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Polarisation of academic career building—A generational perspective on the early-career phase

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In the current managerial and market-driven university context, academic career trajectories have become increasingly fragmented, diversified and polarised. The competition for research funding and university positions has tightened, making career building increasingly demanding and risky and intensifying the divide between the haves and have-nots in academia (e.g. Fanghanel 2012; Henkel 2012; Musselin 2010; Sutherland 2017; Ylijoki & Henriksson 2017; Ylijoki & Ursin 2013). Since casualisation has been a common strategy for universities in coping with turbulent and insecure funding conditions, precarious fixed-term and part-time employment has become widespread (see e.g. Enders 2000; Murgia & Poggio 2019; Rhoades 2012). This uncertain university environment places particular pressure on junior academics at the start of their career trajectories, who can be found across a wide range of positions in research and/or teaching (see the chapters by Deem, Geschwind et al. and O'Connor).

According to Laudel and Gläser (2008), early-career researchers are the most vulnerable group of academic staff, as they encounter worsening career prospects at the same time that they need to establish themselves as independent scholars. Taking a similar tone, Bozzon, Murgia and Possio (2019) emphasise that junior academics need to build their careers in increasingly frenetic environments, characterised by the casualisation of the workforce and contract fragmentation, expanding requirements and tighter competition, as well as increasingly strict formal and informal time limits for reaching specific career stages. On this

basis, they argue that junior academics face a significant risk of becoming trapped in temporary research and teaching appointments, without prospects for permanent employment and career progress. This is especially true for female early-career academics (see also Nikunen 2012). Likewise, Archer (2008) underlines that contract researchers in particular, who form a necessary component of a university's workforce and contribute to the career development of principal investigators, tend to remain invisible and unrecognised in career promotion.

The changed conditions for academic career building have important implications for generational relations between junior and senior academics. Compared with juniors, seniors began their careers at a time characterised by a different understanding of what it takes to forge an academic career and what being an academic means. In her UK-based study, Henkel (2000) found that junior academics who began their careers in the 1980s and 1990s entered a very different profession and faced different expectations than senior academics who started their careers in the 1960s and 1970s. Owing to these generational differences, experiences of the early-career phase and its requirements differ radically, shaping individuals' overall stance to academic life and its ideals. Belonging to a certain generational group, which have been socialised within distinct governance and management models, shapes how academics respond to managerial changes in higher education (Santiago, Carvalho & Cardoso 2015) and how they see, for example, the role of supervision (Müller 2014). Moreover, compared to junior academics, the older generation tends to have more employment safety through permanent contracts, with some seniors having advanced smoothly up the career ladder, even reaching the top. This allows them a degree of distance from the current performativity pressures (see the chapter by Aarrevaara and Pyykkö). In practice, this allows the older generation to demonstrate more agency by engaging in work that 'really matters', rather than spending their time strategically fulfilling the expectations of an institution they do not 'believe in' as junior academics often must do (Martimianakis & Muzzin 2015).

Accordingly, several studies using a generational lens have revealed substantial differences between junior and senior academics' perceptions of career building. For instance, Cannizzo (2018) found a clear distinction between late-career and early-career academics in their perceived degree of control over their career trajectories. Seniors spoke about how academics shape their careers, whereas juniors described how career trajectories shape academics. Unlike seniors, the survival of early-career academics depends on their ability to comply with managerial imperatives, which they saw as immovable. As such, juniors tended to adjust to

the prevailing conditions and adopt an instrumental career rationality and the required temporal order of career building (Matthies & Torka 2019). This is reflected in how academics promote themselves, with junior academics' CVs seen as a self-promotional marketing tool written in self-laudatory language or hyperbole, while seniors' CVs are relatively anodyne and descriptive historical records (Macfarlane 2020). Similarly, Hammarfelt and de Rijcke (2015) found a generation gap in publication strategies: the older generation was more critical towards externally driven publishing strategies with a focus on international peer-reviewed journals, while the younger counterparts viewed this strategy more positively. In addition, the younger generation has been reported to be more productive in publishing than their senior counterparts (Kyvik & Aksnes 2015).

