

## Career dynamics in social practices: accumulation, concurrent careers and career demographics

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### Abstract

Though the 'practice turn' in social theory valuably directs attention to social practices as a key unit of analysis, we argue that this does not mean we should lose sight of individual lives. By engaging with existing theoretical and empirical research on careers, we extend theories of practice by situating careers in three ways: as careers-in-a-practice, concurrent careers-in-a-life, and multiple cumulative careers in a practice. This discussion illustrates that further attention to careers can highlight the co-evolving and emergent relationship between practices and individuals across the lives of both. Incorporating a more robust understanding of careers into practice theories holds promise for developing understandings of how elements of practice are accumulated over time, how practices compete and interact within individuals' lives, and how the demographics of careers themselves provide powerful tools for envisioning future change and policy interventions.

### Keywords

accumulation, biography, careers, social change, temporality, theories of practice

### Introduction

This paper is located within the 'practice turn' in social theory (Schatzki et al., 2001; Shove et al., 2012; Warde, 2005): a 'turn' away from individualist and structuralist approaches to focus on 'social practices ordered across space and time' (Giddens, 1984: 2). We argue that in shifting the 'unit of analysis' to social practices we should not lose sight of individual *lives*. Theories of practice acknowledge the importance of individuals for a practice's emergence and persistence. This is because practices are dependent on individual performances, and because it is individuals that 'carry' the requisite skills and knowledge that make such performances possible (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). However this relationship between individuals and practices has yet to be substantially developed. Our paper contributes to this project. We draw on the longstanding tradition of career theory to explore the different ways that we might think about individuals' lives and careers within social practices, and the implications of these intersecting careers for practice emergence, persistence and demise. This exercise provides a framework that might usefully inform future research in this area.

Warde notes that the question of how 'practitioner' careers 'take off, develop and end' is a vital one for understanding the nature of social practices (2005: 149). That is to say that since they are 'carried' by people (Reckwitz, 2002: 250), the trajectories of practices are in part dependent on the ongoing engagement of the individuals who 'carry' and perform them. Shove and Pantzar (2007) take a further step in specifically studying processes of recruitment (the first stage of a career), and how participants come to 'carry' practices of digital photography and floorball, highlighting the

importance of recruitment and defection for the ‘careers’ of the practices themselves (Shove et al., 2012). However, with the exception of these brief encounters, little attention has been given to the trajectories of individuals’ careers within a world of practices. This is surprising given the range of theoretical questions to which a consideration of careers could contribute. For example, moving beyond ‘recruitment’, how are trajectories of practices connected to the dynamics of individuals’ careers? Or taking up a mantle offered by Reckwitz (2002: 256), how do multiple careers intersect within, and across individuals’ lives and with what implications for the dynamics of practice?

For the purposes of this paper we focus on ‘social practices’ in the realms of leisure and the professions. By way of example, we refer to yoga, patchwork quilting, bread-making, teaching and academic research as social practices, all of which can be understood in terms of Reckwitz’s definition of a practice as:

a routinized type of behavior which consists of several elements, interconnected to one another: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, ‘things’ and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge (2002: 249)

Further, we think about ‘careers’ in three ways. Firstly, as the ‘whole’ intersection of an individual with a practice, that is, rather than framing individuals as performers in a moment, we conceptualise them as having a history and future of performances too. Secondly, ‘career’ provides a way of capturing the multiple relationships to practices that each individual has, and that are thus woven together within a life. Thirdly, we think about coexisting careers within a practice to reflect on the demographic constitution of a practice at any moment, and the implications these demographics might have for a practice’s future trajectory: whether it endures and becomes deeply embedded in the routines of social life, or does not.

According to Hughes, ‘a career consists, in one sense, of moving—in time and hence with age’ within institutions (1994: 34), or we might add within practices. In studies of work and leisure, researchers have long engaged with the concept of ‘career’ in an attempt to understand changing professional trajectories and more generally ‘the fate of man running his life-cycle in a particular society at a particular time’ (Hughes, 1994: 33). This tradition of ‘career theory’, in which the Chicago School is a key influence, has inspired a breadth of theoretical and empirical work that specifies the dynamics of careers, in particular the intersections of individuals with communities and sub-cultures (Anderson, 1923; Becker, 1951; Becker, 1963), organisations and institutions (Goffman, 1991 [1961]; Strauss, 1968) and how they mutually shape one another across time. This research provides a fruitful starting point for conceptualizing individual lives within the dynamics of practice because it holds a basic ontological compatibility with theories of practice.

