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Being a professor in the 21st-century university: Pressured professionalism in the UK academy

Ser professor na universidade do século XXI: Profissionalismo sob pressão na academia do Reino Unido

Être professeur dans l'université du XXIe siècle: Le professionnalisme sous pression dans l'académie britannique

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Abstract
Drawing upon research that yielded data from over 1,200 UK-based professors, this paper illustrates how, by trying to meet expectations, their 'demanded' professionalism became pressured professionalism as these academics navigated ways to enact academic leadership. Unclearly defined in the UK context, academic leadership was often interpreted as needing to be all things to all people, and pressure to enact it spawned performance angst as professors were impeded in trying to achieve what they perceived as their ideal job situations. Yet it is suggested that the demands and pressures associated with today's neoliberal university have dogged academe for centuries.

Keywords: academic working life, 'demanded' professionalism, 'enacted' professionalism, proximity theory, academic leadership, neoliberalism, the neoliberal university

Resumo
Baseado na investigação que recolheu dados de mais de 1.200 professores/as sediados/as no Reino Unido, este documento ilustra como, ao tentar responder às expectativas, o seu profissionalismo "exigido" se transformou em profissionalismo sob pressão à medida que estes/as académicos/as lutavam para encontrar formas de exercer a liderança académica. No contexto britânico, a liderança académica é muitas vezes interpretada como uma necessidade de ser tudo para todas as pessoas, e a pressão para a exercer criou ansiedade de desempenho, uma vez que os/as professores/as foram impedidos/as de alcançar o que consideravam ser a sua situação de trabalho ideal. No entanto, sugere-se que as exigências e pressões associadas à universidade neoliberal de hoje estão presentes no meio académico há séculos.

Palavras-chave: vida profissional académica, profissionalismo 'exigido', profissionalismo 'decretado', teoria da proximidade, liderança académica, neoliberalismo, a universidade neoliberal

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Résumé
S'appuyant sur des recherches qui ont permis de recueillir des données auprès de plus de 1200 professeurs basés au Royaume-Uni, cet article illustre comment, en essayant de répondre aux attentes, leur professionnalisme "exigé" s'est transformé en professionnalisme sous pression, alors que ces universitaires s'efforçaient de trouver des moyens d'exercer un leadership académique. Dans le contexte britannique, le leadership académique est souvent interprété comme un besoin d'être tout pour tout le monde, et la pression pour l'exercer a engendré une angoisse de performance, les professeurs étant empêchés de réaliser ce qu'ils percevaient comme leur situation professionnelle idéale. Pourtant, il est suggéré que les exigences et les pressions associées à l'université néolibérale d'aujourd'hui sont présentes dans le monde universitaire depuis des siècles.

Mots-clés: la vie professionnelle des universitaires; le professionnalisme "exigé", le professionnalisme "mis en œuvre", la théorie de la proximité; le leadership universitaire, le néolibéralisme, l'université néolibérale

Introduction

Whether there ever was a 'golden age' of academe is debatable, but in the twenty-first century's third decade it is difficult to conceive of the academic profession as Perkin (1969) depicted it over fifty years ago – as probably the most stable and self-confident one in the world – or as what Tight (2010) suggests has been mythologised as a "kind of elite priesthood" that "enjoyed a relatively leisured and un-pressurized existence (...) well connected with the powers that be" (p. 106). Yet, while "a 'things were better in the old days' nostalgia" (Bacon, 2014, p. 5) may be dismissed as not only a futile but also an epistemically dubious basis for analysing academic life, it underpins Sullivan's (2014) more expansive portrayal of what has been lost. The former University of Virginia president pulls no punches in apportioning blame for what she identifies as conflicting pressures on academics that combine to dilute the quality of what they can offer their students, their disciplines, and their universities:

> Academe was once considered a haven from the corporate rat race, a refuge for serious scholars and teachers, a place for measured thought and unhurried instruction – the "life of the mind" concept. Mention of the Ivory Tower conjured up images of devoted scholars bent over their dusty books, scientists experimenting in their laboratories, or professors engaged in Socratic discourse with attentive students. (...) But how many professors have time now to sit down (...) for a sustained, one-on-one dialogue with a student? They have too many competing demands. Conducting research, advising students, serving on various committees, and staying abreast of the latest research in our fields – these demands can eat up their entire lives, and this means that universities fit the profile of "greedy institutions". (pp. 10-11)

Echoed by Pifer et al.'s (2019) observation that what the American liberal arts college connotes – "classic images of higher learning – beautiful campuses, intellectual vitality, small

classes" – has been eroded "in the present era of accountability" (p. 538), Sullivan's (2014) 'then and now' impressionistic snapshot, culminating in highlighting higher education (HE) institutions as the avaricious agents of oppressive demands, captures an image of twenty-first century academic working life within what Smyth (2017) derides as the 'toxic university', and what has come to be identified more generally as the neoliberal university.

It is within this context – what Kauppi (2015, p. 32) bemoans as "the triumph of neoliberalism in academe" which "[n]othing seems to stop" – that academic life is examined in this paper. Drawing on UK-based research findings, the academic environment that I portray is, technically, UK-specific, but it will resonate with readers familiar within the many other national HE sectors framed by the same backdrop; as Montero-Hernadez et al. (2019, p. 426) argue: "Across nations, academics are experiencing a sense of loss, anxiety, and fatigue as a result of the growing role of government in university control, the climate of accountability, increased expectations for research productivity, public scrutiny, and reduced funding".

My examination is specific to academic life experienced by the most senior academic grade. In North America these academics are known as full professors, and in the UK (as well as in many other European countries, and, for the most part, in Australasia) they are simply called professors; for junior academics in UK universities are not routinely known or addressed as 'professor'; the professorial title is preserved as one of distinction, denoting only those – currently, around 10% – promoted to the highest academic grade.

With the publication of his own professorial inaugural lecture, "What is it to be a Professor?", Malcolm Tight (2002) was one of the first UK-based researchers to turn his attention to professorship as a focus of analysis – albeit an anecdotal and impressionistic 'analysis'. In this paper I address an extended version of Tight's question: *What is it to be a professor in the twenty-first century neoliberal university?* Finding professorship in the UK to be associated with academic leadership – which professors are expected to enact – I highlight the distinction between how such leadership is typically conceptualised and understood in that national context, and how it seems to be interpreted in other countries. Moreover, since leadership requires 'followership', my depiction of the nature of professors' academic leadership incorporates consideration of the perspectives of junior academics. I also question whether role diffusion-invoked 'pressured professionalism' is unique to the 21st century neoliberal university, or whether it has a longer history.

