Chapter 6
A Clash of Academic Cultures:
The Case of Dr. X

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6.1 Introduction

In recent years higher education institutions in Finland, as in most western countries, have undergone profound changes. With the rise of a so-called knowledge-based economy, higher education policy and science policy have begun to stress universities' role as crucial players in the national innovation system and as instruments for economic competitiveness in global markets. This means that university education and academic research are increasingly viewed and evaluated from an economic perspective. In accordance with this policy change, universities' funding patterns and management styles have witnessed profound transformations. The general trend has been a decline of budget funding, for which reason universities and departments have been compelled to seek external income and to engage in entrepreneurial activities (e.g., Slaughter and Leslie 1997; Nieminen 2005). This trend has intertwined with the adoption of the doctrine of the new public management, which brings the values and practices of the private sector to public administration, including higher education institutions (e.g., Chandler et al. 2000; Deem 2003).

Martin and Etzkowitz (2000) regard this change as so radical that they call it the second academic revolution. The first academic revolution, taking place in the end of the 19th century, introduced research into the previously teaching-oriented higher education institutions. Now, according to Martin and Etzkowitz, a so-called third function, contribution to the economy, has been added to the core duties of universities. This new emphasis has been conceptualized by a variety of terms: "academic capitalism" (Slaughter and Leslie 1997), "entrepreneurial university" (Clark 1998), "the triple helix of university-industry-government" (Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff 2000), "post-academic science" (Ziman 1996) and "new managerialism" (Deem 1998), among others. They all point to an increasing market-orientation accompanied by the advancement of such virtues as accountability, efficiency, cost-effectiveness and productivity.

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The macro-level changes in the institutional context of higher education no doubt affect the internal functioning of academia, that is, the ideals and practices at the basic unit and individual levels (see Becher and Kogan 1992). In this article the focus is on individual academics. My aim is to explore critical elements in the social construction of academic identities in the present-day university from a cultural perspective. I ask, how do academics themselves perceive and interpret changes in their work environments and how do they experience growing managerialistic demands? The empirical basis of the article consists of a fine-grained qualitative analysis of a single case, the case of Dr. X. It is argued that, although personal and unique, the work experiences of Dr. X shed light on more general tensions between traditional academic and increasing managerialistic values and ideals.

The exploration of academics' experiences is important, since the individual level tends to be ignored both in higher education policy and higher education research: individual academics are mostly perceived as mere passive targets of policy implementation and external steering, not as active subjects who monitor their own behaviour. As a result, the forms the policy measures actually take in daily practices within academia and how they shape the lives and identities of academics remain largely uncharted territory.

In order to offer a context in which academic identity-building takes place, I first discuss in more detail the changing nature of academic cultures. Then, I introduce Dr. X, the protagonist of the article, whose work experiences are analysed by drawing upon the concepts of identity project and moral order elaborated by Rom Harré (1983). Finally, I return to a more general discussion and ponder current dilemmas and conflicts in academic work and in the formation of academic identities.

6.2   Academic Cultures in Transition

The research into the cultural dimension in higher education has shown that universities are not homogenous entities but internally differentiated into distinct "small worlds" (Clark 1987). According to this research tradition, universities are primarily composed of a diversity of "academic territories" inhabited by "academic tribes" with their own epistemological and social forms (Becher 1989). Although the local institutional and organizational cultures of a given university and the professional cultures of the different categories of academic staff are important in shaping academic life (e.g., Välimaa 1995), disciplinary differences have proven to be the most influential with regard, for instance, to modes of interaction, lifestyles, career paths, publishing patterns, pedagogical codes, etc. (e.g., Becher and Trowler 2001; Boys et al. 1988; Clark 1987; Ylijoki 2000). There are moreover some empirical findings showing that disciplinary differences also outweigh gender differences (e.g., Thomas 1990). Thus, from the cultural perspective, the main pillars of academic identity are constructed through socialization into the values, norms, basic assumptions and practices of one's own disciplinary community.

