

This is an Open Access document downloaded from ORCA, Cardiff University's institutional repository: <https://orca.cardiff.ac.uk/id/eprint/145622/>

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted to / accepted for publication.

Citation for final published version:

Morris, Jonathan , Mckinlay, Alan and Farrell, Catherine 2023. The ties that bind us: networks, projects and careers in British TV. *Human Relations* 76 (2) , pp. 341-361. 10.1177/00187267211062863

Publishers page: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/00187267211062863>

Please note:

Changes made as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing, formatting and page numbers may not be reflected in this version. For the definitive version of this publication, please refer to the published source. You are advised to consult the publisher's version if you wish to cite this paper.

This version is being made available in accordance with publisher policies. See <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/policies.html> for usage policies. Copyright and moral rights for publications made available in ORCA are retained by the copyright holders.



**human relations**

**The Ties that Bind us: Networks, Projects and Careers in  
British TV**

Journal:	<i>Human Relations</i>
Manuscript ID	HR-2020-0440.R4
Manuscript Type:	Standard Manuscript
Keywords:	Careers, Creative industries, neo bureaucracy, networks, interviews

SCHOLARONE™  
Manuscripts

**The Ties that Bind us: Networks, Projects and Careers in British TV**

Jonathan Morris (Corresponding Author), Cardiff University ([morrisjl@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:morrisjl@cardiff.ac.uk));

Alan McKinlay, Newcastle University;

Catherine Farrell, Cardiff University

**Abstract**

The dominant view of careers is that they have been transformed by the emergence of ‘post-bureaucratic’ organizations. ‘Neo-bureaucratic’ structures have emerged, retaining centralized control over strategy and finance while outsourcing production, creating employment precarity. British television epitomises a sector that has experienced long-run deregulation. Producing television content is risky highly competitive. How do broadcasters minimise the risks of television production? Broadcasting neo-bureaucracies avoid relying on fragmented labour markets to hire technically self-disciplining crews. Control regimes are enacted through activating social networks by broadcast commissioners, green-lit to trusted creative teams who recruit key crew, through social networks which complement diffuse forms of normative control. Social networks and the self-discipline of crews are mutually constitutive, (re)producing patterns of labour market advantage/disadvantage. Younger freelancers prove vulnerable, exposed to precariousness inherent in freelance employment; to build a career they must access and sustain their social network membership. We locate individual decisions around career narratives in the context of specific social networks and industry structures. Careers are not boundaryless, individual constructs. We introduce the concept of ‘mosaic-career’, capturing the complexity of individual work histories, composed of fragmented employment in organisations/projects. How do neo-bureaucracies, then, intervene in labour markets? What are the consequences of those interventions?

Keywords: Careers, Creative industries, neo bureaucracy, networks, interviews

## Introduction

Over three decades careers have been portrayed as transformed. The catalyst was corporate restructuring that signalled the death knell of the managerial bureaucracy and the internal labour market (Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Jones and Maoret, 2018; Morris et al, 2016; Morris and Farrell, 2017; Sydow, 2018). In bureaucratic careers, employees developed firm-specific expertise in return for security and career progression (McKinlay, 2002). The shift to post-bureaucratic organization disrupted this social compact between organization and individual: careers were no longer the joint responsibility of organization and individual. The organization absolved itself of responsibility for career management. The ‘boundaryless career’ has become hegemonic in contemporary career research despite its neglect of social and historical context (Arnold and Cohen, 2008; Clarke, 2013; Pringle and Mallon, 2003; Stoyanova and Grugulis, 2012; Tomlinson et al, 2018). ‘Boundaryless’ labour switched employers pursuing personal development, indifferent to which organization was their temporary host, their tenure at their discretion and decided by their criteria. This was the antithesis of the managerial bureaucracies and the predictable, linear careers of twentieth century ‘organization man’. The ‘boundaryless career’ invoked the emergence of nomadic individuals producing their own future (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996).

How do broadcast neo-bureaucracies intervene in labour markets? And what are the consequences of those interventions? We have two objectives. First, to evaluate the emergence and role of neo-bureaucracies and the location of power and control in them