Before outlining details of the studies whose findings inform this paper, I trace the development of the context that shapes the nature of professorship in the UK.

Professorship in the UK academy: role and purpose

Examining academic life within the neoliberal university has been a focus of research into HE for over two decades. A prominent discourse concerns itself with what ranges from macro-level contextual features of what Archer (2008) called these 'new times', such as the marketisation of higher education and the commodification of its services, through meso-level conditions, such as systemic or institutional audit and performativity cultures, to micro-level perspectives, perceptions and experiences: "the implications and 'lived' (experiential and identity) consequences for academic workers subsumed within such systems" (p. 267). Much of this literature (e.g. Davies & Petersen, 2005; Kauppi, 2015; Levin & Greenwood, 2016; Lybeck, 2018; Smyth, 2017; Wright & Greenwood, 2017b) exposes what are interpreted as the deleterious effects of neoliberalism and the managerialist policies it has spawned.

A pervasive generic critical theme is that accountability measures have impoverished academic life by, *inter alia*: reducing academics' autonomy, increasing their workloads, undermining many of their cherished values, and intensifying the nature of their work. Nixon (2003), for example, refers to "the endless target-setting, league tables, inspection regimes, and centrally controlled funding mechanisms that now characterize the university sector and dominate the working lives of those within it" (p. 7), while Kauppi (2015) identifies "globalisation and neoliberal technologies of power" as the bases of redefined standards and values by which academics live and work, and Enders et al. (2009, p. 48) write of "the vicious cycle of career planning, target settings, performance measurements, and the related systems of rewards and sanctions", which they link to the impact of dwindling resources on the research funding pot, and on academics' reduced capacity to drive research agendas.

A key point is that, within the neoliberal university, academics – not least professors – have become a commodity. This university cannot therefore afford the luxury of offering itself as – to requote Sullivan (2014) – "a refuge for serious scholars (...) a place for measured thought and unhurried instruction – the 'life of the mind' concept", if such features do not pay their way. For UK-based professors (around a quarter of whom, my research revealed, are not UK natives), such 'privileged' academic lifestyles – if they ever existed – have been superseded by expectations that they (professors) will be academic leaders.

Professors as academic leaders

It seems that, to complement their protracted project of refashioning themselves in the Neoliberal style, universities[1] in the UK have been instrumental in widening the parameters of

[1] For simplicity, I apply authorial licence to personify the term 'universities' to denote universities' senior managers and decision makers.

what professorship implies and what purpose its serves. With a view to harnessing the skills and talents of their most senior academics – and perhaps justifying these academics' salaries and status – they appear to have re-designed professorship to support the realisation of their institutional strategies (see, for example, Evans, 2016). This evident re-design identifies professors' overarching purpose as providing academic leadership; it would be almost impossible today to find a job description for a professorship in a UK university that does not list academic leadership as a core requirement. To understand such expectations, it is important to recognise that academic leadership is interpreted rather differently in the UK from how it is interpreted elsewhere.

A UK-specific conceptualisation

As is evident from American texts on academic leadership (e.g. Birnbaum, 1992; Bolman & Gallos, 2011; Gallos, 2002; Hecht et al., 1999), in North America 'academic' seems to denote the context in which the leadership is carried out, and to prefix an interpretation of leadership that equates – or even conflates – it with incumbency of a recognised middle or senior management role. This narrow interpretation is also evident in some Australasian literature (e.g. Debowski & Blake, 2004; Ramsden, 1998; Scott et al., 2008; Spiller, 2010); those who adopt wider interpretations of academic leadership as designated-role-independent practice (e.g. Juntrasook, 2014; Youngs, 2017) seem to represent the minority of Australasian-based authors to have published on the topic. In the UK, in contrast, academic leadership is for the most part understood as informal – often *ad hoc* – supportive collegiality, expressed as development- or empowering-focused agency, as conceptualised in the report of a UK-based study of academic leadership:

> Findings reveal a high degree of consistency in perspectives on, and experiences of, academic leadership. In particular it was observed that *much of what could be considered as 'academic leadership' is not provided by people in formal managerial roles*. Instead, leadership arises through engagement with influential colleagues within one's own academic discipline, especially those who play a pivotal role in one's transition and acculturation into academic life. PhD supervisors, current and former colleagues and key scholars were all described as significant sources of academic leadership, exerting substantial influence throughout one's career, *whether or not they were part of the same institution*. (Bolden et al., 2012, p. 6, emphases added)

But with conceptual breadth comes opacity. So-conceptualised, academic leadership is under-examined; having attracted attention from only a very small group of researchers (e.g. Bolden et al., 2012; Evans, 2018; Evans et al., 2013; Juntrasook et al., 2013; Macfarlane, 2011, 2012), it remains a nebulous concept. Most work that focuses on academic leadership neither defines

it nor problematises its conceptualisation. It is therefore unclear if the term denotes the leadership of *academics* or of *academic work* – or both – or whether it simply refers to leadership *of* and *by* anyone, and of any kind, *within an academic context*. Indeed, before formulating my own (presented below), Bolden et al.'s (2012) was the only published definition of academic leadership, *so-interpreted* – as "a process through which academic values and identities are constructed, communicated and enacted" (p. 17) – that I encountered.

Interpreting 'academic', when it prefixes 'leadership', as an adjective rather than a noun, I offer a stipulative definition of what I refer to as the 'basic unit' of academic leadership, as: *human agency that, at the micro level, consciously or unconsciously prompts or facilitates, without coercion, an individual's attitudinal, behavioural, intellectual or affective shift or deviation – however minuscule – from a position or direction in relation to (the context of) academic activity or endeavour to what s/he (the individual) consciously or unconsciously recognizes as a superior position or direction: a 'better way'*. Aligned with what has been called the 'new wave' of critical leadership studies (Evans, 2018, 2022a, 2022b; S. Kelly, 2014), this definition incorporates recognition that leadership essentially involves non-coercive influence on another, and that, as a fluid – and potentially reciprocal – practice, occurs continually, as part-and-parcel of day-to-day (working) life. I see academic leadership as an umbrella notion that incorporates more specific sub-categories, such as intellectual and research leadership – the latter of which I define as "the influence of one or more persons on the research-related behaviour, attitudes or intellectuality of another/others" (Evans, 2014, p. 48).