The first important point of convergence is that both theoretical traditions seek to understand social phenomena writ large. Contrary to commonsense understandings of careers as belonging to the realm of working life, the Chicago School saw careers as spanning a range of life’s domains. From an early focus on deviants (Anderson, 1923; Cressey, 1932; Shaw, 1931; Sutherland, 1937), the Chicago School tradition went on to consider the careers of mental patients (Goffman, 1991 [1961]) the ill (Roth, 1963), school teachers (Becker, 1952), elderly people (Humphrey, 1993), and bike messengers (Fincham, 2008). Some authors have criticized this diversity, suggesting that an important degree of specificity is lost when the concept is so widely applied (Wilensky 1960:554 in Barley, 1989: 45). Yet in doing so, these authors refute narrow associations between careers and jobs – careers cannot be reduced to a series of jobs or limited to progress within organizations because they properly speak to more complex dynamics of the social world (Barley, 1989: 47). This approach fits well alongside theories of practice, which see practices not as limited to particular industries or areas of social life, but as the units from which diverse social phenomenon are constituted. Since the concept of career has already been used within studies of leisure, everyday life and work, and theories of practice have

similarly looked in detail at these realms of life, the potential to have a career-in-a-practice is already, partly, established.

The second point of similarity is that both careers and practices are *social* phenomenon. The way that an individual makes their way through a career might appear subjective or personal, but such trajectories are culturally defined. As Barley notes, the Chicago School acknowledged that careers were experienced subjectively as they were 'lived through' by individuals, however they also emphasized that such trajectories were highly institutionalized (Barley, 1989: 51; Strauss, 1968: 324). Discussions of practice situate individuals in a similar way. For example, Shove and Pantzar illustrate how recruitment to careers in digital photography are shaped by previous careers in film photography and as such, 'personal histories of practice are never entirely personal' (2007: 157). Through 'performing' practices (of bathing, yoga, teaching) in their daily lives, individuals 'carry' and re-enact the skills, embodied knowledge and understandings that the practice requires. People 'understand the world and themselves... according to the particular practice' (Reckwitz, 2002: 256). Therefore, both traditions illustrate the cultural and social dynamics of subjective experience.

The final point upon which these theories converge is in their 'ontological duality': the constant interplay and mutual shaping of structure and agency. Rather than treating careers as made up of solely objective structural components, the Chicago scholars addressed subjective aspects of experience and meaning (Barley, 1989: 49). Understanding the dynamics of a career therefore necessitates that researchers see both sides of the coin. Objective and subjective perspectives should be integrated together, the public and private are in constant interaction, and individuals and institutions make one another. These ideas resonate with Giddens' theory of structuration. In *The Constitution of Society* (1984), he suggests that social theories which give either the 'object' (society), or the 'subject' (the individual) predominance have veered too far, and should be reconceptualised as the 'duality of structure'. Social practices are seen as the constitutive unit and therefore the means of studying this duality: 'social practices, biting into space and time, are considered to be at the root of the constitution of both subject and social object' (Giddens, 1984: xxii). When reviewing theories of practice more broadly, Reckwitz similarly notes that 'the social world is first and foremost populated by diverse social practices which are carried [and carried out] by agents' (2002: 256). Therefore, in the midst of polarised objective/subjective theoretical traditions, concepts of both career and practice reframe the object-subject divide.

Having recognized this compatibility, the remainder of the paper explores the potential of careers literature to begin answering three questions that have yet to be fully addressed in theories of practice: How do practices take hold, evolve and fade away from personal biographies and how can we understand these processes? How do individuals' lives simultaneously touch many practices, and how do these practices intersect and have implications for one another? How do performers and performances accumulate within practices, and with what implications for the practice's future trajectory? Each of these questions is considered, in turn, in the ensuing sections.