However, the recent changes in the university environment prompt the question to what extent the growing managerialistic pressures push disciplinary cultures in the same direction and standardize them. Are disciplinary differences fading away while all academics, regardless of their disciplinary background, are encountered with the same externally imposed demands to attract external money, to publish in international journals, to create large networks across and outside academia, to commercialize research results and so on? Are universities transforming from a colourful mixture of tribal cultures into a "McUniversity" (Parker and Jary 1995) characterized by homogenous and standardized managerialistic culture?

Some authors answer these questions in the affirmative. For instance, Ziman (1996) claims that due to increasing market-orientation, a new post-academic culture is replacing the traditional academic norms formulated by Merton and that the differences between academic science and industrial science carried out in companies are disappearing. Contrary arguments have been presented, too. Calvert (2000), for instance, maintains that what is changing is only the rhetoric used by academics. Faced with new demands, academics quickly learn the right way to present their work and to write their applications, but in practice they continue to work as they are used to working. In this view, then, disciplinary cultures continue to flourish but somewhat disguised by managerialistic rhetoric.

It seems that most researchers in higher education avoid these extremes, seeing academic work neither as totally colonized by managerististic forces nor as totally independent of external steering (e.g., Clark 1998; Prichard and Willmott 1997; Slaughter and Leslie 1997). Such a moderate view regards academic work and identities as affected by growing external pressures but not subordinated to them. For instance, drawing on empirical studies made in the UK, Henkel (2005) concludes that although academic autonomy and the primacy of the discipline in academic working lives have been strongly challenged, they are still the most important sources of meaning and self-esteem in academic work.

It can be summarized that the impacts of external steering on the internal life within academia are not mechanical or straightforward. Instead, local cultures filter external influences and shape the ways in which different university units and individual academics respond to them. In other words, the changes in the higher education environment are interpreted and responded to differently in distinct disciplinary and organizational cultures (e.g., Trowler 1998; Ylijoki 2003).

It is also important to take into account that the distinction between disciplinary cultures and managerialistic culture is far from clear-cut. Again, disciplinary differences are of crucial importance. Several fields, especially in hard-applied domains such as engineering, have always valued close connections to industry, commercialization of results and economic utility both in teaching and research. Seen from the perspective of these fields, the market-oriented values pushed by the current policy resonate well with the disciplinary values and practices. Therefore, it is somewhat misleading to speak about traditional academic and new market-oriented values, since both sets of value have a long history within academia. It follows that the current change does not mean an emergence of something totally new, but rather a shift in balance (Martin and Etzkowitz 2000). If compared to Snow's (1959)

classical thesis of a split between literary intellectuals and applied sciences, it might be summarized that it is the power relations between the two cultures that are changing: the former are losing their elite position in defining the core academic values and the latter are gaining a more dominant role.

All in all, changes in the higher education environment transform disciplinary cultures and academic values, at least to some extent. Academics in every field encounter increasing – and often conflicting – external demands and pressures. In the name of the entrepreneurial university, academics are expected, among other things, to contribute to economic growth, to advance national competitiveness and to promote societal welfare as well as to carry out the traditional core academic duties, that is, high-quality teaching and research (see Henkel 2000). Several studies have pointed out that the growing external pressures have resulted in the deterioration of academic work in terms of autonomy, workload, time management, societal status and salary (e.g., Chandler et al. 2000; Currie and Vidovich 1998; Enders and Teichler 1997; Ylijoki and Mäntylä 2003). Besides, there are clear signs of internal stratification of academics into two tiers, "have and have-not groups", the former consisting of academics with tenure and a secure future and the latter of an increasing number of project workers with limited-term contracts and poor prospects for career advancement (e.g., Henkel 2000; Kogan et al. 1994; Slaugher and Leslie 1997). Thus, for many academics the changing context of higher education means a deterioration of work. Yet there are also winners, who benefit from the changes, who are willing and able to make good use of the new opportunities and who manage to improve their professional status (e.g., Barry et al. 2006; Henkel 2000; Trowler 1998).

