered institution[s] that were "living, breathing organisation[s] that [are] always changing". It was suggested that those who succeeded in these kinds of environments had a "professional maturity", based on applied institutional knowledge, political awareness, sensitivity to institutional environments, and a pragmatic approach. Notwithstanding the challenges outlined above, such individuals appeared to be less tentative than their UK counterparts, particularly about what a number of them referred to as "moving the institution forward". There was also less necessity for 'doublespeak', about their activities, for instance in relation to 'administration' and 'management'. In comparison, the parallel group of *blended professionals* in the UK might be said to be at an earlier, pathfinding stage, with fewer role models available.

## SUMMARY OF INTERNATIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

While the results of the second part of the study are not directly comparable with the first, because the overseas interviews focused on less *bounded* forms of professional, they are of interest in providing possible indicators of future directions in the UK. In the US, and to some extent in Australia, extended professional activity such as taking qualifications, publishing, and presenting at conferences appeared to be embedded within professional and career expectations, whereas in the UK there was, by contrast, an element of diffidence about these additional dimensions, although this might be couched in terms of time constraints, or a lack of certainty about where such opportunities might lead.

If, in the UK, fields such as institutional research or student life, which exist in embryo in some institutions, expand and develop, it could be that there will be a rise in *blended* roles and professionals, and that these will achieve recognition in their own right. If such roles become more established, this will have implications for the development of their incumbents, and the type of provision that might be made available. In the meantime, senior managers in UK institutions may wish to take cognisance of ways in which, particularly in the US,

*blended professionals* contribute to institutional development, and issues arising from this, such as:

- Encouragement that might be given to professional staff to extend their profiles by, for instance, acquiring academic qualifications, contributing to an applied professional knowledge base, teaching on development programmes, and disseminating their research and practice.
- Raising the status of professional staff within the institutional community.
- Encouraging synergy between professional and academic domains.
- Understanding and facilitating issues of transition from other sectors, for instance by encouraging secondments to and exchanges with contiguous professional environments.
- The possibility of more flexible working patterns and conditions for professional staff who wish to build a project portfolio with academic elements.
- What 'management' and 'leadership' might mean, and how they might be practised, in relation to more policy and research-oriented types of activity.
- The possibility of *blended professionals* moving into academic or academic management roles, temporarily or permanently.



## 7: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES

The movements in roles and identities outlined in preceding sections, including changing career routes, have implications for management and leadership development needs and provision. The study sought to update and extend the evidence gathered via the literature review<sup>112</sup>, using two approaches:

- As an addition to the main study, a questionnaire was sent in 2006 to graduates of three dedicated UK management programmes, two of which led to a formal qualification (Appendix 4).
- In order to gain a sense of the type of development favoured by less *bounded* forms of professional, questions were asked about this in the second and third rounds of interviews in the UK and overseas (Appendix 2).

From both the questionnaire and the interviews, it was clear that UK respondents perceived a link between professional development and career opportunities:

*“Unclear career progression pathways make it difficult to select professional development opportunities.”*

*“The career pathways are not clear, and career advice plus flexible forms of personal development may be a more appropriate alternative to fixed programmes of study leading to a qualification.”*

Desire to make progress in a career could, therefore, be a significant motivator in overcoming time constraints, which were seen as the major barrier to development activity.

### QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

An overall response rate of 38% (49/130 individuals) was achieved in relation to the questionnaires. 57% of the forty-nine respondents classified themselves as ‘generalists’, and 43% as ‘specialists’. 32% had professional qualifications, 33% a master’s degree, and 10% a doctorate before starting their programme.

On all three programmes, participants overwhelmingly cited ‘own initiative’ (rather than encouragement by a line manager or the institution) as the trigger for their attendance and, for two of the programmes, knowledge of the opportunity came

from peer group networks rather than the institution. The third programme appeared to be better publicised and integrated as part of institutional planning for the development of professional staff. 24% of participants had either paid their own, or made a contribution to, course fees. In the small number of cases where some difficulty was reported in obtaining time to attend programme modules or study time, this had been overcome by negotiation, using annual leave, and/or agreeing that the time would be compensated for out of working hours.

The overwhelming reason for undertaking a programme was to contextualise and broaden knowledge of the higher education policy environment and other types of institutions (59%). In particular, it was seen as important to be able to link specialist and technical knowledge to a more holistic view of institutional activity. This was closely followed by a desire to gain a qualification for the purpose of career progression (56%), and personal professional development was cited by 41% of respondents. Although networking and meeting peers was not seen as a compelling reason in deciding to attend a programme, this emerged as a highly valued outcome, and in the case of the non-qualificatory programme it was ranked as the top outcome.

In relation to group mix, it was suggested that it was important not to have too great a disparity between numbers of generalist and specialist staff, and also between levels of experience, so that members of the group could learn from one another. Only one of the programmes included academic staff, and although this enabled individuals to “explore differences of perception in a constructive way”, the possibility of tensions also existed, whereby, for instance:

- Academic colleagues were perceived by professional staff to dominate group work.
- Discussions could be perceived as not relevant by one group or the other.
- Academic staff perceived discussions as lacking rigour.

Nevertheless, a majority of respondents overall said that they would prefer a programme that also included academic colleagues, although the balance of seniority and experience between participants appears to be critical to the success of mixed programmes. There also appeared to be an impression among some respondents that more development

<sup>112</sup>Whitchurch (2006a)

opportunities existed for academic than for professional managers.

68% of respondents had worked in two or more higher education institutions, and in that sense might be regarded as higher education career professionals. Nevertheless, when asked about the future, 45% saw moving out of the sector as a possibility, and 49% mentioned that they saw themselves as moving into a project management role. In response to a question about favoured development opportunities, the response was evenly divided between further qualifications (54%), secondments and exchanges (56%), and mentoring programmes (53%) (although a majority of respondents indicated more than one possibility). 24% said that they would consider a doctorate, which suggests that perhaps the UK will move closer to the situation in Australia and the US where 60% of respondents had doctorates. While management and/or higher-level qualifications appeared to be seen as an increasingly significant element in career development, bespoke opportunities that were timely and appropriate, such as secondments and mentoring, tended to be favoured over formal programmes that did not lead to a qualification. This may have been because time constraints, as opposed to, for instance, funding availability, were seen as the overwhelming obstacle to participation in development activity.