### ***Careers in a Practice***

As Shove et al. note, the reproduction of the social world, and the practices within it, depends upon 'changing populations of more and less faithful carriers or practitioners' (2012: 63). When a significant number of people neglect performances – when routines of listening to the radio or letter writing are broken – practices begin to die out: skills are lost and the infrastructures and configurations of social life that made them possible change. Therefore, 'by following the careers of carriers as commitments develop and wane we get a sense of how some practices become more deeply anchored and embedded in society while others disappear' (Shove et al., 2012: 64). We agree with this starting assumption, and argue in this section that career theory offers further insights to think about the relationship between practices and individuals across both the *life of the individual* and the *life of the practice*.

Careers are not unilinear or homogeneous. While common sense definitions associate 'career' with vertical progress up distinct occupational hierarchies, the Chicago School used ethnographic methods to study careers as empirical phenomenon. These studies showed that careers need not be equated with traditional ideas of progress – vertical, horizontal and even reverse movement can be legitimate parts of the careers of public school teachers (Becker, 1952), medical students (Hall, 1948) and even supporters of the Manchester Storm ice hockey team (Crawford, 2003).

We might expect careers-in-a-practice to have similar characteristics, with the 'ideal form' being in tension with the emergent trajectory of an individual's participation. Yet theories of practice have given little attention to these emergent dynamics. Reckwitz, for instance, refers to the many interconnected elements from which practices are constituted (2002: 249), noting that they are integrated in performance, and that the persistence of practices depends on re-enactments that reproduce this integration. Further, in contrasting 'the individual' in practice theory and other cultural theories, he suggests that individuals are the carriers of elements, such as skills and embodied knowledge, which practices require (2002: 251-252). Yet this version of the individual seems somewhat static. Individuals have lives, and we know from the work of the Chicago scholars that an individual's relationship to a practice changes across time. How then might this seeming contradiction of the individual as the 'carrier of elements' and re-enactor of practice, and the individual as having an evolving career-in-practice be understood?

Within careers literature, Bird (1994) conceptualizes the career as a process of accumulation. After reflecting on the changing characteristics of work within a knowledge economy, he argues that careers can be seen 'as repositories' – 'accumulations of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise, and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences over time' (1994: 326). Progress is linked not to a series of jobs, but to the accumulation and use (or performance) of various types of knowledge and skills. This is not to say that career repositories are always growing. Individuals' careers involve fluctuating collections of knowledge and skill: 'in addition to being accumulated, knowledge may also be removed, rearranged or replaced' (1994: 326).

This conceptualization fits well with our concern about the unfolding (and reciprocal) relationship between individuals and the elements of practice. Some interpretations of practice theory can reify these elements, giving the impression that a particular fixed combination of knowledge, skill, and material is brought together each time a practice is performed. To move away from this static image, we imagine instead broad 'vocabularies of elements' (Author A), with individuals routinely using and developing sub-sets of them. Taking this starting point, a career-in-a-practice involves the accumulation, removal, rearrangement, replacement and innovation of these elements during a sequence of performances over time. Within a practice we would expect each individual to accumulate different, but overlapping sets of elements; that is to say that variety exists in the embodied skills, knowledge and collections of materials held and used by each individual. At the same time, and partly because of these careers-in-a-practice, the 'vocabulary of elements' is also changing. As such, explanation of the range, configuration and changing morphology of elements will partly be achieved by studying the intersection of practice and practitioners across time.

A story of product development in bread-baking offers an example of these dynamics. Nonaka (1991) relays how a Japanese product developer became an apprentice baker in order to improve the design for a new bread-making machine (in Bird, 1994: 330-331). After being socialized into the tacit knowledge of traditional bread-making, she was able to articulate and combine traditional knowledge with technology-development principles in order to create a successful new product. The developer's innovative career facilitated a particular accumulation of knowledge, thus enabling an innovation in the 'elements' of commercial bread making in Japan. As this example shows, individual

careers, and the accumulation and combination of elements within them, matter for the dynamics of social practice.

The removal, rearrangement, replacement or innovation of practice elements that occurs as individuals live through their careers-in-a-practice can have implications for future performances, and performers. In the example above, future bread-making is affected by the integration of changed technologies. Other emergent qualities include changed cultural conventions associated with the practice, changed 'standards and ideas of 'good practice', increasing accumulations of knowledge or skill that individuals must acquire in order to enact the practice, the integration of new or more technologies and materials, new forms of embodiment and a changing set of demands on the body. Such shifts will affect practice participants in different ways, and careers research provides examples of these emergent qualities of practice, and their implications for performers.