In the following, I move from the cultural level to the individual level. By exploring the work experiences of one individual academic, Dr. X, my aim is to encourage reflection on the human consequences of a cultural clash between traditional academic and growing managerialistic values.

6.3   The Case of Dr. X

The case of Dr. X is based on a focused interview conducted as a part of a series of interviews with Finnish academics working in a variety of disciplines and university settings. The objective of the study was to trace the ways in which academic work and identities have changed in recent years. The interviews were open in nature, allowing academics to freely speak about their work experiences. The themes covered a wide range of issues, including questions concerning the interviewees' personal work history, current work practices, communication networks, collaboration patterns, modes of publication and the personal meaning of working as an academic.

The rationale for examining only a single interview instead of the totality of the available interview material is that it allows a more subtle, vivid and contextual analysis of individual experiences, thereby offering means for a better and more profound understanding of the current nature of academic work and the conflicting

elements in identity building. The criterion for selecting the interview with Dr. X for closer scrutiny, in turn, is that it reveals especially clearly those tensions and dilemmas that are common in the interview material as a whole. In this sense, it might be claimed that the case of Dr. X presents not only his unique work experiences but raises issues with wider resonance in present-day academia. In particular, the case illustrates the human consequences of a clash between the traditional academic values embedded in the disciplinary culture of Dr. X and the growing managerialistic values imposed by the higher education system.

Dr. X is a male Finnish scholar working in a soft-pure field at a large university. He began his academic career at the end of the 1970s and since then has worked continuously within academia. At the time of the interview he was in his late 1940s. He has a well-established position in his department which, in turn, has a good standing in its field. Dr. X has publications that are widely read and valued within his disciplinary community. He has been successful in fund raising, too. He has managed to obtain funding for his own work from the Academy of Finland (Finnish research councils) several times and recently he has also succeeded in establishing projects for his doctoral students. In addition to his research merits, he has been active in teaching and administrative duties. In order to ensure his anonymity, no further information can be presented.

Although the academic career and the current position of Dr. X seem to be very successful, he accounts of his work in a negative tone. The following three quotes illustrate how he describes his work experiences:

> I really think that all kinds of jobs should be satisfying in some respects (…) or conversely at least, they should not be awfully stressful. They should be stressful only in a positive sense. At the moment this is not stressful in a positive sense, it is only exhausting. It makes me tired so that I have no energy to do anything.
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> Recently I have felt that I should somehow pull myself together or at least to try to see whether I am able to pull myself together any more. If I put this really dramatically, I could say that I feel that my creativity has run out. I should check whether this really has happened. I should somehow organise my time in such a way that I could concentrate on one project only, or two at the most. It has sometimes happened to me, even recently, that I have suddenly become absorbed in studying something or in reading something. And I have realised that this is really rather pleasant, that I really enjoy it. Recently such experiences have occurred too rarely, experiences of success. These are, of course, totally subjective matters, that is, how I experience things, whether they are successes or failures.
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> I have thought that just because this does not seem to go very well I should change my occupation. But there is a problem. I mean I have fallen into a kind of tube which has become narrower and narrower. The opportunities to do something else have decreased the longer I have stayed here. It seems to me that (…) it is all the more difficult here but there is no other option than to stay here. Because of this I really have to pull myself together. Since now and then I still realise that I enjoy this work. I really should observe those situations in which I enjoy it. It is very important that I should focus more vigorously on some issues. I really can't blame the circumstances, at least principally, only myself.

The quotes tell about severe problems in work. In spite of his achievements, Dr. X feels powerless and exhausted. He is disappointed with himself and with his work situation – even to the extent that he feels he is caught in a trap: the work at the university is full of problems but he sees no way out of academia.

My argument is that the problems Dr. X describes can be regarded as a crisis in his professional identity as a university researcher and teacher. But how should this identity crisis be interpreted? How are these personal feelings and worries related to the changing social and societal context of higher education institutions? In order to answer these questions I will utilize a theoretical framework provided by a social psychologist and philosopher, Harré, in his theory of identity projects.

