Sustaining the academic self: Challenges to the professoriate in a changing higher education landscape

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Astract

The university is an august institution of which the medieval origins are embedded in the history of the Christian church. Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, the university's tripartite mission of teaching, research and community engagement has been reduced to that of primary economic engine of society. Their future wealth is seen as dependent on knowledge as a marketable commodity. Subsequently, where the professoriate was historically considered the embodiment of the idea of the university, its social and cultural cohesion has come under increasing pressure amid incisive changes in higher education, both globally and locally. Against a discussion of extant themes in the literature concerning higher education change and a conceptual framework of social and personal identity theories, this article reports on a qualitative inquiry into the development and sustenance of academic identity among late-career professors at a large South African university. A small sample of participants was selected by means of purposive sampling, and data gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants described how they had shaped and sustained their academic identity across a lengthy career. The following themes emerged: academic identity as a function of interlocking environments; academic identity erosion in weakened communities of prac-

tice; the use of personal resources to sustain well-being and engagement in academe; and sustaining academic identity throughout the academic career. The discussion highlights the need for the contemporary university to consider the ongoing development of the professoriate if it is to maintain its vitality, retain intellectual capital and enhance the accomplishment of institutional mission.

Opsomming

Die universiteit is 'n grootse instelling wat sy oorsprong in middeleeuse tye in die Christelike kerk gehad het. Sedert die begin van die 21ste eeu is die universiteit se drieledige missie van onderrig, navorsing en gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid egter gereduseer tot dié van primêre ekonomiese enjin van die samelewing, waar laasgenoemde se toekomstige welvaart van kennis as bemarkbare kommoditeit afhanklik is. En waar die professoraat histories as die beliggaming van die gedagte van die universiteit beskou is, word sy sosiale en kulturele kohesie toenemend aan druk onderwerp te midde van ingrypende veranderinge in hoër onderwys, beide globaal en plaaslik. Ter bespreking van bestaande temas in die literatuur wat met innovering in hoër onderwys en 'n konseptuele raamwerk van sosiale en persoonlike identiteitsteorieë te make het, doen hierdie artikel verslag oor 'n kwalitatiewe ondersoek na die ontwikkeling en handhawing van akademiese identiteit onder professore aan 'n groot Suid-Afrikaanse universiteit wat aan die einde van hul loopbane staan. 'n Klein steekproef deelnemers is deur middel van doelbewuste steekproefneming bekom, en data is aan die hand van halfgestruktureerde diepte-onderhoude ingesamel. Die deelnemers het beskryf hoe hulle hul akademiese identiteit oor 'n lang loopbaan gevorm en gehandhaaf het. Die volgende temas het na vore gekom: akademiese identiteit as 'n funksie van aaneengeskakelde omgewings; die erosie van akademiese identiteit in verswakte praktykgemeenskappe; die gebruik van persoonlike hulpbronne om welstand en betrokkenheid by die akademiese wêreld te handhaaf; en die handhawing van akademiese identiteit hul loopbane deur. Die bespreking beklemtoon dit dat die hedendaagse universiteit die volgehoue ontwikkeling van die professoraat in aanmerking moet neem ten einde sy lewenskragtigheid te handhaaf, intellektuele kapitaal te behou, en te verseker dat die instelling sy missie vervul.

1. Introduction

The thousand-year development of the university in Western society is inextricably linked to history of the Christian church to which it owes its origins and its sponsorship as place of advanced training for professionals in the church, the legal system and the field of medicine (Clancy & Dill, 2009:3). During its first 700 years the teaching mission of universities was pre-eminent; in the early 19th century reforms in the German university system introduced the ideal of the unity of teaching and research. The early 20th century saw the university's mission extension to include social responsibility through which university teachers, as trained professionals, are called upon to engage in communities by sharing their knowledge and expertise. Embedded in the very idea of the university has been the foundational concept of rationality as essentially human characteristic, which humankind shares with the Creator (Venter, 2006:275). Notwithstanding the particularisation of the university in very diverse contexts over time, Lategan (2005;194) argues that the creation, guardianship and dissemination of knowledge through the activities of scholars and the transfer of knowledge through teaching comprise the universal features of the university by which it is recognised in any of its varied forms. The evolution of the role of the university over a millennium has been marked by an expansion of its function into a tripartite mission, the core of which has always remained the notion of knowledge as a value in itself (Visagie, 2005:225), whether knowledge is communicated in the formal lecture hall or in the non-formal learning and teaching situation typical of community service. However, during the past three decades the university has been overwhelmed by the view that it is primarily the economic engine of societies whose future wealth and material well-being is based on knowledge which has intrinsic value only as a marketable commodity rather than as a cultural and scientific resource (Santiago, Tremblay, Basri & Arnal, 2008). In his critique of the business model for the university, Venter (2006a:357) contends that this increasing sublimation of the university to the forces of technicism and economism implies a reductionist view of the university's character and mission with far-reaching implications for university teachers and for graduates. Venter (2006b:276-8) argues further that within a milieu which has made the economy the 'religion of our time' (Latouche in Venter,