Raisborough provides a typical example in her study of the implications of sea cadets' everyday practices for the development of their careers (2007). The study shows that there are limited opportunities for female staff to accumulate and use their skills due to a rule stipulating that they must be present when female recruits participate in any activity. As a result, they are reduced to observers in activities led by male colleagues, and their talents and skills are underused. This prevents them from developing their CVs in the same manner, or at the same rate, as their male counterparts, at the same time reducing the competition these male colleagues face. In this case the emergent relation of individuals and practice elements reproduces inequality.

In other practices, the cultural importance of place makes travel a necessity, thus making aspects of the 'vocabulary of elements' difficult to access. Within 'diasporic' leisure practices such as capoeira and yoga, conventions of apprentice-guru transmission mean that full participation requires travelling to Brazil or India, and learning from the masters who have deep ties to these places (Delamont and Stephens, 2008; Joseph, 2008; Strauss, 2005). Another example is found in unionized workplaces, which can create barriers to accumulation for non-members by restricting access to training and employment experience. Inequalities in accumulation must therefore be considered alongside issues of access and empirical investigations of 'which specific internal and external benefits accrue to people in particular positions within identified practices' (Warde, 2005: 147).

More broadly, the relationship between careers-in-a-practice and accumulation is linked to social validation and rewards. For some practices the accumulation of credentials is crucial, while for others social networks or technologies must be collected, as illustrated by Iellatchitch et al.'s discussion of the different capitals required for successful careers in traditional work places and in self-employment (2003: 742). The institutions which 'house' practices can formally outline the accumulations required for career mobility, but even practices less dependent on such organizations have understandings of socially-acceptable and beneficial accumulations. Patchwork quilters, for instance, validate and encourage the excessive accumulation of supplies such as fabric because, even though these materials may never be used, their presence reaffirms understandings of beauty and commitment to the practice (Stalp, 2006).

If careers are seen as repositories, then their ongoing vitality is linked to the accumulation or rearrangement of key elements of practice in performances – it is through these processes that the repositories, and so careers, remain active. We can reason then that the duration of careers is linked to continued possibilities for accumulation and rearrangement. As Lachmann explains, graffiti taggers – those who scrawl their signature or logo in public places – rarely develop long careers because the range of achievements and associated skills available to them is limited (1988: 238). While some become associated with gangs or begin accumulating the skills of mural-creation, many stop after less than a year once opportunities for accumulation have expired. Running out of opportunities to develop new skills and knowledge does not necessarily terminate an individual's career, but it limits the possibilities for performance and its related rewards, making ongoing

commitment less likely. The 'socially expected time durations' (Merton 1968 in Moen, 2005: 197) of careers are therefore linked to the opportunities to accumulate and rearrange element vocabularies.

Accumulation of embodied skill – the 'carrying' of the practice in the body – forms an aspect of element vocabularies with particular characteristics. Wainwright and Turner's (2006) consideration of aging and injury across the careers of royal ballet dancers highlights how physical capitals of speed, stamina and suppleness are scrutinized in recruitment, how they undulate across a career, and eventually decline. Accumulating a certain level of skill, and the corresponding physical capital, is necessary for participation as a high-level dancer, yet this very process affects the duration of participants' careers. Though the graffiti taggers mentioned earlier quickly run out of things to accumulate, in this case top levels of embodied competences and physical capital are simply unsustainable – 'the extreme physical demands of ballet can, literally, wear your body out' (Wainwright and Turner, 2006: 243). In this way, the practices' requirements of the body, in relationship with the body's limitations, shape career durations. For a demanding practice such as ballet, people are 'getting old' by age twenty-five and dancers can expect to be retired by their mid-thirties. We would expect practices to have different career rhythms, which might offer some insight into practice emergence, persistence and decline.