As my research (Evans, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2018) reveals, however, in the UK, neither those who promote it as a key dimension of academic life – typically, university senior managers and policy makers – nor, for the most part, those from whom it is most often expected – full professors – seem to know precisely what academic leadership is, and more importantly, where its parameters lie. Before discussing the implications of this conceptual vagueness for professors' work, I outline the paper's theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework

My analysis is framed within two of my own related theoretical perspectives: proximity theory, and notions of professionalism and its relationship to role identity and expectations' fulfilment.

Proximity theory

Stemming from the *axiom of comparison*, "which formalizes the long-held view that a wide

class of phenomena, including happiness, self-esteem, and the sense of distributive justice, may be understood as the product of a comparison process" (Jasso, 1988, p. 11), I have formulated an original theory – proximity theory – which involves (most often, unconscious) comparison between one's 'actual' and 'ideal' current job situation, as subjectively perceived. The theory posits that:

> the closer one perceives one's 'actual' job situation to how one would, ideally, like it, the more positive one's job-related attitudes are; conversely, the further from one's ideal job situation one perceives one's 'actual' job situation, the more negative one's job-related attitudes are – typically manifested by, inter alia, dissatisfaction and low morale. (Evans, 2018, p. 140)

Whether actual or ideal, what is meant by 'job situation' may best be explained as "the whole, vast 'package' that defines one's working life" (Evans, 2018, p. 139). Encompassing each of the examples of phenomena listed by Jasso (1988), above, the *underlying* phenomenon in question, underpinning one's total job situation, is the conception of oneself-at-work, or of one's work-related self – which reflects, in turn, a broader, all-encompassing, conception of self, for work-related ideals will always be located within a more expansive, holistic, conception of an ideal self that encompasses all aspects of one's life: personal as well as professional. This notion of an ideal self is aligned with the notion of subjective well-being (SWB) – which Weiss (2002, p. 180) explains: "Numerous SWB researchers now take the position that SWB is an umbrella concept that encompasses three distinct constructs: an overall evaluation or global judgment of life satisfaction, a component that taps into affective experiences, and a belief component" – or as what Rode (2004) and Veenhoven (1991) call "life satisfaction" and which the latter explains as "the degree to which an individual judges the overall quality of his life-as-a-whole favourably. In other words: how well he likes the life he leads" (p. 10): a judgement that is made on the bases of affective and cognitive considerations.

Professionalism

Whether 'actual' or 'ideal', job situations encompass professionalism. In the vernacular, professionalism connotes praiseworthy behaviour, and status that is worth pursuing. Academic scholarship, however, has moved on from twentieth-century merit-laden interpretations that stem from historic notions of professionalism as denoting membership of a profession – which in turn imply a minority of elite occupations distinguished by traits such as autonomy, self-regulation, and exclusive entry pathways. Noordegraaf (2007) describes the context of twenty-first century professionalism as represented by "ambiguous" domains that are "fuzzy" and "loosely ordered" (p. 770). Barnett (2011, p. 31) highlights this context's 'networked complexity',

likening it to thin ice upon which the 'modern professional' must skate, trying to keep ahead of its cracking behind her. It is against the dynamism and fluidity of such a backdrop that the sociology of professions has shifted its focus from issues related to professional status and who should have it, to conceptual and critical analyses. Julia Evetts (2013) argues that "[t]o most researchers in the field it no longer seems important to draw a hard and fast line between professions and occupations but, instead, to regard both as similar social forms which share many common characteristics". She urges researchers "to look again at the theories and concepts used to explain and interpret this category of occupational work" (pp. 779-780).

Reflecting such epistemic evolution, I have conceptualised professionalism as quite simply a description of people's 'mode of being' in a work context, irrespective of whether that translates into practice that is praiseworthy or practice that is despicable (Evans, 2013), and explain it (professionalism) as relating to and conveying: what practitioners do; how and why they do it; what they know and understand; where and how they acquire their knowledge and understanding; what (kinds of) attitudes they hold; what codes of behaviour they follow; and what their function is – that is, what purposes they perform. So-conceptualised, professionalism encompasses, yet is 'bigger' than, what is often referred to as practice. Moreover, I distinguish between four 'perspectival versions' of professionalism (Evans, 2018): professionalism that is *demanded* (such as that reflecting specific professional service level demands – or requests – made of an occupational group, workforce, or work-defined constituency, such as professors); professionalism that is *prescribed* (such as that reflecting professional service levels recommended by analysts); *deduced* or *assumed* professionalism (which, distinct from prescribed professionalism since it does not involve prescription, represents reasoned deduction and/or assumption or speculation about the nature of a specific professionalism) and professionalism that is *enacted*, that is, professional practice as observed, perceived and interpreted (by any observer – from outside or within the relevant professional group or constituency, including those doing the 'enacting').

A key point is that only one of these – 'enacted' professionalism – may be considered to represent 'reality' (albeit a phenomenologically defined reality), for no matter what 'shape' or nature of professionalism is 'demanded' by stakeholders, or 'prescribed' or 'deduced' or 'assumed' by analysts and commentators, it is 'enacted' professionalism that represents the only meaningful conception of professionalism – that which practitioners/professionals are actually perceived to be 'doing'. The other three versions remain nothing more than visions, representing insubstantiality ranging from articulated ideology to wishful thinking.

Nevertheless, 'demanded' professionalism can act as a potent force, through the expectations that it conveys, for shaping enacted professionalism – such as occurred, as I illustrate with the research findings presented below, for professors in the neoliberal university.

Three studies of professors

By the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, academic work was establishing itself as a field of scholarship with a steadily accumulating knowledge base. But there remained a gap in this burgeoning research output: while the working lives of several minority groups of academics attracted, and continue to attract, researchers' attention, as several commentators note (e.g. Macfarlane, 2012; Rayner et al., 2010; Tight, 2002), as a discrete constituency of academics, professors scarcely featured in it. This article draws upon selected findings of three empirical studies that were undertaken as a response to this lacuna. To avoid lengthy diversion from the paper's key focus, I present below only information needed to contextualise the presentation of findings and the discussion that follow, referring readers to more detailed information available elsewhere (Evans 2015a, 2015b; Evans, 2018).