6.4   Theoretical Tools

According to Harré (1983), the construction of identity involves two interrelated projects: a social and a personal identity project. In a social identity project an individual tries to attain and maintain an acknowledged and respected position as a member of the community to which she or he wants to belong. This requires appropriation of the cultural heritage of the group in question and the ability to convince other members of one's commitment to the values and norms of the prevailing culture. Thus, the core element in the social identity project is socialization into the local moral order. The moral order refers to collectively shared taken-for-granted beliefs, assumptions and values. Basically, the moral order defines what in a given community is regarded as good, right and respectful, and conversely, what is seen as bad, wrong and despicable. In so doing, it functions as a sort of compass helping individuals to orient and to find their direction in the social world. By socializing into the local moral order, individuals are able to construct their social identity as members of the community.

In the personal identity project, by contrast, individuals construct their own unique way to relate to the community. In other words, individuals do not merely appropriate the cultural heritage of the community, but, because of the unique life situation and perspective of each person, individuals also transform it in idiosyncratic ways. The transformation process is a source of new ideas and practices and by doing this, it creates a sense of personal identity in a thoroughly social world. An individual constructs – in interaction with others – her or his specific, personal manner of being a full member of a given community, thus leaving her or his own mark and "handwriting" on the culture. Individuals are therefore not only products of the prevailing culture but also its co-producers.

From this point of view, an identity crisis is basically a result of tensions and conflicts between moral commitments. Without the help of socially shared, yet constantly renegotiated moral orders, individuals are left drifting in identity crises unable to direct themselves properly (see Greenwood 1994). The crisis in social identity arises when individuals are unable to adhere to the local moral order and/or to convince others of their commitment to it, leading to a marginal position or even to a denial of membership of the community. A personal identity crisis, in turn, means that individuals do not find their particular, personally fitting way to adhere to the morals of their community. Consequently their personal identity remains weak and fragile, since they are unable to gain a sense of really being at home in the community.

6.5   Personal Identity in Crisis

From the perspective of identity projects it can be argued that the work problems Dr. X describes are a result of a crisis in his personal identity. Dr. X has a well-established and valued social position both in his department and in the wider academic community, so there is no crisis in his social identity. Instead, the problem lies in his inability to find personal sense and worth in his current work. Although outwardly everything seems to be in order, Dr. X himself seems to be at loss in his professional life and in building his personal identity.

A key question now is how to interpret Dr. X's identity crisis. Following Harré's notion of identity projects, I will not search for the explanation for Dr X's identity problems in internal causes – such as his innate personality traits or a midlife crisis in an academic career. Instead, in accordance with Harré's ideas, I will focus on the social and societal context in which Dr. X is situated and try to see how his problems are related to the wider processes currently taking place in higher education institutions.

Dr. X accounts for his work in a regressive tone, following almost a plot of tragedy. Dr. X says that before he was pleased with his work and confident of himself, but for some time he has not been able to live up to the morals which he regards as essential in the academic career and which he sees as personally most satisfying. Moreover, he anticipates that his professional future in academia will continue along the declining trend and that the end will not be a happy one. However, he still has some hope, as he emphasises that he should put himself into a final test in order to find out whether he could "recover" and be able to act as a scholar, in his opinion, should. The tone of his account is therefore decidedly negative, the main reason for this stemming from his feeling that he does not reach the standards and moral commitments he has internalized as cornerstones in his profession.

Hence, Dr. X's account rests upon a moral order that defines the basic pillars as to what it is to be a respected member of the disciplinary community in question. The disciplinary culture in the field of Dr. X represents a typical soft and pure discipline (see Becher 1989). It is based on traditional academic values as crystallized, for instance, in the Humboldtian ideals of university. The moral commitments include such virtues as individualistic pursuit of knowledge, freedom to follow one's own research interests, unity of research and teaching, profound devotion to research without external constraints, originality in thinking and making an enduring contribution to one's field. Accordingly, the most-valued activities in the account of Dr. X are reading, studying and writing in peace and quiet, and consequently producing original ideas and fresh, interesting interpretations which are recognized and respected by his colleagues in Finland and abroad. The reference group of his work is thus his disciplinary community, including students, whom he perceives as junior members of his academic community.