While physical decline leads to an end of one's dancing career, the repositories built up from being immersed in the ballet world leads a small number of people to new career paths as teachers and administrators (Wainwright and Turner, 2006: 243). These new careers draw upon ongoing accumulations of knowledge and skill, as well as demanding an articulation, though not an associated enactment, of embodiment. While embracing this career trajectory offers many rewards, there remains for some dancers a sense that different elements are simply out of sync: 'just at that point when you are in your mid-thirties, I think, you just begin to understand so much more about the world, and yourself and life and other people and emotions. But you can no longer dance like you could when you were 25' (Wainwright and Turner, 2006: 247). In this view, the limits of the body prevent further personal mastery and achievement. Yet as developments in other styles of dance suggest, limits can also lead to positive transformations in practice – for instance modern dance innovator Merce Cunningham was able to perform into his 70s because his style of choreography rejected many conventions (and the associated demands) of classical dance.

Practice elements also accumulate across generations. In this sense, inter-generational dynamics are important for the sustenance of the practice. Patchwork quilters, for instance, have a difficult time expressing the temporality of their careers according to clock or calendar time, yet highlight the importance of connections between generations (Stalp, 2007). Materials are handed down by family members, skills are passed from grandmothers to mothers, and inheritance becomes a key motivation for ongoing performances. Continuing family traditions, picking back up after missed generations, or starting new traditions where accumulated skills can be passed down through families (Stalp, 2007: 50-55) are shared understandings that reproduce the importance of intergenerational accumulation.

As this brief discussion has illustrated, studying the sequenced, emergent accumulations of elements across individual careers and how they intersect with the mutating vocabularies of elements can deepen understanding of the shifting contours of practice-entities. Further, considering the rhythms and durations of particular practice-careers might hold some explanations of how and why practices emerge, persist or decline.

### ***Interwoven Careers in a Life***

As there are diverse social practices, and as every agent carries out a multitude of different social practices, the individual is the unique crossing point of practices, of bodily-mental routines. (Reckwitz, 2002: 256)

Though the point of intersection between one person and one practice has been studied, the intersection of one person and many practices is often ignored. Within research on careers, a focus upon work, and even more narrowly upon specific professions or institutions, has hidden the potential of having multiple careers. Though recent ideas of ‘boundaryless careers’ (Arthur et al., 2005) have emphasized that careers are not tied to employers, and can embrace experiences in multiple organizations, the notion that individuals might have multiple parallel careers is not part of this picture. Examinations of practice, on the other hand, have recognized the potential for multiple careers without devoting much study to them. Despite Reckwitz’s observation above, the individual as the unique crossing point of practices has rarely been empirically studied.

Van Maanen and Barley note that historical particularities only gain coherence when set against some ‘backdrop’: an organization, an occupation, a family life cycle and so on (1984). We might imagine this ‘backdrop’ as the integration of many practices and many careers within an individuals’ life. The particular career under empirical study is in the ‘foreground’ and forms an empirical decision rather than a social fact. Reclaiming this dynamic of multiple careers within both theoretical and empirical studies is crucial because the crossing point of practices is also an important site of negotiation and change.

Considering *careers-in-a-life* involves more than what Eaton and Bailyn call ‘career as life path’ (2000: 192). It is not just that family, community and work are negotiated over one’s life, but that people are engaged in *multiple, concurrent careers*. Kirton suggests that such multiple careers be seen as ‘parallel,’ in order to recognize that:

it is not a question of primary and secondary commitment to different life careers, but of balancing more than one career and sharing commitment among them. It is likely that different life careers will interconnect and overlap, sometimes complementing and at other times conflicting with one another (2006: 50)

While in some cases the competing interests of multiple careers can lead to career breaks – ‘time outs’ (Moen, 2005) – or even wholesale defection from practices, many people also successfully manage multiple participation in work, leisure, religion and family. For instance, in the 1970s and 1980s extremely keen bird watchers made use of the North Sea oil boom by getting lucrative manual labor jobs that they could work at for several months and then quit, in order to go birding (Cocker, 2001: 182). The turnover in the sector at the time meant that once they ran out of money, they could return to the oil fields and start the cycle again. In this case, careers in work and bird watching were very complementary. Understanding how parallel careers intersect therefore offers further explanations of why careers are not ‘unilinear’.