The questionnaire survey on professional development supported the conclusion of the main study that a significant minority of individuals felt isolated, both in their current roles and institutions, and with respect to peer professionals elsewhere. This was particularly the case in, for instance, departmental 'silos', whereby "Administrative ... staff in academic departments tend to be passed over". This suggests that it would be helpful if institutional thinking about professional development could be linked to internal opportunities such as job rotation schemes.

## INTERVIEWS

The evidence gathered from the UK interviews corroborated findings from the questionnaire survey. Four main sources of motivation emerged for attending a development programme, whether in-house or external, qualificatory or non-qualificatory:

- To progress in career/gain promotion.
- To fill gaps in knowledge/skills (ranging from how to read

a budget to managing people).

- To deal with specific problems and obtain feedback on performance.
- To gain 'kudos' from a particular qualification or programme.

As in the case of academic staff<sup>113</sup>, it would appear that professional staff increasingly favour individualised provision that incorporates feedback on professional practice. As might be expected, however, there were some differences between what those in middle management roles and those in senior roles felt that they required.

### Middle managers

There was a clear preference among middle managers for what one described as "structured learning" within the work environment. Topics that were mentioned included public speaking, presentation skills, report writing, project management and fund-raising. PRINCE qualifications (Projects in Controlled Environments) were referred to by a number of respondents. Others reported undertaking modules that they saw as particularly relevant to them, for instance from a master's programme, rather than attending the entire course (a practice that may be more widespread than is revealed by institutional statistics). There was a sense that development was most effectively undertaken as a series of loops back and forth between the workplace and the learning environment. In order to obtain the maximum benefit from formal programmes, therefore, there was "a degree of needing to be in a role for while". Furthermore, it was suggested that learning needed to take place in "safe space", in which confidence could be built for new roles. In this connection, it was suggested that in-house courses, alongside colleagues with whom one would be working outside the programme, could be inhibiting in this respect.

Other respondents described how they used project work that they were undertaking within a formal programme to bring together the development of their own professional practice with workplace requirements and the enhancement of their own effectiveness in their role:

*"My own MSc thesis ... is looking at academics' conceptual understanding of the terms 'management' and 'leadership', and where that would come from, how they've constructed it, and if management development in the university has some kind of influence on the understanding that they have. I'd also like to see how that's reflected in their behaviour... a PhD could expand it in that kind of way."*

This respondent had learnt research methods to undertake this work, and was making full use of an academic opportunity to contribute to understandings about the management and leadership development requirements of academic managers.

### Senior managers

A number of respondents commented on the difficulty of finding development opportunities that matched the requirements of day-to-day experience, particularly in relation to ambiguous conditions such as would be likely to be found in *third space*. The balance and integration of theory and practice in formal programmes, therefore, was felt to be critical, if more formal interventions were to be of value:

- *"I've never found [a development programme] yet that has been useful. Because you go and people say that the objective is to get from A to B, and move through the messy bit in the middle, but no-one has yet to say to me 'these are the really useful things [for] moving through the messy bit.'"*
- *"I just think that everyone can be enriched and enhanced ... it's not necessarily teaching 'this is it'; but there's a way that you can be taught certain things ... that different styles are appropriate for different circumstances..."*

What emerged as a key issue for senior managers was not only the integration of professional development with day-to-day working, but also the value of one-to-one feedback on practice and performance:

*"I can read the theory on my own, but what would be valuable for me would be for someone to say 'your performance here was ...'"*

Another manager saw professional development as most effective when "short sharp bursts", involving feedback, were alternated with a return to the workplace:

*"... it needs to be businesslike stuff, intensive feedback and criticism – download this, then feed off it for two months and go back to re-charge."*

There was a sense, therefore, in which senior managers sought development opportunities that would enable them to grow into making increasingly critical judgements, for instance in relation to risk:

*"Let's practice, experiment, be dangerous, avant garde and see it as a learning experience."*

They also appeared to incline towards provision that would enable them to both enhance their own practice and expand their comfort zones (one person likened this to development of academic practice through peer review of teaching).

Figure 12 illustrates the perceived advantages and disadvantages of in-house and external provision, and also of programmes that lead to a qualification. There did not appear from the sample to be a difference between middle and senior managers in this respect, although middle managers might find it more difficult to obtain funding for external courses.

While there was acknowledgement that "it is difficult to provide opportunities for such a diverse group of professionals", even those who felt that there was a satisfactory amount of provision saw it as somewhat "hit and miss". At the same time, some managers saw it as their responsibility to provide development opportunities for their own staff, and ran development programmes for their own teams, with the aim of, for instance:

- Contextualising local agendas in institutional and national agendas.
- Establishing a "sense of community" amongst their staff.
- Providing their staff with networking opportunities.
- Raising confidence levels.
- Promoting the activities of their team at institutional level.

**FIGURE 12**

#### PERCEIVED ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF IN-HOUSE, EXTERNAL AND QUALIFICATORY DEVELOPMENT PROVISION

TYPE OF PROVISION	PROS	CONS
In-house	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less time commitment</li> <li>• More targeted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less 'safe' environment</li> <li>• More restricted network</li> </ul>
External	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Networking possibilities</li> <li>• Wider perspectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive</li> <li>• Time-consuming</li> </ul>
Qualificatory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognised credentials</li> <li>• Portable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expensive</li> <li>• Time consuming</li> <li>• Big investment if not appropriate</li> </ul>

One suggestion that was made was that a formally accredited system of professional membership and updating might be introduced for professional staff, in addition to more 'in-house' provision by institutions.

## POINTERS FROM OVERSEAS

Overseas respondents broadly reflected the views of their UK counterparts, with the notable exception that in the United States, and to a lesser extent in Australia, there was an expectation that if an individual wished to make a career in higher education they would acquire master's, and increasingly doctoral, credentials.

### Australia

There were two distinctive features of the approaches of respondents to professional development in Australia. Firstly, it was noticeable in Australia that qualifications were seen as part of general personal development as well as a key to a better job. There appeared to be stronger motivation than in the UK and US for people to undertake higher degrees both out of interest and to enhance their performance. Thus, two individuals, acknowledging that a doctorate was not a pre-requisite for their current roles, nevertheless saw it as:

- "... adding strength to what I'm trying to do."
- "... allow[ing] me to step into [academic] areas of debate."