which lies with (broadcaster-based) commissioners and second, their links with the development of UK television careers. We focus on the relationship between neo-bureaucratic broadcasters and the freelance labour market. Commissions for television projects are organized around personal relationships between commissioners and senior creative teams. An implicit element of the commission is that senior creatives will activate their social networks to recruit reliable technical and craft crews. Here we go beyond existing research which correctly emphasises the importance of the social network and the crew's latent organization in the television labour market and labour process but portrays these as disconnected from broadcasting organizations. We also go beyond existing research on media careers by highlighting the active mediating role played by broadcasters rather than ascribing precarity to structural change in the sector. Second, to demonstrate that these careers are not boundaryless but marked by structural constraints and inequalities, and as could be characterised as mosaic. We consider how contemporary careers are experienced and understood by freelancers. We follow Eikhof (2017) in locating individual's decision-making and career narratives in the context of industry structures and particular social networks. The freelance labour market is not individualised, but traversed by social networks based on trust, reputation and reciprocity. Navigating between projects and networks is a vital skill for freelancers. Careers are not defined by income or promotion but by fragments that become 'mosaics', whose completeness and coherence rests on the individual's skill in manoeuvring between projects and networks. Mosaic careers retain individual agency without the voluntarism of the 'boundaryless career' (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). Mosaic refers to process and outcome, a pattern emergent over time, but also refers to the piecemeal nature related to precarity which in turn is contingent on the emergence of neo bureaucratic forms. The legitimacy of bureaucratic internal labour markets was premised upon transparency and rules-based predictability: individuals could plot their progress against their

peers and seek redress if the organization's procedural justice was breached. Expectations and constraints were known and long-run career trajectories manageable. Mosaic careers are made of fragments, their development and coherence only comprehensible retrospectively. Mosaic careers have limited transparency, predictability or procedural justice. The gain of rethinking careers as mosaics is that it shifts the focus from structural constraints to a contextual, processual understanding that retains individual agency within the context of specific projects and the recurring ties that bind social networks (Manning, 2010: 570), which are themselves a consequence of the shift to neo-bureaucratic governance regimes. The paper is organised in four sections. First, we consider the emergence of new organizational forms, the role of power and control within these forms (and specifically broadcaster commissioners) and their impact on careers and precarity in television. Second, we detail our methods, particularly how we produced data about the practices of commissioning executives, the diverse experience of precarious employment and social networks across different age cohorts and gender. Third, we present our data which considers how social networks operate in the labour market to create, reinforce and mitigate advantage and disadvantage. Finally, we reflect upon our empirical findings on the organisation of precarity and creative labour's experience of mosaic careers.

### **Organising Precarity**

Neo-bureaucracy entails the hierarchical structure, centralised knowledge, power and strategy, and the comprehensive deployment of rules-based organising. These features are powerful continuities from the ideal-type of managerial bureaucracy. Functional hierarchies are organised around specialists responsible for defining and enforcing regulation corporate strategy and external standards (Clegg and Courpasson, 2004). In knowledge-based or creative sectors, key functions concentrate on finance and audit, and on protecting reputation and intellectual property rights. The project is a routine form of neo-bureaucratic organizing



both inside and beyond the organization’s boundaries. Equally, the project time-limited structures are central organizing principles to achieve strategic as well as operational objectives (Engwall, 2003: 789; Mitever et al, 2017: 9). Neo-bureaucracy is a shifting hybrid that combines market and bureaucracy, centralised and decentralised control in pursuit of ‘a deft combination of remote strategic leadership and detailed operational management’ (Reed, 2011: 243). Far from being threatened by the rise of temporary organizing, neo-bureaucracy has been fundamental to this process by articulating systems to regulate outsourced production and temporary projects. The permanence of the neo-bureaucracy is ‘a vital precondition for temporary organising’ (Sydow and Windeler, 2020: 488).

The ‘boundaryless careers’ rise should be most marked in industries where production was project based; and vertically integrated hierarchies and industry-wide regulation were disrupted and marketised. UK television exemplifies these conditions. The end of national bargaining in commercial television in 1989 and the consolidation of the ITV network increased outsourcing (McKinlay and Quinn, 2007). State interventions, particularly the formation of Channel 4 and the 1990 Broadcasting Act, created new markets for content and labour, and reduced the non-market provisions, including training, required of broadcasters (Carter et al, 2020). From 1992 the BBC was legally compelled to source at least 25% of its output from the independent sector (Carter and McKinlay, 2013). Market reforms from 2007 accelerated the commercial logic in public service broadcasting. The BBC reduced its guaranteed in-house production in 2007, and virtually eliminated it in 2017 to increase competition between BBC Studios, established in 2015, and the external market (D’Arma, 2018; Nicoli, 2012; Turner and Lorenzo, 2012). Asset specificity -the degree to which assets can be switched to other activities - and fixed costs skewed competition in favour of external competitors. The BBC created a market in which it was necessarily disadvantaged. Market liberalization triggered the vertical disintegration of broadcasters and intensified