Outline of research design and method

Distinguished only on the basis of focus of inquiry, objectives, and research questions, the three projects otherwise followed the same format and employed the same two methods of data collection: online questionnaires and loosely structured follow-up interviews. Designed to be completed within five minutes, the questionnaires were intended to yield data revealing broad trends and patterns (while also identifying atypical cases), and the interviews – carried out with a sub-sample of questionnaire respondents – were directed towards uncovering richer data than is generally achievable through questionnaires, such as insight into attitudinal and emotional responses to experiences and situations recounted. Analysis of quantitative questionnaire data was effected automatically by the online questionnaire system. The system had the capacity to generate descriptive and/or inferential statistics, but since the requirements for my study were simply to present frequency percentages to indicate trends and patterns, descriptive statistics sufficed. Qualitative data – both from open-ended questionnaire responses and from interviews – were analysed manually through an incrementally reductive process from which key themes and issues (relevant to the research questions) emerged that illuminated participants' experiences of and perspectives on professorial academic leadership.

The flexibility incorporated into the interview schedule resulted in some disparity in topic coverage. It was impossible to ensure that every interview addressed every component of every research question – while this occurred in some cases, in others, the interviewer opportunistically focused more narrowly on what emerged from the interview conversation. This somewhat uneven coverage of issues makes it difficult, without misleading the reader, to quantify or otherwise indicate the weight of some of the evidence (presented below) of perceptions or attitudes. In some cases, an issue was raised by only one or two interviewees, yet

its exclusion from their interview conversations does not imply that it was of no concern to other interviewees; similarly, some issues identified by many interviewees were pursued extensively and in-depth in some cases, but in others were afforded only brief reference. Struck by its resonance with my own experiences and resultant difficulties in presenting my interview-generated data, I adopt as my own the explanation below (Moore, 2003, p. 309):

> Space prevents me from illustrating the representativity of the views across respondents, and for brevity's sake I have had to use quotations illustratively. I have, however, tended to draw more heavily from some interviews than others: as is usual, some interviews yield richer data than others, often because the individual has played a leading role in the processes under discussion, or because some colleagues are more articulate about social processes than others.

Links to the questionnaires were distributed, in the case of each study, to over 5,000 potential respondents, most of whom were, through unsystematic trawling of universities' departmental webpages, identified as representing the respondent population. Each study yielded responses from over 1200 questionnaire respondents representing over 90 public[2] UK universities in the case of study 1 and over 60 in the cases of studies 2 and 3. While biographical variables were not a key focus in any of the studies, questionnaires sought a range of variable-related data, and in all three studies respondents were asked to indicate their gender. Reflecting the gender imbalance represented in the UK professoriate[3], in studies 2 and 3, 71.1% of respondents identified themselves as male, 27.3% as female, and 1.6% failed to indicate their gender.

Study 1: Leading professors? Professorial academic leadership as it is perceived by 'the led'

Funded by the UK's Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, this one-year study (carried out 2011-12) – hereafter, the *Leading professors* study – was focused on professors' academic leadership as perceived by junior (non-professorial) academics, and who represent those to whom professors are intended to offer such leadership. Fifty of the 1,223 questionnaire respondents participated in follow-up interviews.

The study addressed the following research questions:

- What is the nature and extent of professorial academic leadership received by non-professorial academics – what might/does it look like in practice?

[2] The vast majority of UK universities are public, with only six private ones listed in 2022.
[3] Fagan and Teasdale (2021, p. 775) note that, in the UK, "[t]he majority (78%) of those who hold the rank of full professor are men", while figures for 2019-20 indicate that of 22,810 academics in UK universities who were categorised as professors, 6,345 were women, 16,415 were men, and the remaining 50 were identified as 'other' (Higher Education Statistics Association, 2021).

- To what extent, and in what ways, does this non-professorial constituency consider itself to be receiving the academic leadership that it: a) wants, b) expects, or c) needs from professors?
- To what extent, and in what ways are professors expected to provide academic leadership to junior colleagues?
- What are the perceived strengths and weaknesses of any such academic leadership – what, if any, models of good practice emerge?
- What factors facilitate or impede the nature and extent of professorial academic leadership?
- What is the perceived impact on their junior colleagues' working lives of professors' academic leadership?

Study 2: Professorial academic leadership in turbulent times: the professoriate's perspective

Also of one year's duration (2012-13) and funded by the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, this study was intended to augment study 1's findings by presenting the 'other side of the coin' perspective – that of professors. It addressed the following research questions:

- What is the nature and extent of academic leadership currently practised by the UK-based professoriate – what are its key strengths and weaknesses?
- What factors do professors identify as facilitators of and impediments to their capacity and willingness to provide (effective) academic leadership?
- What makes a 'leading professor'?
- How do professors envisage academic leadership evolving in response to changes to the economic and political context?
- To what extent, and in what ways, does the professoriate's perspective on the issues identified in the above research questions correlate with non-professorial perspectives, and what accounts for any discrepancies?

Of the 1,268 professors who completed the questionnaire, 394 volunteered to participate as interviewees, from whom an interviewee sub-sample of 42 was selected.

Study 3: Leadership preparation and development for UK-based university professors

Funded by the British Educational Management, Administration and Leadership Society, this study investigated an issue that emerged in the *Leading professors* findings: academics' evident lack of preparation and development for the professor role. The research questions

were:

- What level and quality of preparation – if any – for their various leadership roles is available to university professors?
- What lacunae and shortcomings exist, and with what consequences?
- What – if any – models of good practice (of professorial leadership preparation) exist, and what are the bases of their effectiveness?

Since the timing of the two studies overlapped, study 3's data collection was merged with that of study 2; to avoid respondent fatigue, a dual-purpose questionnaire was designed. Not only did studies 2 and 3 share a common questionnaire and questionnaire sample, the doubling-up also extended to the interview phase: study 3 used a sub-sample (20) of study 2's interviewee sample. The distinction between the two studies was maintained by the specific content of the data sought: while biographical data were shared by studies 2 and 3, specific questionnaire items were designed to service each study.

The following questionnaire items (presented verbatim) were specific to study 3:

- During your career as an academic, to what extent – if at all – have you seen any change to the professorial role and to expectations placed on professors?
- Since becoming a professor, have you ever felt the need to change any aspect of your practice to meet other people's expectations?
- Do you understand what your institution requires of you as a professor (i.e. are its expectations of its professors in general – or of you specifically – clearly articulated)?
- Do you feel that, in your earliest days as a professor, you were adequately prepared for taking on the professorial role?
- Has your current institution done all that you would want or need it to do to prepare you for your professorial role in that institution?