In this chapter, we explore junior academics' career building in the social sciences in Finland. Originating in the ideology of Nordic welfare, the Finnish higher education system has been a latecomer for the introduction of the practices and ideals of New Public Management. However, since the beginning of this millennium, implementation has been particularly rapid, making the Finnish system one of the most competitive in the world (Auranen 2014; McKelvey & Holmén 2009). This change has substantially remoulded the conditions for junior academics' career trajectories, with Finnish academics having encountered different career ideals, norms and expectations in their early-career phase depending on when they started in the university.

Career building in Finnish universities has followed what Musselin (2005) calls the tournament model, in which many candidates apply for an open post against heavy competition. Under this model, obtaining a permanent university position, especially a full professorship, is a protracted, risky and highly selective process. This situation has become increasingly challenging in recent years due to the introduction of a tenure track system, which distinguishes at quite an early career stage those who are on track towards a professorship and those who will not be. This has created further polarisation and elitism among junior academics and fostered an increasingly narrow view of what it means to be successful (Herbert & Tienari 2013; Pietilä 2019).

Drawing on a generational perspective, we investigate senior professors' and junior academics' understandings of early career building in university. Our research questions are:

1. How do senior professors make sense of the demands for junior academics' career building?
2. How do junior academics experience the beginning of career building?
3. What

kinds of career strategies do junior academics use to manage the current conditions of becoming an academic? While juniors describe their ongoing experiences, professors make sense of the current situation by recalling their own start in academia and comparing the past with the present. In this way, the generational lens makes visible the temporal layers of academic career building, tracing both continuities and changes in intergenerational experiences and views. The aim is to offer a nuanced understanding of what has changed and what remains the same in academics' early-career phase.

The chapter is organised as follows. The next section introduces our data and method. Then, we present our results. First, we present the views of the professors, then we discuss the juniors' experiences and how these align with the ideas of the senior staff. Finally, we discuss our results from the perspective of how academics are managed and reflect on the relevance of the generational perspective for understanding academic career trajectories.

Data and method

Our study is based on two sets of interview data. The first set comprises 10 one-on-one interviews with senior professors (four females and six males). Each of these interview participants was a full professor, working full-time. All had a long work history in academia and had served as professors for decades at the time of interview. For most, their work history dates to the late 1970s and 1980s, with only one interviewee having started in the early 1990s. The interview themes covered career history, changes in academia and research work, and views of the future.

The second data set consists of focus group discussions with junior academics. In total, there were 12 participants (nine females and three males). All had completed their doctoral dissertations within the last five years. However, their biological ages differed, as some participants had a work history of several years before their PhD, while others had progressed straight from their undergraduate degrees to a PhD. All participants worked full-time in temporary positions in research (eight participants) or teaching (four participants). The themes discussed included work history, current working patterns, their aims for the future and perceived threats.

All our interviewees were native Finns. They worked at three Finnish multi-faculty, research-intensive universities in the fields of sociology, social policy and social work. These fields were chosen because, in the current higher education and science policy landscapes, they tend

to hold a more marginalised position as compared to many hard fields, especially technological disciplines, which have clearer links with economic growth and high potential for commercialisation. Our background assumption was that the transformations in academic career building would be a particularly topical issue in these soft fields.

The interview sessions took about 90 minutes. The discussions were recorded and transcribed. The quotations in the text are translated from Finnish to English. We offer particularly apposite phrases from the data in inverted commas. In the longer quotations, the names given are pseudonyms. Throughout the chapter, we refer to our interviewees as juniors and seniors. This does not refer to their biological age, but instead to their academic age. Juniors have attained their PhD within the last five years and are in the beginning phase of their academic career paths, whereas seniors have worked as university professors for decades.

Grounded in interpretative close reading, both data sets were first analysed by discerning all references to early career building and mapping the diversity of views and experiences. Second, in the cross-generational reading, the themes were investigated within and between the two generations. We compared how the professors remember their own start at the university, how they perceive the current early-career phase and the accordance of their views with the experiences of the present-day juniors. Thus, we rely on three kinds of accounts of starting an academic career—professors' memories, their current views and juniors' experiences—and search for their interconnections, differences and similarities to unravel the complexity of the early-career phase in the current university context.

Results

Senior academics' views

Senior professors speak about and reflect on junior academics' career building against their memories of the beginning of their own careers in academia. Their accounts are characterised by a sharp distinction between before and now: what it was like when they entered academia and how it is today. All professors agree that the nature of career building has changed dramatically, turning it into a substantially more competitive, demanding and uncertain endeavour.