marketization across television (Collins, 2008: 32; Greer and Doellgast, 2017: 196). Further, there was continuous pressure on costs; a combination of BBC license fee pressures, reduced advertising revenue (particularly post 2008), a rapid increase in outlets and reduced viewing figures per programme. Three decades of privatisation and deregulation have reshaped British television. An industry based on oligopolistic markets and managerial bureaucratic structures was replaced by fragmented product and labour markets (Currie et al, 2006). Freelancers, irrespective of legal status, are self-employed workers on short-term not rolling contracts (OFCOM, 2019: 5). 30% of the film and television workforce are freelancers, double that of the UK working population as a whole (BFI, 2020: 3) and freelancers comprise 50% of television production employment (Work Foundation, 2019: 6). Such employment purportedly promised individuals ‘boundaryless careers,’ endless opportunities to roam between projects, genres and employers. But regulatory change also triggered an explosion of media outlets that reduced viewers per programme so that freelance contracts came under severe and sustained pressure, at a time of vastly increasing supply in the UK via specialist higher education courses (Dex et al, 2000; Grugulis and Stoyanova, 2011; 2012; Hodgson and Briand, 2013). Even successful freelancers report chronic insecurity and work intensification (Butler and Russell, 2018; Hodgson and Briand, 2013; Morris et al., 2016; Storey et al, 2005). Television freelancers confront the tension between work as a vocation realised through self-employment and everyday self-exploitation (Eikof and Warhurst, 2013). Entry-level routes into television production involve extended hyper-competitive tournaments (Ashton, 2015: 277). Demonstrating flexibility and enthusiasm were preconditions to tournament entry (Lee, 2011: 552). Novice media workers regard under-paid and unpaid work as exploitative, but also as a marker of personal conviction (Ekman, 2014: 142; Siebert and Wilson, 2013: 714-715).



The quasi-markets of the early 1990s (and beyond) were dominated by former BBC and ITV staff. For independent production companies, their reputation and relationships with commissioners was an invaluable asset (Born, 2002: 72; Paterson, 2017: 291-292; Mills with Horton, 2017: 106, 116). Commissioning remains the key moment in television production. For neo-bureaucratic broadcasters, strategy establishes clear policy and programming parameters together with tight financial control over commissioners (Preston, 2003: 7). The broadcaster's role in making and remaking project-based crews remains under-researched (Manning, 2010: 554, 568). The dependency inherent in the commissioner-producer relationship is only partly offset by reputation. For independent producers, developing shared tacit knowledge with commissioners is expensive, time-consuming and risky but also constitutes a barrier to entry for new entrants (Zoellner, 2009; 2020).

Television production is organized through crews assembled for specific projects, then disbanded. This has consolidated the power of commissioners operating within neo-bureaucracies. The commissioner's centralised power is exercised through diffuse, behavioural norms over independent companies and, through them, freelancers. Through the commissioning process, broadcasters identify individuals capable of building reliable crews to meet formal and informal quality standards within time and financial budgets (Lourenco and Turner, 2019: 624). Crews are not built *de novo*, but through the activation of social networks. Crew recruitment, vetting, and discipline are achieved by social networks more durable than a given project (Powell, 1990: 328). A crew disbands at the close of production, but social networks remain intact. The social network, not the individual is the basic unit of the television labour market: individuals demonstrate their skills and experience, gain reputations and employment through social networks. Reputation is a crucial but fragile asset (Blair, 2001). Social networks complement project management technologies that schedule and cost the labour process choreographed by the crew. The peer controls of social networks

are superimposed on established routines. Routines and peer controls combine to exceed project management methodologies in granularity and constancy. The crew's assumption of individual and collective responsibility for the project produces powerful self-discipline. For the broadcaster, commissioning a programme activates a social network. The organization temporarily reaches beyond its formal boundaries. The organization's legal and organizational boundaries are confirmed by the commissioning process. Once the contract is operational, risk and responsibility lies with the independent company and indirectly with the social network underpinning the crew (Morris and Farrell, 2017). Social networks are not created but activated by commissioning. The broadcaster does not identify, schedule or discipline freelancers, but mitigates this risk by selecting the project's key creatives who then hire their crew. Through the commissioning process the broadcaster accesses the creative leads' tacit knowledge of the labour market and the project's specific needs (Morris et al., 2016). Broadcasters source freelance labour, endorsed by peers, and ensure compliance with necessary standards through the self-discipline of networks (Antcliffe et al., 2007; Baumann, 2002; Tempest et al., 2004; OFCOM, 2019: 12). The crew's 'latent organization' entails routine task demarcation combined with tacit knowledge mobilised to cope with everyday contingencies. Television projects are diverse in technical complexity and duration: from formulaic studio programmes with fixed cameras and routinized set-ups; through recurring series requiring minimal technical adjustments; to live multi-camera events or dramas shot over several weeks in different locations. In all cases, production requires co-ordination of several distinct crafts mobilised in the moment. Television projects have varying perishability and are reviewed by commissioners for compliance to contract, technical norms, and popularity.