Another person described how they had, on their own volition, undertaken an academic qualification in the disciplinary area in which they were working, because "I really do believe you have to know an area to manage it". Doctoral work was also seen as improving relationships with academic colleagues, and providing an entrée to dialogue with them, in that: "I [now] have an intellectual framework that allows me to reflect in particular ways on how I do things." Another senior manager concluded that their PhD was more useful to them "than twenty leadership programmes".

Secondly, there was a strong sense of responsibility among professional managers about developing their own staff, including, for instance, encouraging them to acquire further academic credentials, attend in-house provision, and undertake secondments, exchanges, work shadowing and mentoring:

- "I encourage them to step up and take on leadership roles whether that's in a team context or a project or secondment, and to accumulate achievements."

- "... for the more senior people then I'm talking to them about networking across the sector ... relationships with government departments and professional associations, speaking in those kind of things, as well as postgraduate study."
- "I certainly emphasise professional development and qualifications, but I also emphasise some of the informal stuff as well which is about putting your hand up to do student selection, doing some of the things that are outside the square, because I do think increasingly it's the people who have been seen to be able to work well across the boundaries are the ones that are going to be seen to be useful... [for instance] to work on policy related to student matters ... or for anything to do with policy development or planning..."
- "...there's going to be more demand for generalist managers in universities and in society generally, so it's about not closing off doors. It's about what are the sorts of things that will not only be good for you personally ... but about your ability to work in a flexible changing workplace, whether that's inside a university or not."

However, there was also recognition that movement outside an institution, for instance on an exchange or secondment, could create issues about an individual's position on re-entry: "you've got to take some risks and back your skills ... people are frightened to take that risk." One institution had a career development programme, including advice about potentially suitable career moves. Moreover, Australia was the only one of the three countries in which applying for new posts was mentioned as a learning experience:

*"I recognise the emotional commitment you make as soon as you put in a job application, but I think it hones your experience in interviewing and getting your CV up to date, and you get a bit of feedback from all of these different things."*

Formal management and leadership programmes in Australia were, by and large, only felt to be appropriate if they were "tailored and targeted". One person said that they needed "a pressure cooker view; what the current thinking is in relation to leadership", and that "you can spend an awful lot of time sitting in those things for one or two ideas." What they were seeking, however, was "... lateral thinking outside the box, seeing things in a different sort of way..."; and to "look at what other people are doing". This could helpfully include external programmes, with participants from both public and private sectors.

## The United States

In the US, an understanding of research methods was seen as an increasingly significant skill, particularly for those working in *blended* roles in institutional or policy development. Academic qualifications were seen as important not only for reasons of credibility with local colleagues, but in order to contribute to a research base via professional research associations with associated conferences, publications and networks, both in higher education generally, and in areas such as campus life, outreach, equity and disability, which are regarded as fields in their own right.

Thus, one middle manager had found their doctoral programme more helpful than in-house development:

*"I've learned more from my coursework and interacting with faculty and really critically thinking about these issues facing higher education than I would ever in [an in-house programme]."*

Another senior manager suggested:

*"I've never recommended my staff for any specific training other than full participation in our research associations, like the [state] Association of Institutional Research, and the [national] Association of Institutional Research, presenting papers and things like that. That's what I think has been the most valuable and the most fun, where you really feel like you're a professional, with your peers."*

And another that:

*"In this university the credibility that comes from substance of knowledge trumps everything else."*

This suggests, therefore, that in the US professional staff would seek and expect to acquire membership of a knowledge and practice community that is parallel and overlapping with the academic community. There were also examples of innovative programmes, such as a series of in-house workshops for "first generation professionals", which also had the effect of creating a peer support network for participants.

As in the UK and Australia, there was also a sense that leadership and management training *per se*, on or off campus, was more productive if integrated with, for instance, experiential opportunities such as campus rotations, secondments, and mentoring, so as to address day-to-day, and future, needs of an individual:

*"We talk about things in an ideal world in the classroom in theory, but when you actually come to work and try to do it, it doesn't always work" (middle manager).*

Even at the most senior level, although there was a sense that the skills and theories advocated by leadership programmes were something that one needed to be aware of, a number of people said that these could be gained as easily by reading on the subject. Furthermore, formal programmes were only useful if combined with what one manager described as "the apprenticeship model", to build on experience, preferably in more than one environment. Other senior managers saw greater value in networking with their peers in other institutions, partly to find out what competitors were doing, but also to share good practice.

While some *blended* roles in the US were clearly embedded, for instance in offices of institutional research, there were less well-established areas, such as outreach, in which individuals might need to build transferable experience in order to market themselves effectively:

*"Professional staff... undersell their experiences, so that people within our office do presentations on all these areas [applying to university, taster programmes, study skills] ... if they wanted to go into a different area they could ... but [they] would have to be very specific about why [their] skills were transferable..."*

Building a portfolio, therefore, through discussion and consciousness-raising, as well as extending experience, was seen to be an important part of career development.

## SUMMARY

While it appeared that UK respondents tended to have a more instrumental approach to their own development than did their overseas counterparts, it was also clear that just-in-time provision, with a connection to the individual's workplace experience, was favoured by both middle and senior managers, in the UK, Australia and the US. Issues therefore arise about how less formal opportunities might be integrated with formal programmes, how professional staff development relates to the opportunities available for academic staff, and about ways in which the two might be integrated. A number of UK managers suggested that higher education could learn from the private sector where greater attention was given to nurturing middle managers, since they were the leaders of the future, and that institutions could use their own resources more effectively, for instance calling on business school colleagues to provide tailor-made, in-house sessions, programmes, and even mentoring.

Nevertheless, external programmes, particularly those that were high profile such as the Top Management Programme in

the UK, and the Harvard Programme in the US, could also be important 'totems' in signalling senior management potential. There is a sense in which such programmes might be sought, therefore, notwithstanding their precise content, for career purposes. Should such programmes effectively become a requirement for professional staff to progress, demand for them is likely to increase.

However, if *blended* working in *third space* becomes an increasingly significant component of institutional activity,

consideration will need to be given to the type of development provision that might be appropriate, for instance in relation to teamworking, the conduct of applied research, and *third space* management and leadership. As one respondent in Australia commented: "If you're evolving into a different kind of [professional], then your needs aren't going to be met [by existing provision]." Programme designers therefore, may find it helpful to take account of the way that roles and identities are evolving, and to reflect this, perhaps using programme participants to assist in this process.