Professors look back on the past in a shared way. According to their collectively held view, academic work used to be based on one's passion; it was carried out in peace and quiet, allowing a long period of immersion in theoretical thinking, wide-ranging reading and persistent writing. It was a holistic '360-degree activity', capturing all aspects of the phenomenon under study and taking as much time as was required. The goal was to improve the world and make a contribution to the intellectual heritage of the scientific community. The most valued outcome was a monograph with '300 pages and at least 30 pages of references', mostly in the Finnish language. Since 'everything had to be invented by yourself', academics did not expect to receive any guidance or supervision from their professors. They worked alone and enjoyed academic freedom to pursue their own research interests. This offered them an 'intensive life driven by passion', without boundaries between work and other aspects of their lives.

From today's perspective, professors often comment on the past with gentle irony and subtly laugh at themselves. They admit that although the ideals and goals were high and ambitious, in practice they were not necessarily realised. They say that it was 'a bit comic that making dissertations took 20 years and people did whatever they wanted'. For instance, one professor mentions that 'writing my dissertation was really fun and nice, but of course, I could have done it much quicker'. Despite these reservations, all professors remember their early-career days, especially the dissertation phase, with warmth and yearning, repeatedly saying that it was 'the best time' of their career.

Grounded in the memories of how things used to be, the professors were asked to reflect on the conditions of the early-career phase in present-day academia. They all say that the requirements have increased substantially. Several professors acknowledge that their merits on starting their own careers would not be enough or valid now. From this basis, they express their compassion for junior academics and emphasise that pursuing an academic career trajectory is nowadays much more uncertain and demanding than it was in the past.

According to the professors, academic career building has become increasingly strict and standardised. The rules of the game are clear, and juniors know what is expected of them. The core requirement is to establish 'a strong publication record at high quality forums'; that is, having articles published in high-impact English-language journals. Research merits continue to determine academic career success as in the past, but monographs in Finnish have lost their value and place their author at risk of academic suicide. Instead, 'the norm of

publishing internationally has become self-evident', and junior academics must learn and adapt to this reality. In addition, juniors need to have a diversity of other skills, such as competence in teaching and supervising, the ability to network, and 'street credibility' in social and economic outreach so that they are able to 'fluently operate in a variety of forums at home and abroad' and 'be in dialogue with practitioners and media'.

Since the 1970s and 1980s, when the professors entered the university, the organisation of research has transformed significantly, shaping junior academics' career paths. Instead of working alone and enjoying academic freedom, present-day juniors work mostly on externally funded projects under the guidance and control of the principal investigator. Academic work has become more 'professor-oriented' because seniors are responsible for attracting funding for and managing project activities. Therefore, junior academics 'need to be flexible and able to integrate into new projects' and fit their research interests to a given project context. Further, due to being dependent on the success of funding applications, project-based work offers only short-term temporary contracts. This makes it necessary for junior academics to learn to cope with employment uncertainty, find ways to create career continuity over contract ruptures and engage in active fundraising themselves.

These changes in academic work have temporal implications. The pace of work has accelerated because more and better outputs are expected in a shorter period. The professors emphasise the lack of time for free-floating wondering: results must now be achieved in a specific timeframe. Similarly, the career building steps now have clear temporal limitations. For instance, a doctoral degree needs to be completed in approximately four years, as compared to the 15–20 years more common decades ago. In addition, the early-career phase entails an age-related temporal boundary. It has become more important that juniors be young; in the past, it was possible to start an academic career at a later age.

While the professors concur in their view on how academic career building has changed, they have radically different, even polarised, attitudes towards the changes. The dominant view is critical and negative, seeing the changes as deteriorating both the quality of science and the work experience of junior academics.

According to the negative view, the changes have narrowed the diversity and lowered the quality of academic work, focusing it on the 'churning out of articles'. This leads junior academics to perform shallow work, as 'profound thinking has been replaced by productive publishing'. Further, junior academics must avoid taking scientific risks, which could

jeopardise their careers. Instead of investigating new directions and creating ‘theoretical openings’, juniors need to remain within the mainstream and already established research tracks. This produces ‘trivial knowledge’, which is ‘nonsense although it is valid’.