For each item, a range of response options was offered, which included: 'not sure/difficult to answer'. Within the dual purpose (serving studies 2 and 3) questionnaire, these five questions formed one study-3-specific section, *Expectations*, at the end of which was an open-ended item inviting, and yielding 348, comments. Within the interviews that served studies 2 and 3, the 20 study 3 interviewees, in addition to addressing issues relevant to study 2, were asked to discuss in more depth issues underpinning the five questions listed above. The interviews thus generated two distinct datasets: one serving each study.

Findings

The research findings revealed a pervasive feeling, shared by most professors, of pressure to enact what is effectively an academic leadership-focused 'demanded' professionalism.

'Demanding' or 'requesting' a particular professionalism is not the prerogative of employers and paymasters; it may also emanate from other stakeholders, including, in the case of professors, their junior colleagues. In the section below, I indicate something of this latter constituency's perspectives on professors and professorship.

'Demanded' and 'enacted' professorial professionalism: junior academics' perspectives on professors as academic leaders

My research revealed the nature of academic life in the neoliberal university to be what I have summed up elsewhere (Evans, 2018) as reminiscent of a Bruegel painting that depicts a cornucopia of busyness: a landscape of field and track, covered with exertion and activity of all kinds: people on the move, frenetically coming and going, leaping through hoops, twisting and curling past obstacles, and many, sharp-elbowed, hurdling ahead of everyone else, while others reserve their stamina and persistence for the marathon. The dominant image conveyed by professors and junior academics alike was one of pressure, competitiveness, competing tensions and work intensity. To provide a steer in performing their roles and advancing in their careers within such a context, academics may seek some kind of leadership from those whose professional achievements and accomplishments are tried, tested and proven: their most senior and successful colleagues. It is unsurprising therefore that non-professorial academics were found to hold high expectations of professors as academic leaders. Their expectations indicate the nature of the professionalism that junior academics 'demand' of professors, while their perceptions of how professors discharge their responsibilities represent junior academics' versions or notions of professors' 'enacted' professionalism.

From study 1 two essential broad features emerged of what was perceived as defining a 'leading' professor who meets expectations of her/him: *distinction* – professors were expected to demonstrate intellectual and scholarly distinction and erudition – and *relationality*, which refers to people's capacity for relating, and the extent to which they relate, to others, and the nature of such relations and relationships; or, to paraphrase Cunliffe and Eriksen's (2011) succinct explanation of relational leadership: people's "way of-being-in-relation-to-others", which encompasses "the character, judgment and personal values of leaders rather than [leadership] practices or processes" (pp. 1430-1431). Such relationality appeared to be the paramount concern of the majority of the *Leading professors* participants, who typically judged professors on the basis of their approachability, availability, and readiness to help and guide.

Many positive assessments (conveyed both in interview conversations and through the online questionnaire) were expressed as gratitude for career-building- and development-focused support, which was interpreted as a form of academic leadership that reflected altruistic collegiality. Negative assessments typically incorporated reference to what was perceived as professors' absorption in their own work, at the expense of meeting responsibilities to others, and junior academics' developmental needs.

Falling short of expectations?

In responses to an item that asked: Do the professors in your department/centre exemplify professorial professionalism as you perceive it? (i.e. do they behave as you expect professors to behave?) well under 10 per cent of its respondents selected the most positive response ('definitely'), and a quarter selected the most negative responses ('not really', 'a minority of them do', or 'none of them do'). Such negativity was elaborated upon in many respondents' comments – such as: "Professors see their focus as being research and view supporting others as a distraction and not part of their role"; "Professors are self-centred and interested only in furthering their career at the expense of others"; "Professors are remote & unapproachable & only interested in their own research".

On the whole, comments left in the open-ended items within study 1's questionnaire veered towards conveying rather more negative than positive assessments of professors' academic leadership – though it is reasonable to assume that those with negative views may be more motivated than those benefiting from mainly positive experiences to offer comments in a questionnaire that allows them to express their perspectives. The follow-up interviews yielded a more balanced overall evaluation, with all but one of the interviewees recounting experiences of interaction with professors that spanned a positive-negative assessment continuum, and including the following examples of many expressions of appreciation:

> He [a professor] was just very enthusiastic – just *very* approachable; again, it wasn't a question of "My door is always open", you just *knew* it was.

> With grant applications I've received excellent advice from professors here – our director of research – very helpful, very supportive, very incisive.

> A professor in another institution took the time and trouble when I was still a relatively new academic to read my work and go through it very carefully. But that wasn't the end of it, because she went through it very carefully and said, "Well, y'know, there's this, there's that, and there's the other; do this and that and the other". But she then said, "and then send me the next draft". And I think tea and cake came into it somewhere.

How closely enacted professionalism matches what I identify above as other perspectival versions of professionalism is very much in the hands of those doing the enacting, for expectations that others hold of one's performance may, depending on the circumstances – and, certainly, mediated by individual agency – act as a powerful spur to live up to them, so that the 'demanded' can often become (gradually) enacted. Such appeared the case with most (around two-thirds) of the professor participants.

Meeting expectations

Within the online questionnaire that served both the *Professorial academic leadership in turbulent times* and the *Professorial leadership preparation and development* studies, almost one-third (31.3%) of respondents to the question "Since becoming a professor, have you ever felt the need to change any aspect of your practice to meet other people's expectations?" selected strongly affirmative responses ('very much so' or 'quite significantly so/in most respects'), and another third (35.6%) indicated that they had tried to meet other people's expectations 'to some extent/in many respects'. Similar evident concern to meet expectations was expressed in interviews, and also conveyed through several anonymous responses to open-ended questionnaire items; the latter included comments such as: "Better preparation for how colleagues will view you would have been valuable. Most don't cut you any slack now", "Expectations are more implicit than explicit", and "There is certainly no handbook on how one is meant to behave as a professor, or exactly what is expected of us!".

Such evident concern to meet expectations seems to have prompted the (largely involuntary) enactment of what Noordegraaf (2007) calls 'pressured professionalism'.

Pressured professionalism

Emerging from studies 2 and 3 as prevalent was perceived pressure to perform, resulting in work overload and, in some cases, compulsive working that manifests itself as the inability to 'switch off' – as business studies professor Margaret admitted:

> I don't switch off when I go to bed; that's the problem. The mind just clicks back in... and you get sleepless nights, thinking: Oh, I haven't done that! Or, I need to do that!' And the email... emails that I haven't responded to – I meant to, and then... forgot.