The research questions are threefold; how do social networks operate in the labour market to create, reinforce and mitigate advantage and disadvantage, particularly in the context of neo-

bureaucratic organizing; how is precarity organized; and what is creative labour’s experience of mosaic careers.

**Methods**

We report data collected from research into the development of new organizational forms in UK television. Our 80 semi-structured interviews with managers and professionals comprised commissioning broadcasters, independent television producers and freelance operatives. We formally interviewed commissioners and senior broadcast executives, independent production company executives and owners, most were formerly employed by commissioning broadcasters. We conducted 30 unstructured and 50 semi-structured interviews. Unstructured interviews were used to gain background information, pilot questions and to develop themes for the subsequent semi structured interviews or as follow-ups to clarify issues. The semi-structured interviews ranged between 60 and 90 minutes. A majority of freelance respondents were former employees of broadcast networks. A minority of respondents, generally younger, reported exclusively freelance work histories. Freelance respondents represented ‘above’ and ‘below’ the line occupations. ‘Above the line’ labour is creative professionals: cast, directors and writers; while ‘below’ the line comprise production crew plus administrative and managerial personnel (Mayers, 2011). All categories included male and female respondents. Respondents were categorised by age: under thirty; from thirty to fifty; and over fifty. These broad categories captured generational differences in experience and career. All participants, programmes and companies are anonymised.’

Two interview schedules were compiled: for industry executives, commissioners and independent production executives; and another for freelancers. The first included questions about product and labour markets; how commissions are secured; how production schedules and crews are established. Only one independent company executive had not worked for a major broadcaster, and all had ‘pitch to production’ experience, from programme development through commissioning to production and broadcast. These respondents had comprehensive strategic and operational knowledge. The second interview schedule included why and how individuals became freelancers; employment search; perceptions of how they manage their reputation, networks and career. The interview sample was drawn from a combination of industry directories, from personal industry contacts and purposive snowball sampling (from suitable contacts drawn from the personal ones). Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and were followed by email, telephone and informal conversations. Initial interviews were conducted in 2014-16. Data analysis was conducted, with further interviews in 2020, including five interviews with commissioners. All three authors were involved at various stages of data collection.

Our interviewees ranged from novice television labour to individuals with decades of experience. Semi-structured interviews generated rich, detailed and comparable data. But also provided opportunities for respondents to reflect on the importance of taken-for-granted practices (Alvesson, 2003: 19-20). Broad questions opened up the respondent’s own employment history and their perceptions of how structural change had impacted upon them and their peers. Our interviews focused on: why they were motivated to pursue a television career; how they joined or were recruited to social networks; and how important these social networks were for their employment and career development. More specifically, we then asked participants to discuss particular examples of their own networking practices and how these had shaped their career. These more focused questions also identified mentors and

sponsors who were important in accessing social networks and projects the respondent considered important for their career. We challenged respondents to develop and reflect upon points where, for instance, their account contrasted with other participants' perceptions of the role of social networks and their own networking behaviours for their careers. Interviewees were asked to suggest others who might be willing to be interviewed, particularly those whom they regarded as members of their social network and/or were important to their career. Novel or surprising insights were pursued in subsequent interviews. Using contrasting experiences of unnamed others as prompts alerted us to how the commissioning process mediates between neo-bureaucratic broadcasters and the labour market. Our interviews with producers with deep experience of the commissioning process concentrated upon the importance of the informal personal ties that paralleled formal contractual relationships. This insight emerged from the interview process and was not evident from the extensive literature on media work and labour markets. Producers understood their personal ties to commissioners as a vital but fragile form of competitive advantage. Our interviews concentrated on the producers' perceptions of how that relationship had evolved; how the formal and informal dimensions of commissioning worked in practice; and how commissioners draw on producers' tacit knowledge and connections to key creative teams that in turn accesses their social networks to build project-specific crews. The data was categorised into themes and analysed manually following the step-by-step framework (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Grounded coding and inductive questioning categorised this data into meaningful themes. We worked from our transcripts thematically, moving from general reflection on industry structures, career trajectories and creative work to individual experiences. This allowed us to follow a pragmatic iterative process moving between our identified themes, the existing literature and novel themes that emerged during our interview process, notably the vital but neglected role of commissioning as the

moment that binds the neo-bureaucratic broadcaster and the television labour market. A second interpretive stage followed in which categories were saturated by relevant cases, to demonstrate empirical and theoretical relevance (Corbin and Strauss, 1998; Glaser and Strauss, 2009; Jay, 2013).