## 8: CONCLUSIONS: PREPARING FOR COMPLEX FUTURES

As part of the series of studies commissioned by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, this report focuses on professional staff as a grouping that is distinct from academic managers such as deans or pro-vice-chancellors. It suggests that the frames of 'administration', 'management' and 'professionalism' no longer offer a comprehensive picture of these staff, and uses the concept of identity to provide a fuller perspective than, for instance, studies that consider them *en passant* in the context of academic identities, or of changing socio-economic contexts. It offers an additional dimension by viewing individuals in relation to the structures and boundaries that they encounter, and develops four categories of *bounded*, *cross-boundary*, *unbounded* and *blended professionals*. Furthermore, it suggests that the boundary between professional and academic domains is no longer clear-cut, and that less *bounded* forms of professional are developing new forms of *third space* between the two. Comparisons with Australia and the United States suggest that such staff have the potential to make an increasing contribution to the development of institutional capacity and potential in the future.

### THE PROFESSIONAL DIMENSION

The study adds to understandings about what it means to be a professional manager in UK higher education by bringing into view identity movements whereby individuals are, for instance:

- Developing their professional identities as a career-long project, rather than defining themselves solely via membership of a pre-defined 'administrative' or 'management' cadre.
- Actively interpreting and developing their roles as well as enacting them in accordance with, for instance, formal structures and job descriptions.
- Moving laterally across functional and organisational boundaries in order to develop their professional identities and careers.

The nature of professional identities, therefore, has shifted, so

that rather than simply comprising essential elements, they also represent a "project" undertaken by individuals<sup>114</sup>. Thus, while *bounded professionals* might be said to be "social subjects of particular discourses"<sup>115</sup>, with identities that are "'taken on' through shared practices"<sup>116</sup>, less *bounded* forms of professional demonstrate, as Delanty<sup>117</sup> suggests, that identity construction is not simply a linear project over time, but is one that is also contingent on an individual's positioning in relation to others.

The UK element of the study illustrates how:

- External factors such as a more market-oriented environment, increased accountability and reporting requirements, a broader spectrum of students, and a multiplication of interfaces with partner agencies have led to the recruitment of professional staff with expertise and experience in, for instance, data management, marketing, research partnership and business development. In turn, this has resulted in their diversification as a grouping.
- In adopting more sophisticated approaches to contemporary environments, "characterised by indeterminacy, partiality and complexity"<sup>118</sup>, professional staff are recognising the need to broaden and contextualise their knowledge base. Thus, in the words of one respondent:

*"...the situation's got much more complex; it's now accepted and appreciated that it's helpful to have people who know a lot..."*

They therefore contribute increasingly both to institutional capacity building and to institutional development for the future.

- Less *bounded* forms of professional tend to construct their authority on a personal, day-to-day basis with academic and other colleagues, inside and outside the university, rather than relying solely on their organisational position or role. In doing this they undertake active 'identity work', for instance editing their identities by downplaying the 'management' elements of their activities (and, on occasion, their seniority) in the interests of, to quote one manager, "bringing people on board ... and helping to build bridges".

<sup>114</sup> Henkel (2000: 13-14)

<sup>115</sup> Hall (1996: 6)

<sup>116</sup> Taylor (2008: 29)

<sup>117</sup> Delanty (2008)

<sup>118</sup> Taylor (2008: 30)

- Although continuing difficulties around the concept of 'management' can lead, at times, to identity 'strain', there is evidence that new forms of language may help to modulate understandings of both 'administration' and 'management'. These are illustrated by terms such as 'learning/community/research partnership', 'team working', 'project management', 'professional practice', 'institutional research', 'risk management', and 'business development'. Furthermore, professional staff who undertake activity that overlaps, and even merges, with the activity of academic colleagues, are likely to become more fluent in academic dialogue and debate.
- Relationships with academic colleagues remain an issue, cannot be taken for granted, and require active and ongoing attention. One senior manager referred to the relationship as a "delicate social contract", and another to the fact that "... how that relationship is managed has to be very carefully done". More than one respondent reflected along the lines that: "you can't make anybody do anything unless they think it's a good idea". Professional managers, therefore, are expected increasingly to be able to negotiate a position, which may, in turn, involve them in political debate.

Thus, while "ideal" forms of professionalism<sup>119</sup> may appear to offer a sense of collectivity to professional staff in higher education, these forms do not necessarily capture the dynamism or mobility of professional staff as a grouping. The trends that emerge in the study would seem to reflect wider movements in the workplace, whereby employers seek "employees with good interpersonal skills who are able to engage in 'rule-making' rather than 'rule-following' behaviour", and are "innovative and creative" rather than "bureaucratic"<sup>120</sup>. There was also evidence that younger staff were less comfortable with the term 'professional' *per se*, which they saw as implying an elitism and exclusivity in the elevation of one group of staff above another.

Furthermore, it may be that the concept of the professional generalist is being superseded by that of the project manager, who carries generic experience from project to project, and that individuals will increasingly see themselves as building portfolio identities rather than being associated with a single role or function. How these might relate to careers, and to the concept of a generic 'higher education manager', would be for further investigation. These developments are likely to have

implications for recruitment strategies, for rewards and incentives, and for staff development. Individuals may wish to consider their own identities in terms of the typology that has been developed in the study, whether or how they might wish to modulate their identity, to draw on different approaches according to circumstances, or to move in a different direction.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL DIMENSION

The study used in-depth, qualitative interviews with sixty-one professional managers in the UK, Australia and US, and the report represents a snapshot of identities between 2004 and 2006. Since the interviews were conducted, some individuals are likely to have moved on, and the institutions within which they worked to have changed and developed. Such conclusions as are drawn, therefore, should be regarded as indicators of trends that may deserve further investigation via a more comprehensive study. It would, for instance, be of interest to know whether the proportion of respondents categorised as *bounded professionals* in the UK study (50%) has remained steady over time, whether *unbounded* and *blended professionals* are on the increase, and if so, at what rate and under what conditions. It would also be interesting to know what variables might facilitate or frustrate shifts between categories. Moreover, as the higher education system itself is diverse, and not susceptible to generic solutions<sup>121</sup>, it is for institutions to consider what lessons might be drawn from the study, and how these might be applied appropriately in their own circumstances.