2006b:276), the intellectual enterprise of the university has become dehumanised in the interests of the new idols of techno-economic progress. In sum, these developments constitute a new crisis for the very idea of the university (Segal, 1994).

Against this background, it follows that when the professioriate begins to regard its endeavours in purely economic terms, whether voluntarily or under the compelling pressure of the managerialism used to steer the market-driven university, the integrity of academic identity is jeopardised. Historically the professoriate has been the quintessence of the university (Altbach & Finkelstein, 1997:v11). Finkelstein, Seal and Schuster (1998:4) have argued that the fulfilment of the university mission has always been dependent on a dedicated and competent professiorate. Yet in the second decade of the 21st century the status of the professoriate is hotly contested by policy makers, university administrators and even faculty themselves (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). As early as 1984, French philosopher, Lyotard (1984) predicted that, as the status of knowledge succumbed to the forces of performativity, commodification and marketisation, the professoriate in a postmodern university would see its demise. Lyotard's treatise resonates with new import as the contemporary university increasingly faces waves of change which threaten the nature of the academic profession (Enders & De Weert, 2009:5). Many scholars (*inter alia* Altbach *et al*., 2009; Enders & De Weert, 2009; Brewe & Lucas, 2009; Nelson, 2010; Scott, 2009) have identified how the university is affected by closely inter-related megatrends.

Driven by the forces of globalisation and neo-liberal ideology, the university's role has shifted from creator and guardian of knowledge to a for-profit 'vendor' of academic products (Kinser & Levy, 2006:107); academics are relegated to knowledge workers (Neave, 2009:20) whose duties are managed and regulated by professional administrators and managers (Enders, De Boer & Leisyte, 2009:36). Traditional collegial patterns of decision-making and adherence to core academic values have been diminished by corporate models of leadership, governance and management (Sporn, 2006:141; Nelson, 2010:56). Accountability and quality assurance through state regulation in terms of funding, governance and administration have been augmented by new forms of regulation (El-Kharwas, 2006:23), demonstrated by tighter management characterised

by a performative and evaluative culture in which tools of performance appraisal borrowed from the non-academic workplace are used to measure professorial output (Brewe & Lucas, 2009:xv). The dominant epistemology of knowledge which has emerged is instrumentalism according to which pedagogy and research are focused on narrowly defined economic outcomes; a university education is valued only as job training, programmes are regarded as marketable commodities and students are relegated to consumers (Nelson, 2010:53). Research production is privileged above the university's cultural and intellectual agendas due to its potential for wealth creation (Brewe & Lucas, 2009: xiv). Post-World War II massification continues unabated (Altbach & Forest, 2006:1; Trowe, 2006:343), placing financial and infrastructural strain on institutions and creating a contingent academic workforce, part-time or contract faculty, hired to perform ancillary academic tasks (Nelson, 2010:54). Finally, technological developments exercise an increasingly incisive impact on the university, with benefits but also limitations (Bjarnason, 2006:377; Scott, 2009:70). Online programmes designed by central administration are often managed by part-time faculty (Nelson, 2010:51). The professor, no longer a stand-alone teacher, is overshadowed by information and technology experts, who may claim that their technical skills are ascendant over the intellectual capital of the former. The research process has been 'Googlerised' through more sophisticated analytical tools, the proliferation of refereed and non-refereed e-literature and the instant dissemination of research findings. However, face-to-face disciplinary discourse and student-faculty interaction has been impoverished by e-communication (Brabazon, 2007:105).