While some professors evidently took such pressures in their stride – even, in some cases, seeming to thrive on it – others spoke of being ground down by and resentful of it. Numerous

responses to an open-ended item within a section of the questionnaire labelled 'morale' illustrate something of how pressure affected professors' perspectives on their working lives. One, for example, suggested that professors need to be 'all singing; all-dancing' and a great many respondents conveyed a sense of being pulled in numerous directions and struggling to meet the multiple demands upon them. A male STEMM professor interviewee complained:

> I think there's too many things expected of me. I'm expected to lead in too many areas, and as I look around and I look for people who appear exceptionally successful, they only really do one thing. (...) We can only really deliver *mediocre* stuff because we simply don't have the capacity to deliver at the levels expected, and I feel the expectations at the very top of this university, where it's stated that professors should research more, teach more, do more administration, are unreasonable.

Other interviewees highlighted similar tensions and frustrations. While his case is examined in more detail elsewhere (Evans, 2018) as an example of extreme demoralisation and work overload, the following extract from another STEMM professor's narrative adds colour to the scene of institutional greed sketched out by Sullivan (2014), cited in the opening paragraph of this paper. He complained:

> I just don't get into the lab. I mean, my working week is between fifty and sixty hours, and I don't work at weekends anymore because if I'm doing fifty to sixty hours during the week... I don't see that I need to come in on a Saturday! Of course, with the internet, y'know, you're never free. I've taken to reading my email at quarter to seven in the morning just to clear the stuff that accumulates overnight... so when I get to work I then have a free hour before stuff starts coming in. And I'm just pulled in every which direction... and yesterday I spent a fruitless hour-and-a-half in a meeting about how we're going to deal with the UK border agency regulations for overseas students. And then it was straight from that and back to the lab here to host parents at open days, y'know. This afternoon I have *got* to go down to the teaching labs to fix two bits of equipment, which I need for my practical – which I run on Thursdays. But because the practical sessions are timetabled so badly... in that we only have an afternoon to get the equipment ready, and the day then to run the practical, and that afternoon of the practical to put the equipment away again, everything's – there's just pressure on all sides... all the time... for doing things *now*! (...) we don't have time to do it *any other way*, and it's just *madness*!

In responses to open-ended items, many questionnaire respondents conveyed similarly negative sentiments. The comments below – all made by professors – indicate the nature of the pressure they highlighted as an overarching feature of their academic lives:

> It's a constant battle to juggle the range of internal and external demands. Given that many of these are unseen (intangible); lack of appreciation of this situation by others (who perceive you as absent

or not contributing to core activities) is arguably the biggest morale buster!

> Having been an engaged professor, loving both my teaching and research and contribution to the wider academic community, I now feel completely 'burnt out', struggling to maintain any work-life balance.

> I feel rather overwhelmed with work, much of which is not my own personal research work which I enjoy, but institutional work, such as managing [academic] staff and doing tasks for the school.

Yet it is important to emphasise that a broad spectrum of work-related attitudes – ranging from positive to negative – was evident in the dataset as a whole, and across the entire questionnaire sample of professors morale levels were broadly spread. Of those (n=1255) who responded to an item asking them to indicate their current morale level on an arbitrary 1-10 scale, fewer than ten per cent (6.8%) indicated the highest possible level (10), while just over ten percent (10.8%) indicated very low morale levels (1-3), including thirty-four (2.7% of the item's respondents) whose selection of the lowest number (1) implied that their morale was at rock-bottom. The largest proportion of respondents – almost a quarter – indicated a morale level of 8, with the next most frequently selected morale level indicators being 9 (selected by 16.9%) and 7 (selected by 15.4%). Well over half of the sample of professors thus indicated relatively high to very high morale levels (gauged at 7 or higher).

Most of these UK-based professors seemed to accept academic leadership as a key feature of their work – though, probably as a result of my having made explicit the research's focus on academic leadership at the point at which participation was invited, the sample emerged as skewed toward *relatively* pro-academic leadership attitudes; subtle attempts to recruit some of those whom study 1 participants had implied were reluctant academic leaders proved fruitless. Despite this limitation, it remains the case that for many who related feeling under (sometimes immense) pressure, the demands of enacting what they hoped would be perceived as effective professorial academic leadership loomed large.

Professors as academic leaders

Familiar with the kind of management-speak that peppers institutional and sectoral rhetoric in the UK, most professors had grasped that they were expected to show academic leadership. But when it came to *enacting* it, the finer details of what such leadership should involve seem to have been less apparent. Resonant of imposter-syndrome-type concerns reported among US-based Boomer generation women academics, including a remark from one – "[t]he standard for full [professor] is so vague and there's no mentoring about that" (Marine & Martínez-Alemán, 2018, p. 229) – were recollections shared by several (both male and female)

study 3 participants of having felt unprepared for promotion. A STEMM professor, for example, lamented in his interview: "We get no training, support, guidance. There's no pack the day you get… you know, the day you get this promotion to the top of the tree", while a male language and linguistics professor reported having been "totally, totally unprepared! I remember my first faculty meeting, and I thought, well, I've been appointed to a professorship here; everyone will be looking at me in the room and thinking, who is this guy? I need to speak", and an education studies professor recalled a conversation he had had on the day of his promotion: "I remember asking [a senior professor colleague]… 'What is it to be a professor?' And he said, 'You won't *really* understand for a couple of years'". Moreover, of those who responded to a questionnaire item asking: "Do you understand what your institution requires of you as a professor (i.e. are its expectations of its professors in general – or of you specifically – clearly articulated)?", one-third selected responses that implied a degree of negativity: "in some cases" (15.7%); "not necessarily" (13.7%) or "no" (4.6%). The academic leadership enacted by these senior academics therefore ended up being self-defined and inevitably informed by their preconceptions of what professorship ought to involve and represent – which in some cases involved emulating others' examples and following advice from mentors. Confiding that she had felt 'absolutely terrified' at securing promotion, a law professor related her coping strategy: "I thought, well, actually, I'll think of role models; I'll think of people I'd like to be like, and people I *don't* want to be like".