Dr. X emphasizes that before he acted in accordance with these high principles and managed to achieve outcomes he was satisfied with. In this respect his account can be interpreted as a hero story in which an individual hero is totally dedicated to her or his research topic and struggles uncompromisingly against all obstacles in

order to reach significant outcomes. For instance, Dr. X emphasises that his research topic, which he has also dealt with in his teaching, is very personal and intimate for him: he says he has "a sort of burning need" for it. Therefore his work is something which he "just cannot take as a mere job." In a similar tone, he reports that he devoted himself for more than 20 years to one topic he considered personally the most significant and interesting and during that time he published only when he had something really important to say – when he had "texts really worth publishing".

In recent years things have changed. He has had fewer and fewer possibilities to concentrate on his own scholarly pursuits. Instead he has been involved, among other things, in writing research proposals for junior researchers, in attracting external money to the department and in carrying out all kinds of administrative tasks. He says, for instance:

> During the last one and a half years my work has been particularly fragmented. During this time I have not been able to further my own research projects at all. My projects have been pushed totally into the background.

In the midst of growing external demands and constraints he feels he no longer works in a proper manner. Relying on the moral order which he has internalized as the basis of his profession, he makes a distinction between "necessary" and "unnecessary" work, the former referring to research and research-based teaching, the latter to all other duties – writing applications, filling in all sorts of forms, answering enquiries, attending administrative meetings, etc. Although he understands that "unnecessary work" has to be done by someone since it is necessary for the functioning of the department, it is something which he cannot find personally meaningful and rewarding.

> In this position one constantly has to do work that seems unnecessary to me, although it is not perhaps unnecessary. I have to spread my patience and energy too much. It is a question of time consumption, I really cannot do many things at the same time.

Due to the constant increase of "unnecessary" work, Dr. X has to work hard for long hours to get all the tasks accomplished. Although he has carried out the "unnecessary" duties successfully, he feels he has not managed to get anything done and that he has failed in his work. This is due to the fact that he has not been able to further what he regards as "necessary" work, that is, his own scholarly writings. Thus, "necessary work" and "unnecessary work" are embedded in conflicting moral orders which are mutually exclusive. In daily life amidst increasing externally imposed requirements, the competition between the moral orders seems to be constantly resolved in favour of "unnecessary work", for which reason Dr. X cannot adhere to the moral commitments he sees as crucial in his work. As a consequence, he feels exhausted and his motivation for work "threatens to fade away":

> I just do not find energy to carry on these duties. I am not able to get motivation anywhere.

Furthermore, his perception of his work as a failure creates anxiety and feelings of guilt. This is manifest, for instance, in his account of how he used to have some

important contacts with colleagues in other universities both in Finland and abroad but recently he has withdrawn from them:

> I have a rather bad conscience because of this. I really appreciate genuine no-nonsense contacts but I do not have them since at the moment I don't have anything original to say to anybody.

What is crucial is that Dr. X regards himself as responsible for his failures. He blames himself for incompetence and lack of creativity and is driven into self-accusation. Although it seems quite justified to argue that the increasing requirements imposed on Dr. X by the department and the institution would make it extremely hard for anybody in his situation to find time and energy for one's own scholarly activities, he attributes the shortcomings solely to himself, not to the structural and institutional conditions in which he finds himself.

The overall result is a personal identity crisis. Because of his incapability to work according to the high and demanding standards of his disciplinary community, Dr. X cannot find personal meaning in his work and feels he no longer acts as an academic should. Thus, he does not adjust his values and ideals to better fit the current work requirements but remains deeply committed to them. As a consequence, the university appears as an alien and suffocating environment in which he cannot feel at home. In this his experiences resemble what Henkel discerned in her study among academics in the UK. According to Henkel (2000, p. 208), many academics tried to hold on to their traditional academic values but "they were doing so within a hostile culture, which in some cases challenged their sense of self-esteem".