The study also showed that identities were not uniform across case institutions. In the UK segment, *bounded professionals* were clustered in an institution with clearly drawn boundaries between the centre and the periphery, and between professional and academic domains. By contrast, a majority of less *bounded* categories of professional were to be found in an institution that was undergoing significant development, for instance extending local partnership and outreach. In the latter case, senior managers may have appointed, consciously or unconsciously, less *bounded* forms of professional, who were likely to facilitate new forms of activity. They may also have recognised that when such people *are* recruited, if they are then overly restricted by boundary structures, this may lead to frustration. This suggests, again with the caveat that a larger study would be needed to draw firm conclusions, that institutions that are obliged to respond to changes in their environments, for whatever reason, are more likely to host

<sup>119</sup> Eraut (1994)

<sup>120</sup> Brown and Scase (1997: 89)

<sup>121</sup> Shattock (2008)



professionals who are active in interpreting their roles, and in working across and beyond boundaries. Furthermore, the influence of the head of administration in facilitating flexible boundary conditions would also appear to be significant. In the institutions where less *bounded* forms of professional predominated, a number of respondents voluntarily made reference to the accessibility of the head of administration, and the latter's interest in their roles and futures.

It may be, therefore, that organisational positionings are more complex than suggested by Clark<sup>122</sup>, in that professional staff not only operate at the "centre" (in the central 'Administration') and the "periphery" (for instance, in academic departments), but are also creating new locales. As a result, Clark's distinctions between the "strengthened steering core" and the "stimulated academic heartland"<sup>123</sup> may begin to be re-conceptualised. *Third space* working may also offer some answers to Clark's questions<sup>124</sup> about ways in which institutions can "sustain change" as they "lean towards the future"<sup>125</sup>, and also assist in overcoming the "systemic problem"<sup>126</sup> of reconciling professional and academic agendas.

The study suggests, therefore, that boundaries can both connect and divide, and that they can be used for communicative, non-communicative, and also for political, purposes. They may have the effect of creating a sense of marginalisation and isolation for some individuals, although others, in different ways, are able to use boundaries, or the lack of them, to create new possibilities and spaces. On the one hand, institutions will continue to require professional specialists to deal with increasingly rigorous legislative, audit and regulatory requirements, and a significant proportion of these roles are likely to be filled by *bounded professionals*. On the other hand, institutions also require less *bounded* forms of professional to interpret and contextualise institutional obligations to different constituencies, internal and external, and also to build and develop institutional capacity. The latter may be expanding groupings who facilitate institutional adaptation to more fluid environments, as systematic, evidence-based approaches to planning and decision-making become less dependable.

Institutional discussion about the shape of the professional workforce might include, for instance, how individuals working in *third space* might contribute to new thinking and ways of working, bearing in mind that too many such people

could lead to too little organisational form, or the non-achievement of desired outcomes. Furthermore, organisational restructuring, which may well involve replacing as opposed to modifying or removing boundaries, is likely to remain a feature of institutional life. However, it might be usefully informed by consideration of the nature of boundaries, and the way that individuals operate around them, particularly when they are being reconfigured or functions relocated. Attention to professional clusters and networks may also helpfully complement approaches to restructuring.

A more nuanced understanding of *third space* activity may also help to ameliorate tension between professional and academic domains, and to fulfil:

*"... clear potential for creating collaborations and partnerships across the boundaries between the heartland and the periphery to meet the needs of new or existing clients and markets and indeed, to create similar lateral relationships and cross-organisational roles between the university and other organisations."*<sup>127</sup>

In turn, this might assist in providing opportunities to:

*"... problematis[e] both traditional academic culture and managerialist ideology [and] ... offer a strategy whereby these competing ethics can be combined."*<sup>128</sup>

## MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP

The study would appear to support Bryman's<sup>129</sup> view that insufficient attention may have been paid to the significance of context in relation to the identities of managers and leaders, and that hierarchical 'chain of command' models are increasingly challenged by the emergence of lateral networks and relationships. It may be more productive, therefore, for institutions to think in terms of new project- and team-oriented forms of management and leadership, and how these might be integrated and cascaded within functional areas. Rather than a duality of leadership and followership, there emerges from the study a more complex pattern of collaboration and partnership, with a sense of managing sideways and upwards, as well as downwards. Thus, even top-level managers are subject to the views of governing bodies, funding councils, and government agencies, and might be seen as 'middle managers' in their management of the institutional interface with the environment. Treating 'management' and 'leadership' as activities that are

<sup>122</sup> Clark (1998)

<sup>123</sup> Clark (1998)

<sup>124</sup> Clark (2004: 115)

<sup>125</sup> Clark (2004: 92–93)

<sup>126</sup> Clark (1995)

<sup>127</sup> Middlehurst (2004: 275)

<sup>128</sup> Scott (1995: 70)

<sup>129</sup> Bryman (2008)

freestanding and separate from other forms of professional activity, therefore, may be an increasingly insecure premise.

Thus, the study appears to corroborate the view that the management, leadership, and academic aspects of institutional management are increasingly symbiotic (see, for instance Temple and Barnett<sup>130</sup> on the contingent relationship between what was hitherto regarded as a largely technical matter, the estate, and the teaching and research missions of the university). Not only has the distinction between academic activity, and ‘an Administration’ that serves this activity, become less clear-cut, but it is being replaced by a:

*“... partnership between those who have come up via a professional route and those through a purely academic career, [with] crossovers of personnel at various levels”<sup>131</sup>*

Furthermore, the “diarchy” described by McMaster<sup>132</sup> between professional and academic activity would appear to be breaking down, supporting the suggestion that:

*“A more accurate account might emphasise the growing interpenetration of academic and managerial practice within higher education”<sup>133</sup>*

In this context, it would be helpful to extend Kennie and Woodfield’s work<sup>134</sup> to teams at different institutional levels, and to explore the effects of diversity and homogeneity within them. This might also take account of the mingling of professional and management activity in other sectors, for instance in roles that carry both professional and management responsibilities in the NHS and the civil service<sup>135</sup>.

## INDICATORS FOR THE FUTURE

It seems likely that professional identities will continue to develop and diversify through the emergence of staff who, for instance:

- Have academic credentials such as master’s and doctoral level qualifications.
- Have a teaching/research background in adult, further or higher education.
- Work in project teams dealing with, for instance, either one-off projects such as bids for funding, or more extended projects such as community partnership.