On a basic level, the complementarities or competition of different careers relate to the fact that careers-in-a-practice take up time – in order to participate in work, leisure, or family one must devote time to their activities (Shove, 2009: 18). Being committed to a practice therefore influences the temporality of everyday life, and of the other practices one can engage in. Participating in one practice regularly affects opportunities to engage in another. Wacquant, for instance, discusses the demands of boxing:

Getting up before dawn, six days of the week, to do one’s ‘roadwork’ (three to seven miles of running, alternating straight jogging with shadow-boxing and sprints), and going to the gym every afternoon to repeat the exact same workout *ad infinitum* can take its toll – especially when it has to be juggled around family obligations and the constraints of a part-time or full-time job, as is the case of most pro-boxers (1995: 82)

While new organizational arrangements, such as out-sourcing and contract labour, change how careers demand people’s time, the key point is that careers in one practice inevitably compete and

conflict with others because their temporalities are differently aligned. The pattern and flexibility of these temporalities contributes in large part to how well people can weave together multiple careers.

Many dynamics of these emergent careers-in-a-life can be seen in studies of women and work. By focusing upon the unique set of challenges that women face when trying to carve out both professional and family involvement, this research has illustrated how maintaining overlapping and concurrent careers often involves competition, conflict and complex management.

Firstly, competition between practices can lead to career breaks. As Crompton and Sanderson note, 'many women, of course, will combine both "employment" and "domestic" careers, and thus their employment careers will be *discontinuous*' (1986: 28). Taking time out to have or take care of children affects how women build up careers, as well as what careers they pursue. Professions such as nursing and teaching, for instance, have temporalities of accumulation more conducive to discontinuity, and they can therefore fit more easily alongside family obligations (Crompton and Sanderson, 1986: 29).

Secondly, negotiating the balance between competing careers can depend largely upon personal management. Evetts' research on women engineering professionals found that flexible work arrangements designed to fit in with childcare were often negotiated on an individual-case basis (see also Eaton and Bailyn, 2000; 1994). In this way, the assumption that some careers should be dominant (i.e. work careers) can result in a lack of formal policy addressing how people's balancing of multiple careers might be accommodated.

Thirdly, careers conflict not only in terms of time demands, but also in terms of understandings of time. As Bourdieu notes, a practice has its own organizing temporal structure (1977: 8). This can be seen in the case of work: 'Paid work and career paths are a source of routines and expectations, providing the social organization of time: be it (work) days, (work) weeks, or (work) life' (Moen, 2005: 191). The temporality of childrearing, however, is often more about responding in the moment to needs – some of which might be anticipated and others which are not. Bailyn, for instance, recognizes that grandmothers are able to forge careers of caring that respond to needs and tasks, while the 'caring time' of parents often becomes commodified and driven by clock-time (2004: 1509). In this way, the temporal assumptions of work careers are imposed onto other careers that would not otherwise be organized with comparable rhythms. While musing on these differences, Bailyn suggests the value of reconsidering how we understand careers: 'Instead of bringing clock time from the world of employment into the work of care, as is currently happening, could one bring social time – a time geared to the needs of ongoing events – into employment?' (2004: 1511). Re-thinking temporal assumptions, and what they symbolize, could lead to alternate understandings of potential trajectories for careers-in-a-life, and accompanying understandings of accumulation.

Finally, the competition between concurrent careers is not always the reason for career breaks. That is, both dynamics between careers in multiple practices and within careers in one practice can affect processes of change. Cohen et al. found that while women in their study named childcare as a key reason for leaving employment, the situation was often more complex (2004). One woman, for instance, noted that a lack of growth and development was a significant factor, though less socially acceptable as a justification (Cohen et al., 2004: 416). In this way, a lack of opportunities for the accumulation of new skills can lead to a reconsideration of how different careers have been prioritized in one's life. Additional empirical research into multiple careers-in-a-life will surely uncover additional dynamics of concern in processes of change.

While this literature on women's work has devoted the most attention to multiple careers, many of these dynamics are also applicable to the intersection of other types of careers. Stalp has shown how careers in patchwork quilting involve negotiating space and time in relation to family activities



(2007). Kirton similarly foregrounds non-work practices, discussing how careers of labour union participation can become an important complement to 'dead-end' work careers (2006). Engaging fully with the intersection of careers-in-a-life therefore requires, in the tradition of the Chicago School, acknowledging the diverse range of careers that are possible. Since many areas of social policy are concerned with transformations in social practice, broadly writ, studying how intersecting careers-in-a-life develop over time stands to offer significant insights regarding complementarities and obstacles to social change.