Few universities worldwide have escaped the impact of these aforementioned trends, however, national higher education systems are also particularised by local economic, social and political factors (Deem, 2001). In South Africa, post-1994 higher education transformation is shaped by policy initiatives which reflect global imperatives and local needs (Mapesela & Hay, 2005:111). *The Higher Education Act*, No.101 of 1997 (RSA, 1997) created a unitary, state-steered and quality-assured system of higher education, further shaped by institutional closures and mergers which reduced universities from 36 to 21 (MoE, 2001). A National Qualifications Framework (RSA, 2008) linked to an outcomes-based philosophy steered

curricula into an outcomes-based format. New funding mechanisms re-orientated university offerings to address national, regional and local education and training priorities (MoE, 2003). Within a short period universities became sites of social and political changes, such as a massive increase in black students, many requiring remedial tuition (Du Toit, 2010:89) and the redress of racial imbalances throughout the ranks of university employees through equity policies (Hall, 2010:360). Organizational processes, partly in the wake of global trends and partly as a tool to control and regulate institutional change, became managed according to a managerial-corporate style by an increasing corps of university bureaucrats (Mapesela & Hay, 2005).

These observations provide the context for formulation of the following question: *How does the professoriate sustain its academic identity in a higher education landscape shaped by global and national change*? The question is addressed though a qualitative inquiry at a South African university where global and national higher education transformation have led to accumulated tensions facing the professoriate.

2. Theoretical perspectives on identity

Identity(ies) is subsumed within the concept of the self, broadly encompassing the ways or categories one uses to specify who one is and to locate oneself relative to other people (Owens, 2003:207). Scholarship on self and identity can be broadly divided into two different branches of theories and separate literatures which have emerged independently of one another: social theories and psychosocial theories (Schwartz, Zamboanga & Weisskirch, 2008:635). In the context of academic identity, recent research relates primarily to social theories (Henkel, 2000; 2005; 2009), which treat identity as a function of one's membership in various social collectives and focuses primarily on the commonalities between people in different groups, not what differentiates individuals from each other (Jenkins, 2008:5). A primary way that people define their identity is in terms of their work (Lutfey & Mortimer, 2003:188). Professional identity is developed in distinct occupational settings. In this sense the identity of an academic is constructed within the occupational setting of the university community at large and the specific discipline in which an individual is located.

This statement alludes to two primary identity referents: the university as organisation and the academic discipline. Group membership informs the individual's attitudes and values and directs his/her behaviour in line with group interests (Pratt, Rockmann & Kaufmann, 2006). In particular, identification with the distinct culture of the academic discipline encompasses both an academic's idiosyncratic scholarly interests as well as shared values and dictates how he/she will enact the role of teacher and researcher within a community of like-minded peers (Neumann & Pallas, 2006). Novice academics are socialised within disciplinary communities, thereby learning the skills, knowledge and behaviours necessary to function as effective academics, the incentives for and markers of occupational success and appropriate attitudes towards colleagues and students (Lutfey & Mortimer, 2003:188). A positive academic identity rests, *inter alia*, on one's accomplishments in teaching, research and community service and one's recognition as a scholar by peers, local and international (Berzonsky & Kuk, 2000:235). Social identity theory assumes that referent social groups are stable and enduring (Glynn & Abzug, 2002:267). Incisive workplace changes, such as, worker autonomy, task routinisation, stressors and pressures and intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, may lead one to question assumptions about professional identity (Kohn & Schooler, 1983). In this vein, Archer (2008:385) argues that academic identity is disrupted by the new dynamic affecting disciplinary-based groups within universities, which force academics to relinquish traditional academic goals for short-term pragmatic objectives. Not all individuals are equally able to balance old and new views of the self as determined by these changes (King & Hicks, 2007:625). Loss of academic identity through goal displacement is generally held as injurious (Henkel, 2009); however, identity readjustment can result in positive outcomes (Enders & De Weert, 2009:269).

This discussion evidences the current preference for social theories in the study of academic identity; however, psycho-social theories and related constructs which stress personal identity construction cannot be entirely overlooked. An integrated position between the two branches of thought regards the personal and the social self as acting in unison (Hitlin, 2003). Thus, the role of temperament, interests, gender, race, class and values should also be considered in the construction of a professional identity (Leik & Goulding, 2000;

Lindholm, 2004). The professor always remains an individual who is continually constructing his/her identity according to both personal and group values (Hitlin, 2003), over historical time (Neuman & Pallas, 2006), through critical life and career events (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981) and in relation to external environments (McAlpine & Akerlind, 2010). Taking therefore an integrated view of identity in which social and personal identity function together, I conclude that academic identity develops as the outgrowth of a dynamic interplay of various collective and individual contexts and definitions.