- Undertake tasks that in the past would have been undertaken solely by academic staff, such as offering pastoral advice to students, speaking at outreach events, or undertaking overseas recruitment visits and interviews.
- Provide an expert, interpretive function between academic staff and external partners in relation to, for instance, the marketing of tailor-made programmes, or the development of research and business partnerships.
- Undertake research into institutional practice so as to build an evidence base in relation to, for instance, student recruitment and progression patterns.
- Undertake research into professional practice, for instance via professional associations, journals and conferences.

There is some evidence in the UK of an emergent link between practice and professional development in the publication of work arising from programmes of study, although this is not as widespread as in the US. Professional staff are, therefore, disseminating generalisable knowledge from their own practice, and contributing to a professional research base. Such in-practice accounts supplement the fixed bodies of knowledge described by Allen and Newcomb<sup>136</sup> and Skinner<sup>137</sup>. A case could be made for professional managers who contribute in this way (and also, for instance, who assist with professional development of their peers through mentoring and in-house or regional programmes) to achieve wider recognition for this type of activity in relation to promotion or career opportunities.

Consequences for individuals of the identity movements that have been demonstrated include the fact that it is increasingly difficult to define, or for an individual to acquire, a single body of knowledge associated with a professional role. Even when they have similar titles, roles are no longer homogeneous, and it is not easy to achieve a common understanding about them. For instance, heads of administration include people undertaking traditional registrar and/or secretary roles, with or without responsibility for resources<sup>138</sup>; people with the title of pro-vice-chancellor and a portfolio for administration and/or resources; individuals acting solely as clerks to governing bodies; and heads of corporate planning or corporate affairs.

Where roles are less ‘standardised’ or clear-cut, issues also arise, for instance, about the relationship between pro-vice-chancellors with a functional brief such as resources or

<sup>130</sup> Temple and Barnett (2007)

<sup>131</sup> Shattock (2000: 34)

<sup>132</sup> McMaster (2005)

<sup>133</sup> Gibbons et al (1994: 84)

<sup>134</sup> Kennie and Woodfield (2008)

<sup>135</sup> Fitzgerald and Ferlie (2000: 278)

<sup>136</sup> Allen and Newcomb (1999)

<sup>137</sup> Skinner (2001)

<sup>138</sup> Hogan (2006)

staffing, and the director of that functional area. Another factor affecting professional roles and identities is the fact that, as spheres of activity in contemporary institutions become more complex, it is less feasible for one person (either a vice-chancellor or a head of administration) to be closely involved with every aspect of institutional management. The development of senior management teams reflects this<sup>139</sup> and allows, for instance, a vice-chancellor to concentrate on representing the institution externally, and senior professional staff to focus on internal matters.

Professional staff with mixed backgrounds and experience, characterised as *blended professionals* in the study, are increasingly likely to see themselves as moving into pro-vice-chancellor posts with a portfolio such as student life or institutional development. It may be, therefore, that working across and beyond boundaries becomes a significant factor in enhancing an individual's career prospects. If this is the case, it could widen any gap between *bounded professionals* on the one hand, and less *bounded* forms of professional on the other. In turn, this could make it more difficult to move incrementally from being a *bounded professional* to becoming less *bounded*, and further contribute to the diversification of professional staff as a collective.

Structures and boundaries are likely to remain an essential aspect of organisational life to provide definition, ensure probity, and build understanding as to what an institution is about. However, flexible working practices are also needed to ensure that structures and boundaries do not become overly restrictive. As suggested by one *unbounded professional*:

*"... ideally you want a leavening of the old hands, and new staff coming in with fresh ideas and so forth; but you need that kind of leavening of institutional wisdom that, you know, carries on and helps oil the wheels in its own way."*

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The study is indicative of trends in professional staff identities, and understandings emerging from it may assist in providing a fuller picture of how these identities are likely to develop in future. Rather than drawing their authority solely from established roles and structures, professional staff build their credibility increasingly on a personal basis, and via the relationships they develop with colleagues inside and outside the university. Not only are individuals interpreting their given

roles more actively, but they are also moving laterally across boundaries, to participate in *third space* activity with elements drawn from both professional and academic domains. In particular, new forms of *blended professional* are emerging, with mixed backgrounds and portfolios. Thus, although the concepts of 'administration' and 'management' are likely to continue to co-exist in institutions, and professional staff to be associated with their practice, the expectations associated with the two concepts are also likely to be overlaid by new ways of working. *Third space* activity, as described in the study, might be said to reflect Taylor's concept of a "creative commons", involving "networking, laterality, hybridity, flexibility, multi-tasking and media capability", in which growing numbers of professional staff are well placed to contribute to a "re-interpretation of collegiality"<sup>140</sup>. It may be, therefore, that a "... reconsideration of the nature of the academic (and non-academic) professions"<sup>141</sup>, as part of a "community of professionals"<sup>142</sup>, is not only timely, but also overdue.

In day-to-day terms, less *bounded* forms of professional are emerging *de facto* and being incorporated into institutional working practices, whether or not they are formally acknowledged. Recognition of these changes, and their implications for professional and career development, would not only assist individuals in achieving their potential, but also assist institutions in attracting appropriate staff, and in building a pool of talent, for themselves and for the system as a whole. This will be critical to the recruitment of a predicted additional 25,000 professional and support staff by 2010-2011<sup>143</sup>. Professional staff themselves have a part to play in raising awareness of their developing identities, by promoting their contribution to both academic and institutional agendas. Senior institutional managers, also, have a responsibility to acknowledge movements that are occurring, and to foster an environment in which professional staff can, to quote one respondent, "feel safe in [offering opinions]... [and] to feel that is allowable and expected of them". Institutions may, therefore, wish to take account of the trends outlined in this report in their organisational development processes, such as are described by Chambers and Huxley<sup>144</sup>.

Professional staff in higher education have not only become a more diverse grouping, but career pathways and patterns are less well-defined than hitherto. While there may be a greater range of career possibilities, there is also likely to be greater

<sup>139</sup> Kennie and Woodfield (2008)

<sup>140</sup> Taylor (2008: 38)

<sup>141</sup> Pratt (1997: 320)

<sup>142</sup> AUT (2001)

<sup>143</sup> HEFCE (2006)

<sup>144</sup> Chambers and Huxley (2007)

uncertainty, if not risk, attached to individual trajectories. However, the study suggests that, provided that they are integrated with an individual's professional life, development initiatives can be used to raise awareness of opportunities, and to increase the likelihood of individual potentials being realised.