### Precarious Careers

What is the relationship between broadcast neo-bureaucracies and creative labour? Such relationships are commercial, technical and social. The risk of commissioning places a premium on durable social networks. *Edward*, a mid-career freelance director of highly successful British dramas across genres, understood that his privileged status reflected his relationship with executive producers and commissioners who had commissioned him for over a decade. In general, over-50s are under-represented in off-screen roles. The exceptions are in comedy and drama especially in senior roles such as director and executive producer (Diamond, 2020: 3,5,15,18). Men consistently direct over 80% of all episodes of comedy and drama (Directors UK, 2018: 17, 22). *Edward* directed *First Dance* and had previously worked for the executive producer; and had collaborated on several projects with the *First Dance's* producer. Meanwhile *Wilson*, a multi-award winning producer/director, explained the obligations that bound commissioners to elite creative teams and, in turn, to production crews:

Commissioners don't want any surprises. They need to know they can rely on you. They know *their* reputation is on the line as much as yours. They need to know in their bones that you can manage cast and crew. They want to see every penny on the screen. Because green lights can happen suddenly, you have to have essential crew



ready. So, you use your contacts, and hope that people you can rely on will bring along others. All of this is tough (pause) stressful.

This was part of a significant change in the industry, associated with the emergence of neo-bureaucracies. *Gareth*, for example was nearing retirement and had worked in a senior position for the BBC before starting up and running an independent. He reflected:

Well, I think one of the big changes I've seen in my career, is the emergence of the commissioner as the key and influential figure in how programmes are – get to be made at all....when I began, if you had the status of a producer within the BBC, you had an enormous amount of flexibility with the kind of programmes that you could make, and the specifics of them. And providing that, over a reasonable period, you delivered what you thought to be good programmes, then that freedom continued....I think this is true 'in-house' as well as in an independent – a producer wants to make a programme, there are an enormous number of hoops that we have to jump through to satisfy the commissioner that the programme is going to satisfy their needs as they see them, the audience needs that they represent. So, we've got the stage now, where, you know, not only 'taster tapes', 'sizzlers' but very detailed, umm, development documents are required before even a commission gets made.

Broadcasters retain control over key roles in development and production when a commission is awarded to an independent company. This was particularly true for peak-time drama, because of their cost/investment and importance. One executive producer, experienced in several genres, considered the complexities and shared assumptions of his relationship with commissioners:

My talent is sucking all the ideas and energy out of any room with commissioners in it. Then you sell them your ideas back to them as *their* ideas. You have to make sure that the commissioner has become personally invested in your project. A good

E[xecutive] P[roducer] already has the commissioner's confidence that you can deliver ...*that's* money in the bank... and *that's* all about them having confidence in you, and the crew you will bring together. They know the sort of crew you've used before, they may even know some of them personally. The good Exec Producer has a reputation for making programmes but commissioners also know their reputation for managing production all the way to edits.

Even where the broadcaster had allocated the contract informally to a senior creative team, this remained contingent upon them securing named individuals for senior production roles: 'The BBC have huge influence on the key creatives, such as the producer, the director, the director of photography, the designer, the editor: this is in their control' (*Elliot*, ex-BBC commissioner, independent producer). Similarly, *Edward*, a highly-regarded producer, explained:

I then make the creative casting decisions, when the BBC will let me, and I normally have someone I can rely on that I want to pick ...this is a crucial job and the market is international. You need to have someone who understands the emotions of a programme and how to frame a shot as we want.

The commission is contingent upon the producer's relationship with senior crew members. *Edward's* description reflects the negotiated nature of crewing decisions while hinting that the commissioner retains the final say over key crewing decisions, especially for repeat productions. For *David*, producer/director of network documentaries, commissioners accurately assumed that creative leads would 'drive production': 'There's no time to be 'managing' during production. Everyone has to know what they're doing and manage each other. You have to be part-psychologist when pulling a crew together'. The pivotal, and all-powerful role of commissioners, was reported by commissioners, ex-commissioners, typically independent company owners, and go-to freelancers alike.

How do freelance television workers experience and understand their careers? Self-exploitation was a recurring theme and assumed various forms. First, ‘budget cuts means that we have to take short cuts. For example, I charge a day rate but I end up working many more days. I get twenty days per programme but I end up doing twenty-three to twenty-five days’ (*Diane*, location manager). *Ray*, an older experienced camera operator, noted the impact of budgetary pressure on freelance workers:

My rates have hardly gone up: it is only nine pounds a day more than fourteen years ago. It’s tougher too. I did nine months of *SciFi* and I was on the studio floor from 7:30 to 7:00 every day. It was great but it was exhausting and I had to do my books over and above this. I also did *Fantasy* and I had to start at 8:15, this meant me leaving at 7:15 and I didn’t get paid for travelling or the cost of travelling.

This issue of ‘pay-for-travelling’, both time and expenses, was an important secondary concern as these freelancers were frequently working on location a (sometimes considerable) distance from their home-base and had formerly been reimbursed for this.