### ***Multiple Careers in a Practice***

At the same time that multiple careers are concurrently emerging within individual lives, they are also emerging within practices. That is, one could recognize that practices are made up not only of elements, but also of careers. In their 1961 ethnography of medical students, Becker et al. note that:

Any organization – no matter what its purposes – consists of the interaction of men [sic]... The men who interact are involved in the organization in varying degree, for varying periods of time, and at different stages of their careers. (2002: 14)

Just as a variety of careers make up an institution, so too we can see a practice as constituted by a range of stages and 'types' of careers. Shove et al. note this point: 'at any one moment, a practice will be populated and carried by people with different degrees of experience and commitment' (2012: 71). Here we argue that much can be learned about the changing morphology of practices, and their influence on individual lives, by thinking about the cumulative effects of multiple careers in a practice.

Research on demography and labour market dynamics provides a useful starting point for exploring this argument, and how it might be empirically studied. Though demography is a broad term that might suggest a concern with aspects such as gender, age and ethnicity, these lie beyond the scope of this paper. Here we are interested in the demographics of not individuals but *careers* – for example, what is the variety of career stages and types at any moment, and how does this change across time? What is the history of careers within the practice: what patterns do cumulative careers form across time, and with what implications in the present? How does thinking in terms of career demographics help us look back to the past and project to the future? What does such an analysis offer for those concerned with shaping and shifting the trajectories of practices in particular directions?

Author B's research on changes in the profession of sociology in the UK provides an excellent example of how considering labour market dynamics might reveal demographics and dynamics of multiple careers in a practice (year). By tracing how jobs in sociology emerged in the 1940s, and how a period of rapid growth in the 1960s led to a glut of young scholars in the 1970s, Author B illustrates that the relationship between multiple careers in sociology not only matters for individuals seeking to start careers, but also for how those already employed can progress. That is, multiple careers have cumulative effects that affect the trajectories of individuals and practices. More specifically, looking at the case of sociologists highlights several important dynamics.

For one, in terms of the careers of its participants, any practice at any moment has a particular shape. For sociology this was a 'moving pyramid' (Westergaard and Pahl, 1989), beginning in the 1960s with a broad base of many early-career scholars, and which by the 80s was somewhat inverted with a middle-age peak and few new recruits. A practice might then be imagined as a series of shapes along an 'x axes' of time. At any moment, this shape structures future possibilities. In the case of sociology, heavy recruitment of young scholars in the 1960s and 70s meant that by the 80s there was little room for new appointments, because the cohort of professors was so young, there was little movement at the top and promotion rates were slow. Those interested in how practices

change, or how their trajectories can be steered might therefore wish to study different 'shapes' that exist, and their structuring effects: how and why different shapes are connected across time.

In sociology the 'pyramid' was unsustainable, and to an extent created the conditions for its own stagnation. We recognised earlier in the paper the importance of 'recruitment' for the ongoing vitality of a practice; for the sociology profession, recruitment was constrained as a result of the initial peak. A pattern of consistent recruitment across time forms an important principle in labour force management (e.g. in NHS workforce planning, and the law profession), and was the case for sociology in the later 80s, a lack of an up-and-coming cohort was identified and addressed. For many (non-professional) practices, this issue is not identified and so the practice wanes.

Of course it is not simply the 'moving pyramid' shape that created problems for sociology, but also its interplay with institutional and policy initiatives – how the discipline was positioned within political discourse. This intersection informed interventions which aimed to shift and shape recruitment, rates of career progression, and redundancy or retirement, for example by stipulating that 'no more than 35% [or later 40%] of university staff should be in senior positions' in order to prevent salary costs from drifting ever higher as staff aged (Author B). These interventions were specific to particular problems, and were informed by an understanding of multiple careers and their dynamics. This form of labour market management is an ongoing tinkering to shift the 'shape' of the labour force in order to encourage its expansion and contraction, persistence and demise. Understanding these dynamics within the context of non-work practices potentially contributes to current discussions of practice intervention and governance, for example in the area of sustainability (Shove et al., 2012).