3. Method

The empirical study was guided by an interpretive approach in which I adopted an emic or insider stance as a member of the community under inquiry. The study site was the only comprehensive dedicated distance education university in South Africa. An institutional merger together with popular demand for higher education has made the university the largest on the continent. Student enrolment (282 000 students in 2010) is comprised overwhelmingly by disadvantaged black students (Unisa, 2011b). The institutional mission is to be a service institution in the nation and the continent (Unisa, 2008:32); this aim co-exists with the pursuit of prestigious national research ranking. The organisational ethos is decisively shaped by new managerialism (cf. Land, 2001:6); a hierarchical organisational pattern (cf. Becher & Trowler 2001:9); tight coupling regarding policy definition and control of implementation (cf. McNay, 1995:108) and staff equity policies (Unisa, 2008). A shrinking academic component (33%) is countered by a growing professional/administrative component (52%) (Unisa, 2011a).

Data was gathered from eight late-career professors selected by purposeful sampling (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:320). Participants comprised four men and four women with continuous work experience at the institution ranging from with 20-38 years; all had six years or less before mandatory retirement at age 65. In-depth interviews were conducted in participants' homes or offices and recorded on digital recorder and transcribed verbatim. Participants were asked to reflect on their lengthy academic careers, ruminating on personal development, past and current circumstances. An interview schedule allowed pre-planned questions and additional probes as the interviews evolved. Ethical requirements were fulfilled by

informing participants fully of the research aim; obtaining voluntary informed participation; and ensuring participant confidentiality through the use of pseudonyms and removal of any specific information that could lead to identification. Data analysis took place during and after data gathering. Raw data comprised the transcriptions of the recording and notes made directly after the interviews. Analytic guidelines for grounded theory (Charmaz, 2010) were used: line by line coding, axial coding and extensive memo writing. Four interpretative themes were developed based on segments of data, the conceptual literature and in-depth reflection. Cross-checking information and conclusions with actual participants for additional information, verification and insight was done where necessary (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006:10). As the inquiry aimed at an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences from their own frame of reference, no attempt was made to generalise findings.

4. Findings

The findings present the four main interpretative themes:

Academic identity as a function of interlocking environments

McAlpine and Akerlind (2010) refer to the multiple nested environments in which academics work: programmatic teams, departments, faculties, institutions, the higher education system, national policy priorities and beyond to the global higher education arena. Layers of policy and organisational change filter down through interlocking environments to affect eventually the practice of individuals and communities of academics (Bleiklie & Kogan, 2006:10). Professor A, historian and professor of 18 years, reflected on the ecology of his workplace: "*We are living in a sort of double circle. First there is the business model which we must contend with. But there is also the political and the socio-political environment that put yet other rings around the university with all their policies for change. These rings just keep us squeezing tighter and tighter.*" The participants all mentioned incisive changes in the academic departments that they had joined decades earlier. The most frequently discussed shift was the replacement of a collegial ethos, marked by trust, respect for scholarship and discipline-linked loyalty, by a managerial ethos, marked by regulation and control frequently exer-

cised by professional managers outside the pale of the department. Participants mentioned increased and repetitive reporting on every level usually at short notice, the regulation of traditionally flexible working hours and the trebling of administrative responsibilities. The most tangible consequence was the displacement of time dedicated to substantive teaching and research by administrative and organisational tasks. However, as Bourdieu (1984) indicates, the development of academic capital is a highly time-intensive activity. Participants found that for every new demand from management, a professional need had to be sacrificed. This management style challenged a sense of self-worth. Professor H, a scholar of international reputation who has regularly acted as Head of Department, explained the blow to self-esteem: "*You feel that you are just a dog's body. You are not a decision-maker anymore, not even in the areas where the other people don't have any competence. And I am quite sure that those managers do nothing more, what more can they do than just sign? There is a good word to describe this kind of management. Intelligence uses it – surveillance! You know, there is an erosion of trust and an erosion of perhaps loyalty as well*." Professor A attributed the deteriorating status of the professoriate to its gradual proletarisation: *"The think-tank, the critical mass in a university is the professiorate. And I think the professor should be nurtured. But I don't think they are being nurtured. I have experienced it at times myself; you feel a bit like a blue collar worker."*