Second, self-exploitation was regarded not just as inevitable but positively as the everyday expression of vocation. ‘Are we in danger of exploiting ourselves’, asked *Pete*, another experienced freelance camera operator: ‘Yes, the problem is that work is my passion. Also, the work we do for ourselves is often on the weekend and this is subsidised by the day job’. Technical competence and experience did not eliminate the need to perform flexibility passionately.

For *Eric*, an extremely experienced former ITV staffer and BBC commissioning editor, the ‘good’ freelancer was: ‘technically good, well networked, reliable, etc’. *Ray*’s career, as an older freelance camera operative, confirmed the importance of embedding himself in networks inside and beyond the commissioning broadcasters:

1  
2  
3 ...joined the BBC in 1981, I was on staff for 19 years. At that time, the freelance  
4  
5 market did down-market stuff – news and sports – no documentaries, no drama. All  
6  
7 the interesting stuff was done in-house... there was loads of training then, which was  
8  
9 brilliant, and loads of on-the-job stuff. ...Then in 1988 I was one of the people who  
10  
11 could operate the new technology. I was thirty and I had a great portfolio, I'd built up  
12  
13 great contacts: news and current affairs and drama – I could do the lot. Then John  
14  
15 Birt came along as D[irector] G[eneral] and encouraged people to work as  
16  
17 independents, and so I just went.  
18  
19  
20

21 His solid BBC training, strong technical reputation meant that he was 'guaranteed' freelance  
22  
23 BBC work for long periods. Upgrading his technical skills from a strong base was  
24  
25 incremental and informal: 'bullshit, mates and the internet.' Technical competence was  
26  
27 necessary but insufficient for an individual to be hired. How an individual contributed to the  
28  
29 project's transient habitus was vital. One floor manager ascribed his steady employment to  
30  
31 his 'good guy' reputation. Certain roles, such as floor manager who maintains the rhythm of  
32  
33 production, require acute social skills rather than sophisticated technical competence.  
34  
35 Sociability was a recurring trope. Networks develop informal behavioural and attitudinal  
36  
37 disciplines: the individual has to observe and enforce normative controls on themselves and  
38  
39 others. An experienced director commented on the intimacy and intensity of a crew's self-  
40  
41 discipline: 'some crews think of themselves as a family. They all know each other. They're  
42  
43 loyal like families but there is a pecking order; there are squabbles but everyone knows that  
44  
45 can't come onto production'.  
46  
47  
48  
49

50  
51 *Ray's* formative BBC years provided skills, experience and reputation. Contemporary  
52  
53 freelancers had little opportunity to establish comparable career trajectories. *Heather*, aged  
54  
55 25, graduated with a media degree and won a place on a government scheme around the 2012  
56  
57 Olympics; then a government-sponsored media training scheme. After several months and  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 hundreds of applications, Heather secured a four-month unpaid internship: ‘then it went  
4  
5 completely quiet for six months’. A series of extremely short-term contracts followed,  
6  
7 including one eight-week unpaid ‘traineeship’ performing mundane tasks that added nothing  
8  
9 to her skills or reputation. More short-term contracts followed, including one that required  
10  
11 her availability for two days per week on call. For *Heather*, this series of limited contracts  
12  
13 equated to stable employment. All younger freelancers experienced such uneasy transitions  
14  
15 in their work histories. Four out of five lived with their parents, including *Heather* who was  
16  
17 engaged to a freelance sound engineer who lived separately with his parents. The exception,  
18  
19 *Rod*, was a successful producer/director who typically worked four days a week and was  
20  
21 rarely unemployed. He was networked through family and family friends:  
22  
23

24  
25  
26 I answered an advert for a research job with ‘A’ (an independent production  
27  
28 company) for a couple of months. They rang me up the next day and said when can  
29  
30 you start? I knew people in the industry as my dad is a well-known producer/director  
31  
32 and knew the boss of ‘A’.  
33  
34

35  
36 For *Rod*, a partner with secure professional employment underwrote his career: ‘I don’t think  
37  
38 that you could have two people working freelance in one family’. Despite these advantages  
39  
40 he had little sense of how he could actively *manage* his career. Despite significant social  
41  
42 capital advantages, his fatalism spoke of the absence of a strategy to exploit his relative  
43  
44 advantage or develop marketable technical skills. Family ties were an important form of  
45  
46 networking, and a significant disadvantage for those without sponsors. One respondent, a  
47  
48 middle-aged female producer/director, had a mother who was a well-known weather  
49  
50 presenter and a brother who was a Sky Sports presenter. Another middle-aged presenter  
51  
52 described how she moved through several freelance contracts before:  
53  
54  
55  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 ..my mother met someone she knew who was going on maternity leave who worked  
4  
5 at 'T' (a large independent) and this got me the job there, on a day-to-day basis but I  
6  
7 stayed there for a long time (*Laura*).  
8  
9