As environmental and institutional complexity increases, the capital of professional staff is likely to grow, whereby they will not only contribute to the building of institutional capacity internally, but also assist institutions to interact with their external constituencies and to consider ways in which they might develop for the future. It is suggested, therefore, that:

- Those institutions that are able to achieve a better understanding of the nature of boundaries will be the most successful in maximising their potential, and that of their professional staff.
- The most mature institutions will be those that are able to incorporate, and facilitate, a balance of professional staff that is appropriate for their shape and direction of travel, taking a view of where and how these might be clustered.

Although, at some institutions, heads of administration take a close interest in the development of their staff, this is not something that is generally addressed in a holistic way by senior management teams, who may find it helpful to review this balance.

- Those institutions that are able to give recognition to more extended ways of working will be most likely to maximise the contribution of professional staff, and to achieve an effective accommodation with their current and future environments.

If, as Florida<sup>145</sup> suggests, talented people seek to work and cluster in creative environments, and are increasingly selective about these, institutions are likely to find themselves competing for talent. Nevertheless, an upbeat conclusion may be drawn from the following view of one respondent in a specialist role, for whom options existed in the commercial sector:

*"It would have to be an amazing offer to get me out of here ... I do like working in a university ... you see students ... in the library, doing things ... you actually see what we are all working for ..."*

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## APPENDIX 1

# TOPIC GUIDE FOR MEETINGS WITH UK PROFESSIONAL STAFF (MIDDLE AND SENIOR MANAGERS)

### 1. Autobiographical

- How respondent moved into university administration/management
- Critical elements/turning points in career so far

### 2. Current role/identity

- Balance of activity in current job in terms of eg
  - Administration – regulations, standards, maintenance, gate-keeping
  - Management – resources, people
  - Professional services – applying specialist expertise; policy and development
  - Anything else?
- Do they see themselves primarily as an administrator, manager or professional?
- What is their distinctive contribution/nature of influence?
- Involvement in decision-making. Types of decisions
- How much discretion/autonomy/choice
- Exposure to risk and nature of risk
- Degree of involvement in initiating change
- Have they ever felt subject to role or identity conflict? In what way?

### 3. Interfaces

- Key interfaces eg:
  - Academic staff
  - Other professional staff
  - Students
- Difference between their role and that of academic managers
- Areas of overlap with other professional managers/academics/academic managers
- With whom do they work most closely?
- Whom do they regard as their peer group internally/reference group externally?

### 4. Self/institution

- Belonging/allegiance
- To what extent do they see the university as a

community of scholars, a public service institution and/or a series of businesses? Has the balance changed? Is it likely to change in future?

- How does consultation occur? How is consensus reached? Are there some areas that are more consensual than others?
- How is trust built, particularly between academics and managers?
- What do they think they are most valued for by a) line manager b) academic colleagues?
- Do they see their future in universities?
- Where do they see themselves going next in terms of type of job, location (public or private sector)?
- Any other relevant issues?

### 5. Sector-wide issues

- Are there common threads between professional managers as a grouping, or are they just people who happen to work in similar environments on a variety of jobs?
- Is there still a 'service' element to what professional staff do?
- Understandings around 'administration' and 'management' – are these terms still relevant?
  - Does management contain elements of administration and vice versa?
  - How does university management/administration differ from a) other public sector b) private sector?
  - Is there something distinctive about the practice of administration and management in universities?
  - Differences between professional management and academic management
- (For more senior administrators) Elements of continuity and change over last twenty years eg how decisions are made; how professional staff are involved in this
- Does the 'generalist' have a future?
- Value of qualifications – generalist; specialist – what would they do if starting again?
- Any other relevant issues?

## APPENDIX 2

### TOPIC GUIDE FOR MEETINGS WITH LESS *BOUNDED* FORMS OF PROFESSIONAL (IN UK AND OVERSEAS)

#### 1. Current role/identity

- Critical turning points in career
- How located in terms of
  - Professional – expertise, ethos, skills
  - Manager – resources, people, knowledge
  - Post-professional/project worker
  - Have they ever felt subject to role or identity conflict? In what way?

#### 2. Relationship to academic colleagues

- Key interfaces eg:
  - Academic staff
  - Other professional staff
  - Students
- Difference between their role and that of academic managers
- Areas of overlap with other professional/academic managers
- Whom do they regard as their peer group internally/reference group externally?
- Service/partnership
- Zones of interest/influence
- Crossover areas
- How valued – by others; self

#### 3. Membership of institutional community

- Voice – how heard
- Zones of influence
- Governance
- Formal and informal modes
- Legitimacy
  - Where do they ‘belong’?
  - What is their distinctive contribution/nature of influence?

#### 4. Discretion

- Decision-making
- Risk
- Innovation/development
- Boundaries
- Conflict of interests/tensions?

#### 5. External working

- How extensive
- How crossing boundaries between university and external partners

#### 6. Leadership

- Do they see themselves as leader; if so:
  - How exercise leadership
  - How exercise influence

#### 7. Future

- Where do they see themselves going
- How do they plan to get there?

#### 8. Development needs

- Same or different between professional and academic managers; specialists and generalists
- What type of intervention – formal/informal
- Qualifications? What sort?
- Knowledge/skills base
- Mentoring – by whom?
- Likely future trends

#### 9. Implications for career pathways

- Changes in career profiles
- Mobility/movement across and outside sector
- Generic skills/knowledge
- How should junior staff prepare themselves for their future careers?
- Recruitment/retention

# APPENDIX 3

## PROJECT ON PROFESSIONAL IDENTITIES IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR COMPLETION BY INTERVIEWEES

Institution:

Name of interviewee:

Note: This box to be removed when the questionnaire is anonymised for purposes of analysis

1. **Anonymity Code:**  
(for completion by researcher):

2. **Sex:**

3. **Generic title of current post:**  
eg Director of Finance,  
Assistant Registrar,  
Faculty/School Accountant

4. **Grade of post:**

5. **Current institutional location:**  
(eg corporate centre, School,  
Faculty, Department)

6. **Reporting line:** (eg Registrar/  
Secretary, Dean, Pro-Vice-Chancellor)