Concentrating on writing articles for an international readership also leads to the neglect of locally and nationally important issues, weakening the societal impact of academic research. Thus, the changes, and especially the dominance of the international article format, are regarded as a serious threat to the quality of research:

It is absurd that current research has become like factory production and the criteria for a good researcher are so strict. For instance, international journal articles have a clear format, and if you learn it, you can produce articles really quickly. However, I of course value profound scholarship and wide learning.
(Hans, professor of sociology)

Further, the current demands in the early-career phase are said to have high personal costs for junior academics. Under the current ‘measurement culture’, juniors must ‘prove their worth constantly’, strive for maximal performance and accelerate their productivity. Therefore, ‘the tempo has increased terribly’ and work has become too hectic; ‘unlike machines, human beings cannot work all the time’. Moreover, tough competition for posts and merits jeopardises social relations between fellow academics. Junior academics face ‘awful competition’ that ‘gets more and more bloody’. Moreover, project-based research ‘increases overall control over individual members’, which prevents junior academics from following their personal scientific curiosity and developing into independent and original scholars. Overall, the implications of the current university climate for the wellbeing of junior academics are serious, especially in the long run:

I think the younger generation is uncritical. I really hope the juniors would think more carefully about the spirit of the present time. They should be more reflective because if they follow the working formula which is currently offered to juniors they will not survive until the end of their careers. (Anna, professor of social work)

In stark contrast to this negative stance, which overwhelmingly dominates in the professors’ interview data, some professors regard the changes as improvements. According to this view, academic career building has become more structured, focused and transparent, which benefits both the quality of science and the wellbeing of junior academics. Notably, however,

only one professor strongly supports the current changes; others mention some positive aspects of the changes as part of a more reserved and ambiguous stance.

The positive view underlines that the audit culture, with its increasing productivity demands, has raised the quantity and quality of outputs. It is no longer possible to start a career at university without producing the right kinds of products. Competition is a desirable driving force. Although ‘people tend to complain constantly that others got funding and they didn’t, ... this tiny envy keeps everybody in motion’. Also, the rise of teamwork increases efficiency and productivity. Instead of working alone, junior academics nowadays belong to organised teams that help them to ‘get more outcomes done’. Teamwork provides support and ‘lowers the threshold of writing when the texts are continuously circulating’. This way of organising work ‘accumulates the results’ and ‘speeds up the writing process’. Compared to the past, the current system makes juniors, as well as seniors, increasingly productive and prevents inefficiency and free-floating idling:

Academic work after dissertation has become much more systematic and the slack has been picked up. Aimless hanging around is slowly disappearing. ... Now you really must be productive. Accountability has cut off an awful amount of inefficiency, which has been typical to university and which has irritated me. It is glibly called academic freedom but is what I call hanging and lazing around. In my view, this new control is better; you really must get something done here in the university. (Linda, professor of sociology)

Further, according to this positive perspective, the changes in academic career building are beneficial for junior academics. The criteria for career progress are more transparent; thus, juniors now know what is required of them, as well as the target areas and research priorities of a given university unit. On this basis, they can ‘profile research strategically and be aware of what is worth focusing on’. The result is that juniors are more determined and goal oriented than was the case for early-career academics in the past. The temporal boundaries of each career step also make career planning and building easier because having time limits ‘sets a good rhythm to work’; ‘it is a good thing that you finish your dissertation quickly and do not get stuck to it’. If somebody does not like the rules of the game, they are free to leave: ‘If you are critical or suspicious towards international publishing and the principles of getting merits, you can choose to opt out’. Finally, under the current conditions, junior academics can achieve a better work-life balance. Juniors are ‘not so work-centred as our generation has

been; it's a good thing'. Academic work is just work; it does not require total commitment and a profound passion. This shift in orientation is welcome:

It is old-fashioned to be passion-driven, always at work. It seems that younger people do not work that way anymore. Instead, they limit much more their work, which is very good. You really have to have something else. (Maria, professor of social work)

To sum up, the professors emphasise that in the past, the early-career phase involved academic freedom and temporal autonomy to carry out one's own interests. Conversely, this phase is nowadays externally structured and standardised with strict temporal limits. This change is understood by most interviewees to produce strain and pain for junior academics, although a few considered that it benefits them and facilitates their career building.

Next, we analyse how junior academics themselves make sense of the current conditions for academic career building and the extent to which their experiences align with the professors' views.