Discussion

Located at various levels within the complex hierarchy of overlapping theoretical perspectives are numerous explanations for what might shape the nature, extent and quality of professors' academic leadership. Social identity theory would explain their efforts to enact academic leadership as attempts to consolidate their identity as professors: "when a social identity is salient (activated) and attended to … [g]roup members act to match their behavior to the standards relevant to the social identity, so as to confirm and enhance their social identification with the group" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 232). Consistent with – and encompassing and extending – social identity theory is the social-constructionist perspective of leadership as "co-constructed through a process involving a series of claims and grants of leader and follower identities. Through this co-construction, identities of leader or follower are individually internalized, relationally recognized and collectively endorsed within the social context" (Humphries et al., 2015, p. 1390). The implications of this perspective for professors are that it is not only, or even principally, they themselves who may self-ascribe 'leading professor' status. Rather, such status is co-constructed by and with those with whom professors interact. Meeting others' expectations is therefore a key element of this unconsciously played-out social process.

Yet the desire to enact a professionalism whose 'shape' and nature are delineated by others – as the version of professionalism that is 'demanded' – reflects a feature of what, in proximity theory, I refer to as an 'ideal' job situation: for some practitioners, their ideal job situation is one in which, *inter alia*, they are perceived by others to be doing a good job. Whether impediments to achieving that aspect of their ideal-selves-at-work are consciously recognised or not, they can become sources of pressure and anxiety. For many of my research participants, pressured professionalism seems to have manifested itself as a relentless concern to demonstrate academic leadership and/or to get a handle on where lay the parameters that defined what was quantitatively acceptable in demonstrating it – 'good enough' leadership. The latter concern seemed to have provoked performance-angst amongst those who implicitly or explicitly related feeling obliged to agree to many demands on their time – for fear of being branded 'unfit' or 'unworthy' of the professorial title, and of the associated 'academic leader' epithet. Reflecting the need for 'role clarity' (B. Kelly et al., 2018), for such professors, a key contributor to pressure – an impediment to their achieving an aspect of their ideal-selves-at-work – is potentially the vagueness surrounding what, in the UK academy, is meant by something they felt required to demonstrate: academic leadership. This is a term that the neoliberal university has been quick to latch onto but slow to delineate.

Lifting the lid on the academic leadership 'box'

There will inevitably be disagreement over what we might call, with a little authorial licence, the 'terms of reference' of an idea or notion that is ill defined, and, as a concept, unclear. But when it is associated with the purpose and function of professors, the nebulousness of academic leadership underpins confusion about where its parameters lie: what counts as it, and what does not. For all that it seems to have appropriated the term to denote professors' overarching purpose, the UK's neoliberal university has provided little elucidation on precisely what such leadership entails, and what it might or should look like; conveyed through vaguely expressed ideas and hints, these are implicit, rather than explicit. Working out what – and, most importantly, *how much* – universities want from professors involves interpretive imagination and guesswork.

It may be that, lacking the imagination to think outside the managerialist-shaped box that gives every formal leadership role a designation and accompanying job description, the neoliberal university simply cannot cope with the vagaries and imprecision that reflect *ad hoc*, opportunistic, and often boundary-less support and guidance that one colleague may offer another – which, as I note above, is what research reveals to be generally considered, in UK academic contexts, the essence of academic leadership – or, even more obscure, the myriad ways in which one person, often imperceptibly, may influence another's academic activity

(which is how I define the notional 'basic unit' of academic leadership above).

The highly visible and easily identifiable – and quantifiable – elements of professors' performance, such as research income capture and publications, are easy to list as institutional expectations or requirements; the more intangible output that represents what I call professors' relationality, along with their direct or indirect influence on others, is much more susceptible to lurking under the radar of accountability, and so – unsure how best to deal with it, while yet recognising it as something to be valued and encouraged – the UK neoliberal university seems to have thrown it all carelessly into a box, fastened down the lid tightly, stuck a label on it that reads 'academic leadership', and handed it over to professors. But because this box remains, for the most part, out of sight, undisturbed and unopened, few are willing or able to have a go at listing – much less describing – its contents. And professors – as much in the dark as anyone – overestimate its capacity and imagine it filled to the brim with an incalculable miscellany of every conceivable academic activity.

The result of this confusion and uncertainty is that, rather than risk tarnishing their reputations and denting their self-esteem, professors often take on ever more demanding workloads and expansive arrays of tasks, evidently hoping that this constitutes satisfactory discharging of their academic leadership duties. The contrasting cases of two interviewees (out of a sub-sample of 42 professors) – and which, due to space restrictions, may be outlined in only the briefest of detail here – lend support to this reasoning. Both employed within business and management schools at research intensive universities, their morale levels and associated perspectives on their jobs differed quite profoundly.

In her questionnaire response, recently promoted professor Margaret (quoted above) had gauged her current morale level as 3. In her follow-up interview she explained the basis of this rating:

> I've got far too much; that's the problem. (...) I find I'm fire-fighting so much, [that] I find it really difficult actually to get the room to think more strategically. Er... I think at the moment, because of the fact that research is always a very poor... y'know, 'also-ran', and trying to fit it in around – and trying to keep it going, in essence, so it doesn't disappear – I find that very frustrating. So that would pull me down into the lower part of that [morale level] distribution... very definitely. But that's not to say I'm unhappy on a *day-to-day* basis. I do get a bit fed-up and think, y'know, it's... just leave me alone! [slight laugh]... y'know, it's... everybody wants a part of you!

Her evident concern to be all things to all people and to take on more or less whatever tasks and responsibilities were asked of her reflected Margaret's articulated interpretation of academic leadership as what I refer to above as "an incalculable miscellany of every conceivable academic activity".

Yet while, to Margaret, academic leadership's morale-sapping reach seemed to know no bounds, for older and more experienced George, who, contemplating retirement, described himself as atypical: "I don't think you're talking to somebody who's a particularly orthodox professor", both the definition and the parameters of academic leadership were clear:

> I'm the chairperson of my subject association – of my professorial association... I was on the [X national] panel twice, and I was its vice-chair in [date]. I was the chairperson of the group that wrote the [Y document] for my subject. I've organized national conferences, I edit a journal, blah, blah, blah. And that probably reflects, actually, how I see leadership – and I've been dean of faculty. (...) That form of citizenship is how I understood leadership to be. In other words, being a professor wasn't about leading in your own institution – or, at least, not leading the *discipline* – but, certainly not *management*... certainly not *mentoring* people... certainly not reading the papers of the junior staff... all those sorts of things.