Finally, it is important to note that personal identity is inherently related to social identity. A sense of uniqueness and a personally meaningful way to belong to a given community are intertwined with a person's social identity; that is how other members of the community see her or his position. From this it might be anticipated that although at the moment the problems of Dr. X concern his personal identity, his social identity, too, might be in danger if the dilemmatic situation continues for long.

6.6   Alternative Identity Constructions

It can be claimed that the strong individualistic emphasis in the disciplinary culture of Dr. X aggravates the clash between the moral orders. The disciplinary culture is crystallized in a sort of hero story which acts as a frame of reference through which Dr. X interprets his work-related problems. According to a hero story, a scholar is a lonely seeker of truth who should succeed in overcoming all obstacles and in managing to achieve outstanding results no matter how hard the external conditions are. In point of fact, the more difficult the circumstances are, the greater is the victory the hero gains. In other words, my argument is that the utmost individualistic elements of the disciplinary culture into which Dr. X has been socialized hinder him from recognizing the impact of the wider university context on his problems.

As a result of this, he hardly has other options than to attribute the problems to himself. It follows that Dr X is caught in a sort of trap, leaving him with few opportunities to find better strategies to cope with the problematic situation.

It could be anticipated that if Dr. X continues to adhere to this kind of hero story, his work problems most probably will not diminish. On the contrary, there is a real possibility of "sinking", a term by which Trowler (1998) describes academics who, in spite of profound changes in the higher education context, try to hold on to the old values and modes of behaviour. It might not be too far-fetched to guess that by committing to the moral order of the individualistic hero story, Dr. X might quite easily end up with burnout and totally lose his motivation for and enjoyment in his work.

The question arises, therefore, what Dr. X – and others in similar circumstances – could do to avoid this kind of "sinking". From a perspective of the identity projects, it would be important for Dr. X to redefine the core elements of the moral order, leading to a change in the construction of his academic identity and correspondingly, to a new and more fitting way to make sense of his work.

One possibility could be "swimming" (Trowler 1998) with the current changes. This requires a complete reversal of the moral order so that former "unnecessary" work becomes "necessary" work. Thus, instead of the story of a lonely seeker after truth, Dr. X could attach himself to the managerialistic story form which represents a totally different kind of understanding of what academic work is all about. The managerialistic culture glorifies such virtues as efficiency, accountability, productivity and effectiveness, as well as skills to attract external money, to get partners in industry, to establish big projects and large networks within and across academia and so forth. Since these virtues stand in sharp contrast to the virtues of the disciplinary culture into which Dr. X has been socialized, a profound change in the identity construction would be needed. For instance, while Dr. X wants to publish and communicate with colleagues only when he has something really significant to say, according to the managerialistic morals, it is crucial to publish as much as possible in order to extend one's CV and consequently, to be classified as a productive, high-profile academic.

Another alternative form of identity building could be an adoption of a tendency to avoid all "unnecessary work" and to concentrate only on those tasks which match one's own values and preferences – that is scholarly work in the case of Dr. X (cf. Trowler 1998). By avoiding meetings, refusing to take any extra duties, neglecting his students, etc., Dr. X might be able to find time and space for his own pursuits and leave "unnecessary" work to others. The weakness of this strategy is obvious. If everybody acts according to it, nobody will do the required tasks, which in the end would lead to chaos and severe problems in the survival of the department, also resulting in serious threats among individual academics. Hence, in order to function, this logic requires that there are others who will do the "unnecessary work" and bear the negative consequences related to it. However, this sort of rationality is basically not in harmony with the morals of Dr. X's disciplinary culture which, in spite of its individualistic undertone, gives much weight to mutual respect and collegiality among the members of the scientific community.