Junior academics' experiences

All junior academics interviewed in this study are temporarily employed, with their contacts ranging from a couple of months to four years. Their insecure and uncertain employment situation creates a shared cornerstone for their career building, although in other respects their starting points and work experiences differ. They describe temporary employment as distressing because of the uncertainty of having their contracts renewed. Living under the risk of unemployment makes them keenly aware of how much time they have left on their current contracts and leads them to worry about their future. Matias, who works on a short-term teaching contract, describes this feeling: 'When my contract ends on the last day of June, the panic strikes me'.

Junior academics are motivated to continue working at the university and to achieve career continuity, thus remaining alert for employment and funding opportunities. In most cases, they work on 'puzzle funding' originating from several sources. They might, for instance, combine or alternate between research and teaching jobs, work on more than one project at once and try to secure personal grants for their own research interests. Like the professors, junior academics engage in seeking research funding, both individually for their own research

and collectively for the projects on which they work. They characterise the need to write funding applications as frustrating and exhausting, especially given the small chance of success in the highly competitive landscape:

This kind of chaos is inbuilt in this work in a special way. You cannot do research in peace since you must all the time apply for the next funding. This is built-in to this work. I don't know whether or not I have learnt to cope with this better. I think quite often that oh no, so what, I can't cope with this anymore.

(Leena, short-term researcher)

Faced with this employment insecurity, junior academics adopt two horizons for their career building. In the short term, they simply try to find the next contract and secure a steady source of income. In the long term, they try to advance their careers and obtain permanent or at least long-lasting employment. To reach the latter goal, it is necessary to publish in English in top-tier journals and secure research funding from prestigious sources. While these requirements are clear, how to fulfil them is less so, particularly when working in circumstances counterproductive to their achievement. The need to accept whatever job happens to be available to ensure short-term survival can make reaching the longer-term goal of career progress difficult. Juniors agree that a series of temporary teaching jobs in particular can lead to a career trap, since teaching merits do not count in academia.

Although junior academics work hard to achieve career success, they are not uncritical of the criteria under which their performance is measured and evaluated. They emphasise that science should 'speak to various audiences' and be 'in dialogue with the world'. Therefore, the Finnish language should be valued, as should topics of interest to Finnish society but not necessarily to the international scientific community. Juniors are also critical of the dominance of the article format and speak for a variety of writing genres. Likewise, they claim there should be space for research methods and theoretical approaches that do not match well with high-speed article production. Thus, the one-sided criteria for success are regarded as a threat to both the meaningfulness of work and the quality of research outputs:

The pressures have increased. You should be able to churn out articles in a fast tempo, but in the social sciences, qualitative analysis is time-consuming. You don't have time to read carefully, analyse the data properly; you only have to publish quickly in good forums. (Kim, short-term researcher)

The pressures become even stronger because junior academics also have non-work related demands. They do not build careers in a social vacuum; they have various responsibilities and commitments outside academia. The early-career phase often overlaps with the phase of life during which one starts a family. Accordingly, the growing career pressures are especially acute for junior academics who have small children. This issue involves a gender perspective, as women still tend to take on most of the responsibility for raising children, making their work and life particularly hectic, strained and vulnerable:

Because of my baby, I wake up several times each night. And then bigger children wake up at six. I really feel that I cannot sleep enough. If then even a small setback hits me, I feel that the whole house of cards collapses. (Harriet, short-term researcher)

Overall, the junior academics' experiences align with the negative view that dominates the professors' accounts. Indeed, the juniors expressed no positive views of the increasing competitiveness, efficiency and productivity of the early career building phase. Junior academics underline their yearning for meaningful work and for being allowed the time and space for proper concentration on their research and the development of new ideas. In this, their accounts mirror the professors' descriptions of their own early careers decades ago, pointing to cross-generational continuity in how meaningful academic work is understood. However, while seniors can relive these experiences through their memories, juniors can only dream of them:

Although I don't know how a chicken feels when it sits on eggs, but anyway a chicken is able to sit on eggs in total peace and then one day there is a pop, a newly-hatched chick is out. I really wish I were that chicken even for a week. (Karen, temporary teacher)

Apart from the shared experiences of the demands and conditions of career building, junior academics have different paths and possibilities to navigate depending on their unique life and work situation. All options are not equally available to everyone. Thus, already at this early phase, academic career paths diverge radically, potentially paving the way for increasing stratification and polarisation:

People respond differently to employment uncertainty. Somebody starts to play the game tactically and focuses only on what counts and carries it out very well. Somebody else may orientate to developing oneself and take it as one's own

project. And then third one becomes anxious and cannot survive it, which leads to feelings of hurt and unfairness. (Sofia, short-term teacher)

Grounded in the focus group discussions, we discern four different strategies to create career continuity. Each strategy involves a distinct career risk, future horizon and generational relationship with seniors. We name the strategies as traditional, group-based, just-in-time and entrepreneurial.