Nested even deeper within departments are programmatic structures which, in turn, host small, intimate discipline-specific teaching teams. Professor P repeatedly located her academic socialisation and attributed her primary identity as a comparative educationist to her membership of such a team. The ripple effect of the National Qualifications Framework and the subsequent restructuring of the former Faculty of Education around teacher's career trajectories rather than disciplinary teaching teams were disbanded and reconstituted along Mode 2 knowledge lines. According to Henkel (2000; 2005; 2009), a primary threat to academic identity lies in university programmes structured around Mode 2 which undermine the legitimacy of discipline-based knowledge in which academic practice is predominantly validated. Modularisation and the introduction of a semester system further created a Fordist delivery of student as-

signments and examinations to be marked throughout the year. These changes diminished time for dedicated disciplinary discourse among colleagues and fragmented fruitful research partnerships. Professor P compared the peer fellowship enjoyed in teaching teams over the current system of formalised mentorship agreements: "*In the old days we really boosted one another in all the lively discussions – informal plus the organised colloquiums – but especially the informal discussions when you could peep into someone's office and chat. We didn't call it mentorship, but it was mentorship. And it was much more effective than these corporate models of mentorship. Nowadays you must sign a contract and you can get a certificate and so on. But it is not suitable for academia.*"

In the wider institutional arena, participants encountered the repeated re-invention of the larger structures in which their home departments had been housed, accompanied by new nomenclature. Professor A traced the vagaries of restructuring: "*First we were a faculty, then a department in a super-faculty, then a cluster, then a department again and now a school. Rumour has it we are soon to be a faculty again. Sometimes I struggle to remember what address to use in official correspondence.*" New structures created new power alliances and generated a plethora of new 'bosses' in newly created management posts. It also impacted on scholarly reputations grown over years within former structures. Professor G found he could no longer depend on his status as an experienced researcher within the new and larger formations with their new cadre; he had to establish his academic colours again, a task for which he had little inclination three years from retirement.

Moreover, an academic's skills are expected to penetrate the broader community through community service and offer an important source of academic identity. Several participants found that their specialisation matched many service opportunities which in turn provided fertile ground for new research. However, community service at this institution has also not escaped corporatisation. In this environment, small-scale, 'goodwill' no-profit projects are dismissed by the new bureaucracy. To receive official recognition, projects must be linked to lucrative sponsorships and voluminous reporting of quantifiable 'outputs'. Professor H described this change: "*Community service seems to have been high-jacked by corporatism. People in the past did community service, often as individuals in small ways but that*

certainly wouldn't be on the radar screen for the University to brag about any more. … The university has now taken it on itself to be again in charge of everything that goes on. And now only essentially community service with a corporate label can be accepted."

Within the macro environment participants were affected by national targets for the redress of disadvantaged students and labour market requirements within a developing economy. Professor P referred to the effect of increasing massification: "*When I started my career, we had like 400 students in the one module in the Honours. We had the luxury of a whole team of experts that could specialise on one certain aspect [of the course]. So we had much more time to go into depth. Now students have increased to 4000 in three years and these days teaching is a lot more shallow.*" Further demand for doctoral graduates had led to an increase in the enrolment of academically underprepared candidates enrolled as a result of political and economic rather than pedagogical considerations. Professor H mentioned that his reputation as a sympathetic and skilled supervisor was strained by the difficulty of guiding at-risk candidates through the mode of distance education.

Identity erosion in weakened communities of practice

Trained to be experts in a discipline, academics primarily develop identity within communities of practice. But transcending the values of disciplinary units has traditionally been loyalty to the idea of the university as embodied in core activities: the preservation and the creation of knowledge, the improvement of service to society and a cultural and civilising function (Kerr, 1963) and the core values of autonomy, critical faculty, creativity, rigour and integrity (Tapper & Palfryman, 2010; Henkel, 2000). All participants had been lured by this ideal in their occupational choice and remained a strong motif as they reflected on their lengthy academic careers. Professor E noted, *"When I got my first appointment, it was just wow! No one tells you what research to do. You are free to choose a project that grips you, on which you feel you really want to do research. You can develop your teaching content as you wish, as you think best, provided you can substantiate it. The freedom to attend congresses of your choice. And we still have a lot of that freedom.*" Professor H identified the most valued academic value in a distinguished career of 38 years as: "*Freedom!*" Participants agreed that maintenance of

the core values is necessary to sustain what Professor P termed "enchantment" with the academic life. However, the university's assumption of a business model relegated academic accomplishments to measurable outputs and in this climate participants felt that core values had rapidly lost currency. Insidiously the language of new managerialism had 'colonised' the self. This was aptly illustrated by Professor L's self-description. Professor L, well-known in institutional circles for his bold critical faculty, frequently referred to himself as an intellectual, a philosopher, a thinker. Yet when asked to define his professorship, he used the ubiquitous 5 point scale of the performance appraisal system which he claimed to despise. He explained, "*How do I see myself as a professor? OK, when it comes to research, OK I am on track. Exceed expectations, I think. So I am a 4. Academic citizenship, a 3. I meet expectations, if not more, and academic leadership also. Community service, I'm a zero. I already said to my HOD, I have a zero for community service because there is a limit to what one can do.*"