Following Trowler's (1998) argumentation there is still another possible strategy for Dr. X to adopt, namely collective policy reconstruction. Instead of "swimming" with the current trends as an academic high-flyer or of maximizing one's own success irrespective of others, there is also an option to engage in collective action to change the policy trends in such a way that work conditions in academia would allow more opportunities to concentrate on those tasks which Dr. X perceives as "necessary". However, this requires giving up the individualistic nature of the disciplinary culture and a redefinition of the moral order in a more collective way. In doing this, Dr. X would also be able to attribute the causes of his problems differently. Instead of blaming himself, he could recognize the larger societal roots of his problems, thereby breaking away from self-accusations and finding common ground for sharing experiences and work-related problems with others.

6.7 Discussion

The changing higher education environment has a great impact on academic cultures and daily practices within academia, thereby often challenging the traditional core elements of academic identity formation. However, the effects of the macro-level changes on micro-level functioning are not mechanical or straightforward. Therefore the case of Dr. X offers just one example of the potential human consequences when traditional academic values encounter growing managerialistic pressures. Other responses to the changes are to be found (e.g., Barry et al. 2006). Becher and Trowler (2001, p. 16) summarize the current situation by stating: "We can expect to see a variety of reactions from different groups of staff, and even from the same individuals and groups at different times. These will include not only negativity and resistance, or a burying of the academic head in the sand in the hope that things will change for the better but the enthusiastic adoption of change in some cases and the strategic undermining and reworking of it in others."

Disciplinary cultures are of importance in shaping the responses of individual academics. Disciplinary cultures differ in their moral orders, meaning that not all cultures are equally committed to traditional academic values. For instance, an individualistic hero is not a prominent manner to perceive academics in all organizational settings. In my interview data with Finnish academics, interviewees in a technical field describe their work in a very different way. Instead of a lonely hero, they tend to identify with their research group and to emphasize the importance of group work. Likewise, it seems that in their case close contacts and collaboration with industry and other external agencies constitute an important element in the construction of their academic identities. Thus, the growth of the managerialistic culture does not lead to severe cultural conflicts and identity crises in all academic units, even if there appear to be some tensions in the most market-oriented environments too (e.g., Ylijoki 2003).

However, although the case of Dr. X by no means represents the whole picture of the nature of academic work in the present-day university, Dr. X is not alone with

his problems. In my interviews with Finnish academics this sort of identity crisis and feelings of anxiety and exhaustion constitute a rather general phenomenon (Ylijoki 2005). In this the Finnish academics seem to have much in common with their colleagues in other countries (e.g., Chandler et al. 2000; Currie and Vidovich 1998; Enders and Teichler 1997; Henkel 2000; Kogan et al. 1994).

By exploring one case in detail, my aim has been to shed light on more general dilemmas and problems the current changes in the higher education environment may create at the level of individual academics. The individual level, although often ignored in higher education policy and research, is of vital importance, since it is at this level that externally imposed reforms and policy measures actually are carried out. Hence, it is not insignificant how academics interpret the steering coming from the upper levels (see Becher and Kogan 1992) and what kinds of actions and experiences it invokes. If the problems encountered by Dr. X become increasingly common among academics, it surely has negative consequences for the quality of academic work and the attractiveness of an academic career. Taking into account the individual level is therefore vital not only for individual academics and their well-being, but also for the functioning of the department, the university, and ultimately, the whole higher education system.

Likewise, I have tried to show how the individualistic nature of the traditional academic culture (academic freedom, autonomy, seeking for individual reputation, etc.) may act as a repressive form restricting well-being and producing human suffering within the present-day university. Although not universally adopted, the ideal of a lonely hero is widely spread and deep-rooted within academia. For instance, Henkel (2000, p. 195) concludes that in spite of all the changes in the working environment, the image of an "individual scholar pursuing his or her interests according to his or her own rhythms" still remains an ideal, particularly in the humanities and the social sciences. Ziman (1998, p. 164) sees "the romantic stereotype of the pure scientist as a lonely seeker after truth" to be embedded in sciences, too. According to him, this ideal entails "an ethic of self imposed dedication, a participant in the quest for the Holy Grail, a person committed to a cause that transcends all other interests and considerations." No doubt, this ideal may act as a motivating and inspiring force in academic work. Yet, it can be claimed that this kind of hero image accompanied by growing external pressures and harsh competition is a powerful combination which suppresses collective resistance and makes it difficult to build more collaborative ways to organize academic work.