Traditional strategy

These are empty days, peaceful days. I have begun to organise such days for every week. Then I don't have any meetings that would break the day. When I immerse myself in something, it is awfully difficult for me to interrupt my work. So, then I don't eat, I don't drink, and I don't speak to anybody. Those are good days; there is no other life. They are the best thing in the world.

(Laura, short-term researcher)

Some of the junior academics enjoy relatively favourable employment conditions. Although they are temporarily employed, their funding periods extend to three to four years and their funding (e.g. personal grants) allows academic freedom, independence and temporal autonomy. This enables them to follow their intellectual passions and concentrate on research. The scientific community and its approaches and topics of the moment form the foundation of their academic identities and provide them with a deep sense of belonging. However, working within the core of the disciplinary field comes with the requirement to produce excellent research outputs and distinguish oneself. Thus, under the traditional strategy, a career risk is an intellectual risk of failing to live up to expectations and earn one's position in a highly competitive environment. If successful, the future horizon promises vertical career progression within the academic hierarchy and personally motivating and meaningful work experiences.

The generational relation between juniors and seniors is constructed through a shared commitment to the disciplinary field and its values. Juniors are novices and professors are tribal chiefs (see Becher 1989) who perform a twofold role. On the one hand, they are career models who show how to achieve success; on the other, they are gatekeepers who assess juniors' merits and qualifications. In many respects, this strategy repeats the same pattern as

that of the professors' own early-career phase, described by the seniors as a '360-degree' mindset. Despite all the transformations in academic work and career building, the traditional path to becoming an academic continues to have currency, indicating that academic ideals and values are deep-rooted and cannot be easily overturned. However, in comparison with the professors' memories, junior academics encounter much stronger pressures in terms of achieving excellence and being highly productive. They do not have time for wondering and pondering for years like the professors did; they must prove their worth on a regular basis.

Group-based strategy

I must say that this has gone very easily. My contract is for four years and I didn't even apply for this position. I got this opportunity straightaway after I had defended my doctoral thesis. I really can't complain. I have a flexible boss. I can pretty well settle things with him and always make rearrangements of the goals, when a manuscript is expected and what else is expected from me and when. There is much flexibility. (Leo, short-term researcher)

While the traditional strategy represents an individualistic working pattern, the second strategy is based on group-based work. Junior academics are integrated into strong research teams, which have large international and often interdisciplinary networks and funding from several sources. Research is conducted in tightly organised groups under the leadership of professors and other established senior academics who act as principal investigators. The group offers career safety, as juniors trust that the success of the group will lead to new projects turning up. In addition, the close-knit group facilitates, supports and sets a good rhythm for research work and speeds up the production of outputs, promoting vertical career horizons. However, being a competent and loyal team player also involves career risk: How can the researcher gain independence, distinguish themselves and build their own reputation as an individual academic? These are critical questions, as university recruitment is based on individual merits (see the chapter by Geschwind et al.).

The generational relation is built hierarchically between the leader and group member. This dependence on and subordination to the group runs counter to the highly individualistic nature of the traditional approach to building an academic career in the social sciences. The professors recalled how, as young scholars, they worked on their own without any supervision from their professors, and the traditional career strategy adopted by some juniors

follows this individualistic pattern. Conversely, the group-based strategy follows the tradition of the hard sciences in which collaborative work in the laboratory is a typical entry point to an academic career. In the current research funding context, which favours large interdisciplinary projects with critical mass, the group-based strategy has been taken up in the social sciences and offers one option for junior academics to create career continuity.