7. **Specific area of work (one sentence):**

8. **Number of years in current post:**

9. **Age band (please tick one):**     50+     40-49     30-39     20-29

10. **Qualifications (please tick appropriate boxes):**

Bachelor's degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Personnel/HR	<input type="checkbox"/>
Master's/MBA degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Professional Estates/Building	<input type="checkbox"/>
Postgraduate diploma	<input type="checkbox"/>	Company Secretary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Doctoral degree	<input type="checkbox"/>	Legal	<input type="checkbox"/>
Professional Finance/Accountancy	<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (please specify):	<input type="text"/>

11. **Number of years in university administration/management (please tick up to two boxes):**

Pre-1992 Sector	Post-1992 Sector	Other HE
<input type="checkbox"/> 30+	<input type="checkbox"/> 30+	<input type="checkbox"/> 30+
<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29
<input type="checkbox"/> 10-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 10-19	<input type="checkbox"/> 10-19
<input type="checkbox"/> 5-9	<input type="checkbox"/> 5-9	<input type="checkbox"/> 5-9
<input type="checkbox"/> Up to 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Up to 5	<input type="checkbox"/> Up to 5

**12. Number of institutions worked in:**

Pre-1992

Post-1992

Other HE

**13. Number of years' experience outside higher education sector:**

Public sector

Private sector

Please give brief description of type of non-higher education organisation(s) worked in:

**14. Professional development activities in last three years:**

Study leading to qualification:  Yes  No (if "yes" please specify)

Non-qualificatory training (in-house or external) related to professional practice:

Yes  No (if "yes" please specify)

Attending seminars/conferences:  Yes  No

Mentoring:  Yes  No

Presenting at seminars/conferences:  Yes  No

Authoring of published papers/monographs:  Yes  No

**15. Professional reading:**

Times Higher:  Regular  Occasional

Professional journals (please specify):

  Regular  Occasional

  Regular  Occasional

  Regular  Occasional

  Regular  Occasional

Books related to professional practice:  Regular  Occasional

**16. Job description – if you are willing to let me see your job description, I should be grateful if you could enclose this when returning the questionnaire**

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

## APPENDIX 4

# QUESTIONNAIRE FOR GRADUATES OF UK PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

### IDENTIFICATION

Name:

Current employing institution:

Year of completion:

Other academic and professional qualifications before taking programme:

Current post:

[Note: all personal information to be removed before analysis of questionnaire]

### YOURSELF

#### 1. How would you describe yourself in terms of professional identity:

General manager

Academic manager ie having academic contract

Specialist professional

Other (please specify)

#### 2. Please briefly describe your current role and functions:

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#### 3. Does your job include:

Management of staff?

Yes  No

Management of a budget?

Yes  No

Management of functions specific to HE (eg quality; widening participation)?

Yes  No

If "yes" to last question above, please specify:

Major projects (eg bids for external funding; capital projects)?

Yes  No

If "yes", please specify:

#### 4. Number of higher education institutions worked in:

#### 5. Please give brief details of other higher education posts held before your present one:

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## YOURSELF (CONTINUED)

6. Please give details of any non-higher education organisation(s) you have worked in:

## THE PROGRAMME

7. How did you hear about the programme?

8. Was your attendance on the programme:

On your own initiative

At the suggestion of someone else (eg your line manager; a colleague)

A combination of both

Other trigger (please specify):

9. Were there any difficulties in:

a) your institution agreeing that you could undertake the programme?  Yes  No

b) your institution making time available for your attendance?  Yes  No

If "yes", how did you overcome them?

10. a) Who paid your fees?

Self

Institution

Combination of both

Other (please specify)

b) Who paid your travel/accommodation costs (where applicable)

Self

Institution

Combination of both

Other (please specify)

11. What were your reasons for undertaking the programme?

12. Did you change your post either during or after completing the programme?  Yes  No

13. What have been, or are likely to be, the major outcomes of the programme for you, other than your response to question 12?

14. Which of the following aspects of the programme were most valuable for you (please rate 1-5, with 5 being most valuable)?

*Knowledge areas:*

Higher education policy context      1  2  3  4  5

Specialist areas (please specify)      1  2  3  4  5

*Skills development:*

Interpersonal skills      1  2  3  4  5

Technical skills (eg IT, budgeting)      1  2  3  4  5

Action learning/group work      1  2  3  4  5

Project work      1  2  3  4  5

Networking/discussion with peers      1  2  3  4  5

Other (please specify)      1  2  3  4  5

15. In relation to any project work (if applicable), what were the main benefits that you feel you gained?

16. Were there any ways in which you think that project experience on the programme could be improved?

17. Do you consider that there are advantages to a mixed group of participants on the programme (academic and professional managers)? If so, what were they?

18. Are there any disadvantages?

## THE FUTURE

19. Were there any outcomes that you hoped you would gain from the programme (eg knowledge, skills, personal development opportunities) that were not realised? If so, what were these?

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## THE FUTURE (CONTINUED)

20. Which of the following forms of development would you consider undertaking in future?

- Another formal programme of study
- Mentoring/coaching
- Secondment/exchange
- Training outside sector
- Doctorate

21. If "yes" to any of the above, what benefits do you think that these would offer you in career terms?

22. What do you see as the main barriers to your being able to undertake career development initiatives (such as further study, mentoring, secondments, exchanges)?

- Financial
- Time
- Institutional Support

23. Which of the following do you see as possible career options for the future?

- Academic management   
eg Head of Department, Dean, Pro-Vice-Chancellor,  
Vice-Chancellor
- Professional management   
eg Director of functional area, head of administration
- Quasi-academic role   
eg Director of teaching and learning/e-learning
- Project management role
- Move outside sector:*
- Other public sector
- Private sector
- Consultancy
- Other (please specify):

24. Do you have any other comments on career development provision for professional managers in HE in the UK?

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Thank you for completing this questionnaire.



## NOTES

## NOTES

## BIOGRAPHY

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Before joining the Institute of Education in 2007, Celia was Visiting Research Fellow in the School of Social Science and Public Policy at King's College, London, after a career in administration and management at the Universities of Kent, London and Birmingham. Her research interests include changing professional identities in higher education, the emergence of 'blended' roles between professional and academic domains, and the implications of these changes for career and leadership development. She has published widely on higher education management, and was founding editor of the journal of the Association of University Administrators, *perspectives: policy and practice in higher education*. She is currently an Editor of *Higher Education Quarterly*.

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