Not for him the kind of acquiescent multifarious 'tail-chasing' version of academic leadership that Margaret was fashioning for herself. Reporting high morale (gauged at 9), George was able to set limits on his enactment of academic leadership because, in harbouring a very clear notion of what it entails, what counts as it, and what does not, he had demarcated its boundaries. For him, then, it was not boundaryless. The neoliberal university formed the backdrop to George's working life, and he was content to deliver his own brand of academic leadership against its setting, but he was sufficiently confident to *ad lib* whenever he felt the need. For these two academics, the 'rhythms of academic life' (to appropriate Frost and Taylor's [1996] term) differed: George kept to a steady, tempered rhythm that for the most part he set himself; set by others, Margaret's rhythm followed a more erratically recurring series of beats with which that she struggled to keep pace.

A product of the 21st century neoliberal university?

In the comments they offered, such as those presented below, many questionnaire respondents highlighted changes that they had witnessed and experienced to academic working life and the role(s) expected of and demands placed on (them as) professors:

> I have been a professor for many years, and the changes are immense, demands are higher, but output has fallen ... universities get in the way of you doing your job.

> I have felt well supported and well prepared, but expectations have grown and I am expected to take on more and more.

> I was relatively young when I became a professor and I modelled myself on other more senior professors I knew. 20 years later, the role of professor has changed significantly.

Whether this perceived prevalence of work intensification is a relatively recent or a more long-standing feature of professors' working lives is very difficult to ascertain. As I observe elsewhere (Evans, 2015a), temporally-based comparison is always problematic when attempted through retrospective analysis that lacks a reliable database; anecdotal recollections and impressions make for vague and contestable – often conflicting – evidence, where well-documented records, maintained over time, would inject more precision and specificity into the process and increase the credibility of its findings.

The various effects of working within a context and an environment that, rhetoric tells us, are defined by neoliberal ideologies and policies have been explored and examined by analysts – researchers of academic life – who, in purporting to portray what I call 'enacted' professionalism, have often transgressed into describing what, due to lack of compelling evidence, surfaces as what I call 'deduced (or assumed)', and occasionally as 'prescribed' professionalism. Such analyses and accounts may highlight issues that have frequently been ascribed as the fall-out of academic life in the neoliberal university – such as the erosion of autonomy, freedom and values, and what I highlight elsewhere (Evans, 2018) as apparent callous and uncaring disregard for academics' well-being by expecting them to persist in what is in many disciplinary fields the futile exercise of continually applying for research funds that are about as accessible as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. My research revealed that, while they are to varying degrees considered important, such issues are eclipsed by what emerged as, irrespective of their morale levels, most professors' dominant overarching concern: the multifariousness of their work remits, and the dilution of their specialist (scholarship) expertise, through multiple demands – including increased managerial responsibilities – placed upon them. The key issue was role diffusion: the perceived unwieldiness of a job that pulls them in too many directions.

Yet, while this unwieldiness and administrative overload is certainly a feature of academic life – particularly professorship – that seems to have endured thus far (its third decade) into the 21st century university, it has a much longer history. Enders (2000) notes the findings of a survey conducted in the late 1990s:

> More than 40% of the time budget of university (full) professors in England, the Netherlands and Sweden is devoted to other activities than teaching and research, namely to administrative tasks. About one third of the professors in these countries reported that their main activity during term-time is not teaching and research, but administration, service and other tasks. (p. 27)

Similarly, reflecting on a document published in 1991 by the UK's National Conference of University Professors, *Standards for the Professoriate*, Malcolm Tight (2002, p. 26) remarks that "the role [of professor] may by now be beginning to sound like it is well beyond the capacity of an individual human being". Even before academe had reached its neoliberal zenith, job overload and unwieldiness were evidently features of many professors' work.

Moreover, such 'historic' features of professorship are by no means confined to Europe. By way of denouement, I draw upon the accounts of two North American-based full professors. In *Rhythms of Academic Life* (Frost & Taylor, 1996), Rynes (1996, p. 341) shares her discovery that, three-and-a-half years into full professorship, she found herself "surprised at the degree of personal overload I feel and the amount of effort I devote to thinking about how to manage my life". She continues:

> I certainly do not feel much reduction in pressure or stress. As I write, these continue to be the central issues in my life. In the end, I have concluded that a number of factors (some self-imposed, others not) have created additional work in my life since I became a full professor. These additional demands are pressing up against more limited personal stamina, higher aspirations for the personal side of my life, and a reluctance to reduce my personal quality standards in almost any area of life (...) I have come to view this combination as untenable in the long run, and I am currently thinking about how to increase the efficiency of what I do, reduce the number of things I do, or reduce at least some of my personal standards. (p. 341)

Montagno's (1996, p. 338) reflection is in the same vein:

> I once envisaged full professorship as a time when I would be able to pursue ideas and questions at a more relaxed pace, without the pressures of each year's annual review to concern me. I find quite the opposite to be true, however. More people are making more demands on my time than ever before, and the prospect of pursuing an interesting and complex research project seems quite remote. (...) I have witnessed a metamorphosis in my career that has been by and large unplanned and unexpected.

Supplementing these vignettes of late 20th century life as an American-based full professor are much earlier snapshots – of sixteenth century European professors who clearly considered themselves overworked, such as Humphrey Walkden who, Collinson et al. (2003, pp. 35-36) note:

> In the academic year 1519-20 ... petitioned for a dispensation from some of his obligations on the grounds that the University had asked him to lecture on Book IV of Dun's Scotus in the Long Vacation, over and above his lectures in college. Adding in his preaching obligations for his own and

another college, he sought some relief from *burdens which, he claimed, were too much for one man*. (emphasis added)

Other medieval professors – such as Bishop John Fisher, the first Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at the University of Cambridge – demonstrated themselves to be avid networkers and academic entrepreneurs; as Collinson et al. (2003, p. 23) report: "Fisher did everything to justify the confidence which the University placed in him and his powerful connections. Then, as now, academic leadership consisted to a large extent of raising money, and he delivered the goods". Moreover, the 'shape' of academic professionalism in the Middle Ages – as in most periods in history – was largely determined by the fall-out from whatever religious or political agenda was being pursued by the monarch, state, or government. The rhythms of academic life have always been set by drumbeats banged out by others. The neoliberal university is simply calling the tune to today's Tarantella.

As cathartic as it may be to use accountability-induced pressured professionalism as neoliberal-bashing ammunition, a glance back at the nature of academic work throughout its history exposes many of what are considered unique to contemporary academic life – and of professorship in particular – to be essentially the kinds of features that, in one guise or another, have endured for centuries. *Plus ça change*!

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