10 Similarly, *Steve*, a 35-year old producer/director, was the son of an actor who had starred in  
11  
12 many major television dramas, which connected her to elite creatives and their networks.  
13

14 Novice freelancer *Heather*, however, was unable to develop her skills, reputation or network  
15  
16 to establish her marketability without long-term sponsorship through a social network.  
17  
18 Crucially, *Ray* had mentored her on one government-funded scheme, and this proved  
19  
20 essential to moving her from the margins of the labour market.  
21  
22

23  
24 I had been contacting the focus puller at *SciFi* for years with no joy, but *Ray* rang him up  
25  
26 and he got in touch immediately. This was my big break.  
27

28  
29 *Heather* acknowledged her mentor's importance in brokering her relationship with his  
30  
31 network. Crossing the boundary into *Ray*'s network and the possibility of gaining  
32  
33 experience, screen credits and expanding her contacts were essential to her career  
34  
35 progression, albeit that it remained precarious. *Heather* perceived her career as dependent  
36  
37 upon remaining within *Ray*'s network and that her progression was contingent upon  
38  
39 movements inside the network. For *Heather*, her reputation was not transferrable outside  
40  
41 *Ray*'s network. Despite this precarity, *Heather* embraced the openness and variety promised  
42  
43 by freelancing, although this was qualified by a desire for certainty: 'what I really want is  
44  
45 stability'. This exemplified the ambivalent pragmatism of younger freelancers: the allure of  
46  
47 variety but aware of the inherent risk of the television labour market. Career aspirations were  
48  
49 vague yet realistic, in their awareness that employment uncertainty made long-term career  
50  
51 planning impossible *and* their assumption of responsibility for their employability. *Rod*  
52  
53 reflected that his initial foothold in the industry at 'A' where his 'contract kept getting  
54  
55 renewed. I've been on the books of the BBC, I worked for 'B' (another independent) and for  
56  
57  
58  
59  
60



ITV; all for about a year. But I've always left, my own choice, I've wanted to do my own thing. I love the freedom and variety of being freelance. I work across the board. If work dried up, I'd try something else'.

For the young freelancer, building their reputation required them to be on-call even when on another contract. Alternatively, technical development and network building could be traded-off against enhanced job security. *Jim*, another young freelancer, rejected an open-ended contract with Sky in favour of freelancing: 'They are totally market-focused ...their production standards are crap'. Gaining experience, while building reputation and social networks, was collapsed in both *Jim* and *Rod's* narrative of individual agency. For *Heather*, meanwhile, a five-year career plan was futile; three-years unlikely; and one year was – perhaps - realistic. Within three years she hoped to be a focus puller. The time-scale was not about skill acquisition so much as the current job holder was three years her senior in the network. Her next transition was possible *if* she retained her current role; and the incumbent focus puller, a freelancer, was unavailable since it was unlikely she could displace him. In three years, her technical skills, experience and reputation might be sufficiently established to make her the obvious network successor to the current focus puller. Three years production experience would allow *Heather* to demonstrate her technical skills and absorption of the crew's and network's normative expectations.

*Jim* was a 23 year-old post-production freelancer. He terminated an open-ended contract producing standardised content for an independent company. His rejection of security, was a rejection of work that was technically undemanding in a 'totally market focused' firm. There was a paradox in how *Jim* scripted his choice. He reproduced the trope of the auteur who rejected the mass market. Conversely, his embrace of freelance status to 'produce vibrant quirky material' was because 'lots of our potential competitors are fairly staid, corporate and bland'. 'We are hoping to get work by word-of mouth. We will begin by doing promos,

corporate videos, weddings: anything to pay the bills.’ *Jim* was expressing a form of competitive strategy that prioritised personal development and technical quality. However, irrespective of quality, the product provides no clues to the maker’s sociability, their readiness to work beyond contract, or to set aside any aesthetic misgivings to meet deadlines or budgets: all attributes critical to media networking. To see the career *solely* as an individual project, like *Jim*, was to misunderstand the importance of the social networking that underpins media labour markets.

Precarity is internalised: reputation and identity are rendered precarious. *All* freelancers faced chronic insecurity, characterised by long hours and (self) exploitation, even amongst those whose skills, reputation and contacts provided comparatively stable employment. Despite his thriving career, *Edward* (regarded as a ‘go-to’ top UK producer) reported that his nagging insecurity proved a demanding taskmaster:

Reputation is everything, but it is a very precarious profession. I am up at the moment, but I could be down and out next year. All you need is a couple of bum projects, I’ve seen it so many times.