Just-in-time strategy

I have had only short-term employment contracts. I teach those courses that have already been settled, I cannot influence their schedules. ... They have ready templates. And when you know that you have this job a half year or one year, then there is no point in making an awful lot of changes to them. Of course, if I think about planning something totally new, my own teaching, or if I participated in a working group which is planning courses, that would be different. ... I think that those who do a similar kind of work that I do need to be competent people. (Susan, temporary teacher)

In this strategy, junior academics create career continuity by seeking and combining a variety of jobs both in research projects and temporary teaching. They are individually responsible for being alert to new job possibilities and for keeping themselves employable. This requires them to be agile, flexible and competent to jump into new duties and to cope with high job insecurity and uncertainty. Dependent as they are on whatever jobs are available, they often need to compromise and postpone their own research interests. Under these conditions, it is particularly challenging for them to accumulate top-level scientific outputs especially if they remain in temporary teaching jobs over the long term. While juniors may find such teaching positions personally rewarding, teaching merits do not count in academic career building. Therefore, the just-in-time strategy does not promise vertical career progression but rather horizontal advancement, with enlarging qualifications and opportunities to develop oneself in new areas. Notably, the awareness that most junior academics work under similar precarious conditions creates a sense of togetherness and shared experiences, which empowers and gives strength to such academics in their work.

Under this strategy's generational relationship, seniors are employers and juniors are employees. In the market-oriented and project-based university context, the former are dependent on the availability of a competent workforce ready to step forward when needed,

while the latter are able to gain expertise as a just-in-time worker and, in this way, build career continuity. This strategy reflects the professors' concerns regarding the negative changes in academia, which they see as resulting in most junior academics occupying vulnerable and marginalised positions. However, although the juniors are critical of their employment conditions, they do not regard themselves as victims. Rather, they have learnt to skilfully navigate this turbulent environment and find personally meaningful ways to collaborate with their students and colleagues.

Entrepreneurial strategy

I have lots of projects which I coordinate. I write columns and popular articles, I give consulting training and, in the autumn, I'll teach one course and give thesis supervision. I have all kinds of networks and many things going on. ... I have decided to succeed in this business and do whatever it takes as long as the price is not too high. (Lydia, short-term researcher)

In the entrepreneurial strategy, junior academics build their careers by selling and marketing their expertise and knowhow both within and outside academia. The commitment to and dependence on the local university is loose since juniors frequently cross institutional boundaries and work in several forums nationally and internationally. However, they strive to strengthen their university connection because it enables personally meaningful work experiences and increases credibility outside academia. The core career requirement is the capability to create and maintain inspiring networks, which attract all parties involved and provide opportunities for employing oneself. The strategy offers a great deal of autonomy and the freedom to focus on one's interests but does not provide career safety because marketing oneself in fluid networks is unstable and risky. Relying on self-support, self-branding and self-sufficiency, juniors need to have a strong faith in their competencies. The career horizon in academia is ambiguous and depends on whether one can find a market niche that fits with the priorities of the university.

The generational relationship between seniors and juniors under this approach is weak and fragile. Senior academics are one party in a junior academic's network, but the nexus is reserved for the junior academics themselves. At the same time, senior academics have power over juniors as they write recommendations to their applications, review their texts and recruit them to give seminars and lectures, among other things. The entrepreneurial strategy

is rare but clearly evident among junior academics; to the professors, it is unknown. Although the professors speak of the implications—negative or positive—of the current competitive spirit and market orientation for academic career building, their reflections are restricted to the university context. Junior academics, in contrast, take advantage of a hybrid career model that also looks for employment markets beyond academia. Boundary crossing between university and business is a traditional way of working in other, particularly technological, fields (see the chapter by O’Connell) and is now emerging in the social sciences.

Discussion

The generational perspective provides insight into the complex relationships between senior professors and junior academics. These groups started their academic career trajectories in different university settings with distinct expectations and understandings of what it means and takes to forge an academic career. Despite this generational difference, the seniors and juniors participating in our study perceive the current requirements and employment conditions of the early-career phase in a strikingly similar way. This creates intergenerational continuity, embedded in shared values and ideals of academic work, which collide with the current increasingly managerial, competitive, metrics-based and insecure university context. In this way, the nostalgic story produced by the majority of the professors of the ‘good old days’ (Ylijoki 2005), typified by the freedom to concentrate on one’s own intellectual pursuits, has strong appeal among current junior academics. This supports the view that the traditional values of the scientific community remain deeply rooted in academic culture and are therefore not easily taken over by managerial control (e.g. Fanghanel 2012; Hakala 2009; Henkel 2012).