Core values are further defined and concretised within disciplinary units. Here a positive academic identity is based on respect and status earned within a community and is earned by quality teaching, publications and professional service. Disciplines, the territory of a particular 'academic tribe', collectively receive a legitimising identity from the university and are further differentiated in status and thus power by the nature of the discipline (Becher & Trowler, 200l:58; 170). All participants derived their most salient sense of self through membership of an intellectual peer group as defined by their discipline. Professor H has disclosed that his greatest job satisfaction, self-esteem and his resilience in difficult times were located in his disciplinary membership. Thirty-eight years earlier Professor H had joined a new department created to teach an emerging field and here he had enjoyed novel opportunities to pursue personal research interests and to act on the cutting edge of course development. This context fed a sense of intense collegiality and enthusiastic scholarship among all departmental members which survives today, albeit threatened by the new managerialism. Professor H still regards his discipline-based department as a haven where academic vigour can be replenished; however, he noted that his colleagues are far less eager to engage in disciplinary discourse in the face of mounting administrative responsibilities. In contrast, Pro-

fessor P found that when a disciplinary 'home' is eroded by or-ganisational restructuring, an important source of self-renewal is removed. She recalled: "*I am a bit nostalgic when I think what we had before. Being in disciplined-based departments made much more sense for me in terms in scholarship. I especially remember my promoter (also HoD) who inspired me about reading more, being more inquisitive, becoming a scholar, asking me uncom-fortable questions.*" Her experience was endorsed by other parti-cipants who, as a result of the same restructuring, had lost their 'guild power'. Without a strong disciplinary base in which to foster research partnerships, participants adopted different strategies. Two sought private alliances with academics outside their imme-diate field of specialisation; two others chose to operate as 'loners' avoiding partnerships and hereby experiencing a sense of isolation which they had not experienced in their earlier careers.

The broad university community also provides trans- or multidisci-plinary structures, often assembled around methodological consi-derations or a particular team project, in which academic identity can be nurtured and reputation built (Brewe & Lucas, 2009:1). Membership of these circles is linked to prowess as a field worker, method specialist or analyst. Professor S is a skilled methodologist who understands her identity predominantly as a seasoned re-searcher rather than a discipline-specific specialist. She recalled her discovery when a novice of the sheer joy of doing research: "*I loved it. I just loved it. I did some research early on in my career – I don't even think it was very good research – but I then realised that I loved it.*" She publishes, consults and teaches about research methods, thus reinforcing her researcher identity. All the participants referred to the importance of publications as paramount to sus-taining a positive academic identity. After Professor M was passed over for a promotion in favour of a male colleague some fifteen years earlier, she had determined to compensate by building her publications list. To do this, she devoted considerable private in-come to acquire research skills and develop writing proficiency in English, her second language. She was willing to produce, what McNay (2007:47) terms 'free output', to forge a path to her current position as award-winning scholar. However, participants were acu-tely aware that the reward of peer approval generated by research excellence has been superseded by the race to acquire financial

rewards associated with research and the imperative of satisfying annual quotas required by managers. Several participants stressed that, within the discourse of new managerialism, the importance of publications as quantifiable 'products', 'outputs' or 'deliverables' and related how they cold-bloodedly downgraded other indicators of academic camaraderie – committee service, peer review, external examination and community service – as activities less profitable to an annual performance appraisal regulated by a bureaucratic agenda which makes publications paramount. Professor G remarked how the system of performance appraisal encouraged the production of quicker, short-term academic outputs, such as articles which are income generating, over long term projects such as books. Similarly, the time required to secure publication in high quality journals had to be weighed against the pressure to publish in sufficient quantity to meet annual publication performance targets set by the management.

In summary, participants' experiences indicated that the core values of the university as a community as well as disciplinary and trans-disciplinary values had suffered in a performative environment. Academic identities as formed in earlier career stages had eroded and had been adjusted by employing a pragmatic approach in which participants modified or displaced their academic activities to satisfy environmental demands. Displaced goals meant that participants frequently, albeit reluctantly, traded the deeply held values of academe with short-term pragmatic objectives.