A powerful aspect of thinking about multiple careers in practice in this manner, and of understanding a practice's demographic shape, is the potential it provides for anticipating a practice's future. Within sociology the 'moving pyramid' which took shape in the 1960s, combined with the political economic climate of the 1970s and 80s, meant that the discipline met a particular set of problems, such as the static career structure, lack of recruitment, slow rate of promotion, and need for redundancy (as there were few candidates for other options like early retirement). Though the recession of 2007/8 presented a similar political economic climate, we might theorise that the implications for sociology will be very different, because of the different characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century sociological labour force inherited from the discipline's beginnings.

Sociology boomed as the 'baby boomer' generation came of age. Though the 'moving pyramid' was in part balanced as many careers were cut short in the 1980s, Locke (2007) notes that social studies is more markedly 'ageing' than many other disciplines, with over 45% of the workforce over 50 years of age. The shape of sociology today is very different to when it faced cuts in the 1980s. This might mean that a 'throughput' continues and recruitment still happens, but conversely it may pose new and different threats to the profession's continuity, with the possibility that old hands retire and no new appointments are made. What is likely is that the interplay of these aspects will be different in different places, adding a spatial dimension that is also relevant when we think about these dynamics of multiple careers in a practice.

As this short discussion has shown, people's careers relate to each other not just in the (intergenerational) accumulation of shared elements, but also in dynamics of cumulative emergence. Managing careers is therefore both something that individuals undertake, as well as an important process for institutions and policymakers who are interested in influencing social processes. Looking at the demographics of multiple careers, especially non-work careers, offers considerable value in further anticipating and shaping the careers of both individuals and practices.

## **Conclusion**

To date, the relationship between individual *lives* and social practices has too often remained peripheral. Broadly speaking, discussions often treat either individuals, or practices as stuck in a series of synchronic instances. That is, where the practices are recognised as changing across time, individual enactments are addressed in terms of isolated moments of performance. Conversely, when individuals' lives are examined in their diachronic unfolding, practices are reified as unchanging entities. The intervention of this paper has been to further engage with the concept of career in order to expand understandings of how individuals' careers and careers of practices are marked by multiple, complex dynamics. These careers emerge over time in relation to each other, and their trajectories are therefore deeply intertwined. Understanding careers in this manner highlights that researching the complex interactions of structure and agency can benefit greatly from considering multiple perspectives and dynamics of how social realities play out. By considering careers-in-a-practice, concurrent careers-in-a-life, and multiple cumulative careers in a practice, we were able to briefly characterize the important ways in which individual lives transform and are transformed by social practices. In order to consider issues of social change, and moreover to try and modulate the direction of this change, further theoretical and empirical exploration of the multiple co-evolving timelines and trajectories of individuals and practices is a valuable next step.

By drawing upon existing resources within careers theory and research we have highlighted several issues that will be important for future study. Firstly, by discussing accumulation as a fundamental component of individuals' careers-in-a-practice, we provide a means of examining the co-evolution of an individuals' and a practices' vocabulary of elements. Empirically, this approach to careers-in-a-practice would involve further studies that trace how people's repositories of material and embodied elements are managed over time, and any corresponding shifts in the overall vocabulary of practice elements. Such studies might deepen understandings of how individual lives affect processes of innovation. Understanding the rhythms and dynamics of accumulation within practice-careers might also provide insights as to why some practices thrive and others do not.

Secondly, we emphasized that the interaction and negotiation of careers-in-a-life deserves empirical attention. Studying individuals' relationships to multiple practices offers a means of understanding what practices require of people, how individuals negotiate these competing and conflicting demands, and how the (in)flexibility of these requirements affects career directions and durations, and so the practice. Moreover, studying parallel careers offers opportunities to consider how elements are exchanged and used in multiple practices, and thus how convergences between practices might foster innovation or increased dedication.

Finally, by highlighting the multiple careers in a practice, we argued that broad patterns of careers should be of interest to practice theorists. These demographics hold considerable potential to assess how careers of practitioners are changing *en masse*, and aggregate qualitative details that have significant implications for the trajectory of social practices. Moreover, the ability to retrospectively analyse career demographics in a practice is matched by the potential to make informed predictions of how future demographics might develop, and possibilities for intervention. In this way, engaging further with multiple careers in a practice offers researchers a powerful means of engaging in future-oriented discussions that could be of significant impact to a wide range of policymakers and institutions.

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