Despite being critical of the prevailing demands of the early-career phase, the professors and junior academics in our study comply with these in their everyday practice. Relying on the rhetoric that ‘there is no alternative’, they say that to survive in academia, juniors must adapt to the prevailing managerial climate, accumulate the right kinds of merits and learn to cope with their precarious employment situations. Nevertheless, the groups’ compliance stems from dissimilar institutional positions. Professors have secure employment at the top of the career hierarchy, with gatekeeping roles including as members of recruitment committees, editors of journals and reviewers of research funding applications. Juniors, by contrast, work in insecure positions, with their career continuity and progress being in many respects

dependent on professors' assessments and workforce needs. It is noteworthy that this imbalance of power embedded in the intergenerational relation has not been mentioned in our interviews, either by professors or junior academics.

While the professors widely oppose the managerial trends and express their compassion and empathy for junior academics, they nonetheless contribute to maintaining these trends when they, among other things, hire juniors as contract researchers for fixed-term projects, recruit them to temporary teaching jobs and socialise them to the competitive and performative spirit of the university. As Leathwood and Read (2013) claim, academics' opposition tends to be limited to ideological critique rather than expanded to active resistance. In this, professors reveal their own privileged positions and, accordingly, their complicity with audit culture (Leathwood & Read 2013). Taking a similar tone, Roumbanis (2019) underlines that although professors' intentions are benevolent and aimed at helping juniors along their career paths, they in fact act as consultants of the managerial regime and exercise subtle forms of power and symbolic violence that are invisible even to the victims. It is noteworthy that the junior academics in our study do not mention professors when they criticise the current requirements for career success; rather, they direct their criticism outside the scientific community to the university management, Ministry, research funding agencies and national-level policy making (see also Tapanila et al. 2020). By this boundary work, the academic and management sides of the university are separated and reflection on their potential intermingling is avoided.

However, junior academics do not form a unified group; they draw on different career strategies with distinct relations to managerial control. Since all strategies are not available to everyone, career paths are already polarised at this early-career stage, with some promising vertical progression up the career ladder, while others offer short-term positions one after another. These results are in line with the findings of Lam and Campos (2015), who argue that academic careers are pursued in highly polarised contexts in which beneficial early-career positions characterised by trust and support are situated alongside low-status positions of perpetual temporary employment. The just-in-time strategy is strongly dependent on the changing workforce needs of the university institution, positioning juniors as managed academics with limited space for autonomy. The traditional career strategy, by contrast, is dependent on the scientific community and its assessment power. The group-based strategy allows distance from the local university and, in the case of strong, international and intersectoral teams with rich external funding sources and support networks, may permit the

team to operate almost completely outside the institution's managerial control. Likewise, juniors using the entrepreneurial strategy are only partially subject to managerial control since the university is only one platform among many others that they use for career building, permitting them scope for autonomy.

The polarised starting points for academic career trajectories point to the power in science of the Matthew effect of accumulated advantage (Merton 1968); that is, the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. This effect is currently strengthened by the dominance of the rhetoric of excellence and its interlinkage with the academic meritocracy. Accordingly, only academic merits count in recruitment decisions and only the most talented junior academics are promoted. This approach has been criticised, particularly in gender studies, where it is argued that the excellence rhetoric is rooted in a masculine understanding of science, with gendered stereotypes and biases influencing how merits are evaluated and recruitments are made (e.g. Murgia & Poggio 2019; Van den Brink & Benschop 2012). In our study, the idea of meritocracy does not receive much support. Rather, a junior's adoption of a given career strategy with a specific future prospect appears primarily the result of coincidence and available employment opportunities in the turbulent and unpredictable university environment.

Our study also shows how the social sciences are managed in the current higher education and science policy landscape. From the professors' interviews, the profound transformation of the organisation of research work is apparent, showing a shift away from the traditional lone scholar model to one of group-based work, typical of STEM fields. Likewise, publishing practices now follow a model akin to that seen in the hard sciences. Mostly against their own preferences and values, the academics of the older generation have had to adjust their working patterns to the formats favoured and required by funding agencies and the university management, while for juniors these formats have been the norm of their nascent careers. In this way, it is not only academics that are managed but also disciplinary fields, indicating a blurring of the boundaries between the scientific and managerial spheres.

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