Using personal resources to sustain well-being and engagement in academe

Individual responses to external influences in the academic workplace are variously determined on a personal level (McAlpine & Akerlind, 2010:4). As agentic beings, academics have the capacity to initiate self-change and to engage with their environment with the purpose of managing it. Conversely they can opt to exercise constraint which may serve the purpose of covertly defying social dictates (Mead, 1934). The participants disclosed a variety of forms of agency as they faced daily, indeed hourly, a barrage of emailed instructions, announcements and requests from management. When faced with time-consuming and repetitive demands for increased reporting of her activities, Professor M admitted: "*I play the*

game. Give them what they want but as quickly and briefly as possible". Thus, she demonstrated outward compliance but side-stepped engagement in issues peripheral to her own career interests. However, Professor G chose to disengage as far as possible from the university discourse, a decision which left him deflated and disappointed in what had once been a lively and satisfying academic career. Although he fulfilled his formal duties meticulously, his academic pursuits had, to some extent, stalled as he suffered what he described as an "*erosion of trust"* in relations with management. Professor S had faced several disappointments in which support for her endeavours had faltered in the morass of administrative minutiae. She, however, felt that the professoriate's hallmark was active leadership which necessitated taking up cudgels on important issues, irrespective of personal setbacks. Professor H, the longest serving professor, recognised the co-existence of several choices: one could act and hereby preserve identity as a senior leader in academe or disengage and thereby distance oneself from critical dialogue. But the choice exacted its toll on personal well-being as he explained:

> To maintain vitality is very difficult. One strategy sometimes is to just let an issue pass by. Just do what is expected and there is a time for that but that also absorbs a lot of energy. Another strategy is to take issue with some of the managerial excesses that descend on us from above. But this can be a very wearing experience and it takes its toll in terms of one's energy, so one has to try and do this in moderation.

Professor H expanded on another sensitive issue which affect levels of engagement in the university's policy agenda. Institutional change at the university was equated with political transformation. Critical questioning of issues, pedagogical or otherwise, was regarded with suspicion by management. To preserve credibility, academics had to avoid being branded as a political Luddite, an individual who was anti-transformation and therefore politically conservative. In his own words, Professor H continued:

> It [critical questioning] can also place one in a certain – perhaps the word is too strong – jeopardy. One has got to continually be looking after your own reputation, avoiding other people's perception of you as someone who is unco-operative and resisting change. Yes, because there are a lot of labels that are bandied about in this environment.

Sustaining of a sense of professional well-being is determined largely by individual capacity to uncover positive meaning in adverse circumstances. Some individuals are able to redeem workplace turbulence by creating new opportunities for themselves; others see change contaminating their goals and lose motivation to define new goals (McAdams & Bowman, 2001). The redemption of setbacks positively relate to sustained career satisfaction and success (King & Hicks, 2007). Several participants mentioned that teaching and particularly the interaction with students kept passion for their job alive. Professor E felt that daily frustrations could be overridden by the satisfaction derived from positive student response: "*Just the way students say after a lecture, 'Wow! That was really good and it was so boring to listen to the other professor.' They drop you an email and say it was really interesting to listen to someone like you. I think it should shine out of you – which you like what you are doing, that you speak from a position of academic authority, you really know what you are talking about.*" Her pleasure in her own competency as a teacher was echoed by others. Experiences of postgraduate supervision were also cited as generally a source of job satisfaction, although this was ameliorated by the difficulties of guidance provided at a distance and underpreparedness of many students.

Sustaining academic identity across career course contexts

Variations in an individual's life and career circumstances affect the fundamental stability of identity; identity develops, shifts and may erode over time (Neumann & Pallas, 2006:441). Certainly academic identity is affected by critical events, such as opportunities for professional growth and tenure (Neumann, 2009), career transitions, such as, appointment to administrative positions or altered working conditions (Reybold & Alamia, 2008) and by stages of career development (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Becher & Trowler, 2001:144), *inter alia* retirement and post-retirement positions (Berberet, 2006: 111; Ehrenberg, 2006:114).