An interesting empirical question in this context is how junior academics experience their work and the changes in university environment (see Hakala 2005). It could be suggested that from the beginning they are socialized into a rather different moral order than Dr. X – presumably not so closely tied to the ideal of a lonely hero and a virtue of total commitment. In "the two-tier university" (Kogan et al. 1994) junior academics tend to belong to "have-not groups" situated on the lower tier of the academic profession with fixed-period contracts and uncertain career prospects. For them, a long-term dedication to a specific research topic and institutional commitment could easily be a trap to be avoided – instead, flexibility and capability to move smoothly from one project to the next would be much more

profitable qualifications (see Sennett 1998). This view gets some support from Henkel's (2000) study in the UK. Her findings clearly show that academics, who started their academic careers in the 1980s and 1990s, entered a very different profession and were faced with different expectations compared to senior academics who joined university in the 1960s and 1970s.

In addition to age, gender may also be crucial in shaping experiences in academic work. It could be suggested that female academics are not necessarily so deeply committed to the individualistic hero story requiring profound devotion, since they still often have more family obligations than men. Therefore women academics have to balance their time and energy more strictly between work and home. Furthermore, Gergen (1992) claims that as a narrative pattern, the hero story is not equally available to women since cultural expectations about how men and women should express their heroism are divergent. She argues that the hero myth, glorifying individual quest and achievement, is a typical manstory while woman-stories about heroism tend to emphasize the importance of social embeddedness. Moreover, there is some empirical indication that the rise of managerialism in academia is far from gender-neutral. Barry et al. (2006), for instance, suggest that in comparison with men, women academics seem to respond to the increasing managerialistic pressures in ways that are more unfavourable to their careers.

It is important to underline that this study offers only a sort of snapshot of Dr. X. It presents a rather stable and coherent picture of his academic identity, which does not tell the whole story of his work experiences. Following Harré's (1983) argumentation, identities are not fixed, essential entities, but temporally and spatially embedded constructions which are renegotiated in social interaction with others. The investigation into the case of Dr. X is based on one interview situation, which represents a specific context for identity building by allowing the interviewee to freely vent feelings to a sympathetic listener. It is most probable that in a different situation at a different time Dr. X would give at least a somewhat different account of his work, thereby also constructing his identity in a different way. This does not mean that the identity formation in the interview situation is less true or less real than in some other context. By contrast, identities are always context-dependent and each of the identity constructions is true, presenting some aspects of the person and her or his experiences.

Finally, it needs to be emphasized that although in this article the focus in exploring work-related identity crisis is on the social and societal context, I do not want to deny the importance of intra-individual psychological factors. Surely, they have a role to play, too – individual academics interpret and experience the same external conditions to some extent differently, and may attribute the cause of their problems in various ways. Rather, my objective is to offer an alternative approach to the mainstream psychological explanations and to demonstrate that problems in academic identities cannot be fully explained by psychological factors alone. In other words, identity crises are not solely private problems to be solved by adopting suitable personal coping strategies. From a social-psychological perspective, it is crucial to take into account the societal and cultural context in which the problems arise and to trace their roots in the wider environment, thereby avoiding the psychologization of all identity-related problems.

Through making visible the cultural underpinnings and taken-for-granted assumptions, research into higher education – and into the cultural dimension in particular – could promote human well-being. Moreover, it might also serve as an instrument for resisting the prevailing dominant discourses and ideological "truths" if they are restrictive or repressive from individuals' point of view. In this sense higher education research may even have emancipatory power.

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