Career transitions created by sideways shifts into administrative positions, such as Head of Department or programme manager, were generally experienced by the participants as stultifying. The position of administrator did not readily form part of the academic identity and inevitably meant time lost in the endeavour to keep up with

one's field. During terms of office as Department chair, Professor H found that academic pursuits lost out to the demands of routinised administrative duties; once a term was completed, one faced the reality of a diminished research record, so central to academic reputation. Redeployment to a different disciplinary community required an adjustment of one's identity. Professor A provided a case in point. Well-established in his field as a historian, Professor A's career was hobbled in the mid-90s when political change brought his discipline into disrepute due to its links with *apartheid* ideology. His Department Chair proposed that he re-school himself in educational management and he eventually assumed coordination of the Master's programme. He described the events as "a *tough task ... I was really thrown into deep water. However, the difficulty was not only in the academic transition – that was not so difficult. The difficulty lay in the transition to administrative work as programme manager".* Altered work conditions which afford more flexibility in a rigorously managed environment had enabled certain participants to regain a sense of purpose. To accommodate staff expansion and to stimulate research and related government funding, the university permitted senior staff who met stipulated criteria to work from home. Performance was monitored through quarterly reports and performance appraisals, work allocation was increased but incumbents were again able to follow an elastic personalised schedule. All four participants who had taken this option described this as career revitalisation, mainly because it liberated them from the grosser aspects of new managerialism. Professor P mentioned, "*They've already established the people working from home bring out more research. They are much more productive.*" In sum, greater research productivity had contributed to a reinvigorated status as a scholar and hence a more positive academic identity.

Finally, late career professors face identity adjustment associated with their career stage (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Bataille & Brown, 2006). The participants differed in their efforts to sustain academic vitality in this phase. Three participants remained energetic in their ongoing endeavour to develop their careers through publications, conference attendance, professional training and applications for awards and research ratings. The other participants tended either to maintain their *status quo* or limit career goals. They met minimum institutional requirements for re-

search, attended the occasional conference and emphatically stated their disinterest in applying for awards or ratings. They had begun to show at least some signs of the lowered aspirations of a 'stuck' professional (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981:58). Frustration in an academic workplace in which they felt less and less at home, participants vacillated in '*counting the years to retirement' and expressing their inability to imagine a future without an academic self.* Although all participants were six years or less from retirement, plans to sustain professional identity were vague. The university does not provide late career planning. As in most universities, professional development opportunities cater almost exclusively for new academics, few, if any, address needs of senior academics as an important source of intellectual capital (Bataille & Brown, 2006). Participants were uninformed about policy and procedures for post-retirement appointment as academic fellow; not surprisingly as the process proves cumbersome, prospects of direct remuneration are flimsy and the job description is vague (Unisa, 2009). Three participants expected that the university would retain them in a contractual capacity; others hoped to retain their academic task through private consultation. Similar to their approach to career development which they all attributed largely to chance, the participants anticipated retirement "*just happening*" and had not given its impact on identity loss serious thought.

5. Conclusion

Lyotard's (1984) early caution that the professiorate would meet its nemesis in a postmodern world might have seemed extreme at its first publication; however, hindsight has proved it remarkably accurate (Roberts, 1998). The last two decades have increasingly confronted the professoriate with unprecedented global and local change in macro and micro contexts, endorsing Altbach *et al.'*s (2009) observation that university teaching is a profession under unprecedented stress. This qualitative study has corroborated this insight in the current context of a large South African university. Participants had been enchanted at an early age by the possibility of a "*life spent with ideas*", a career in which knowledge for itself was the core value (Visagie, 2005). Academe had given them the chance to realise this aspiration and "*for a lifetime*", in a senior professor's words, they had been engaged in valuable academic work within the context of their

institution. However, since "the pendulum has swung from the academics to managers and bureaucrats" (Altbach *et al*., 2009:xvi), these same professors have seen themselves bereft of much of their autonomy. The greater the dissonance between the reality of the workplace and the representation of the academic self within it, the greater the psychological effort required by the individual to sustain his/her original enchantment with the profession (Bourdieu, 1984). When these participants entered the university, they had expected to maintain a fairly stable professional identity, generating relatively consistent social rewards within the academic workplace. However, this study suggested that this had not entirely been their experience as, under the duress of the business model of the university, they found it increasing taxing to maintain a consistent identity as scholars.

The literature endorses the findings of the study. Worldwide the professor's professional status is continually being diminished under institutional, local and global pressures created by the shift to a truncated university mission. These pressures have reduced the university's century-old values rooted in its Christian heritage which embraced "the preservation of eternal truths, the creation of new knowledge and the improvement of service wherever truth and knowledge of a higher order may serve the needs of man" (Kerr, 1963:38). The study confirmed that the 'new' role of the university as economic engine in the service of material progress (Gellert, 1992; Venter, 2006a; 2006b) has palpable implications for academic identity. Notwithstanding, the findings also indicated that the academic environment still offers sufficient opportunities for the resilient and creative academic to resist disenchantment. It remains, however, to universities, the state and society to revalue the academic profession; it is simply too important to be dismissed in the vortex of higher education change and the attraction of materialism.

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