## Discussion

Broadcasters moved from vertically integrated hierarchies to neo-bureaucracies commissioning projects (Burns, 1997). Commissioners do not simply award contracts through markets. Rather, markets for television programmes are mediated through social networks. We have confirmed empirically that social networks are activated for particular projects but that this also reproduced and sustained the social network beyond that project (Manning, 2017: 1402; Grabher, 2004: 1492). Mediation activates the financial, technical and social disciplines that minimise risk and maximise normative control inside the crew. Our findings confirm that social networks are how creative workers navigate the structural constraints of freelance employment. However, adopting a processual and relational

perspective reveals that neo-bureaucracies actively intervene, more or less directly, in the constitution and reproduction of the social networks that form the freelance labour market (Manning and Sydow, 2011: 1388; Stjerne and Svejenova, 2016: 1782; Tunstall, 2015: 81-82). This process does not mitigate freelance precarities. Projects are managed through taken-for-granted routines and normative-based controls (Bechky, 2006; Ebbers and Winberg, 2009; Townley et al, 2009). Given the product's inherent unknowability, relying on crew's normative controls is efficient and reliable (Caves, 2000). The commissioner retains control over the project without becoming entangled in organizing production. Strong ties are particularly valuable in contexts with high levels of uncertainty and risk, which increases the probability that networks will reproduce themselves in ways that preserve existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage (Hesmonhalgh and Baker, 2015; Moran, 2005). Trusted elite creatives are valuable for their technical and aesthetic skills *and* as gatekeepers to networks from which reliable production teams are assembled. The negotiation between commissioners and favoured creative teams, is based on their track record and their ability to build a crew tailored to a project's specific aesthetic and budgetary needs. Commissioners rely on the senior creative team recruiting crew based on previous successful collaborations and so embedding the double discipline of latent organisation and the social network (Manning and Sydow, 2011: 1372). Informal quality assurance systems have increased in value as regulatory standards have declined (Baumann, 2002). For the commissioner, high trust reduces governance, transaction and verification costs (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). Fast trust, mobilised in real time, is a precondition of a crew's effectiveness (Carney, 1998). This is achieved without the broadcaster's direct involvement through their reliance upon lead creatives anxious for future commissions and by the crew's self-discipline. The more embedded the social ties, the greater the propensity for mutual aid, deeper trust and reciprocal transfer of otherwise restricted information and knowledge (Uzzi, 1997). Commissioners and

1  
2  
3 senior project managers exercise control over staffing and quality through proxies: senior  
4  
5 creatives and their networks. During production, crew members' technical standards and  
6  
7 reliability are assessed through direct experience, especially the capacity to solve problems in  
8  
9 difficult moments of production (Tempest et al., 2004). Understanding the crew's self-  
10  
11 discipline as partly derived from the durability of social networks avoids regarding the  
12  
13 project as a 'lonely phenomenon in time,' but as neither unique nor routine but recurring  
14  
15  
16 (Engwall, 2003: 790).

17  
18  
19 The language of 'boundaryless careers' is saturated with a voluntarism that elevates  
20  
21 individual freedom and ignores structural constraints. In practice, the individual assumes  
22  
23 personal responsibility for long-run skill development; a willingness to absorb employment  
24  
25 risks and turn psychological costs inwards (Mayrhofer et al., 2007; Roper et al., 2010;  
26  
27 Scharff, 2016). Some fifteen per cent of working time is unpaid, even for experienced  
28  
29 creative workers (Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2020). In fluid organizational and market  
30  
31 settings, the cues for individual and social action are deeply ambiguous, and provide no  
32  
33 durable, coherent scripts to guide enterprising selves: 'the career contract is not with an  
34  
35 organization, it is with the self' (Barley, 1989; Svejendva, 2005: 948). This is a tournament  
36  
37 labour market with inscrutable rules, uncertain performance standards and comparisons with  
38  
39 distant peers impossible, so that it is both extremely competitive and opaque (Stoyanova and  
40  
41 Grugulis, 2012). Creative workers' embrace of risk and opportunity is central to the 'hope  
42  
43 labour' that renders structural advantage and disadvantage into personal responsibility (Lee,  
44  
45 2012: 489; Mackenzie and McKinlay, 2020). The psychological rewards of creative work  
46  
47 combine with precarity's inherent anxieties, to produce an experience of intense sociality *and*  
48  
49 periodic isolation (Butler and Russell, 2018; Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2010: 16; Rowlands  
50  
51 and Handy, 2012).

The novice learns their craft and how to perform their identity work embedded in both a crew and a social network (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 84-86). Strong ties, durable relationships and intense, frequent dialogue, provide the ideal conditions for producing and transferring tacit knowledge. Hiring through social networks reproduces existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage (CAMEo, 2018: 36; Gill, 2014). Camera operatives had once progressed from trainee, to assistant focus puller and eventually to craft status. *Heather's* experience speaks of the uncertainty of career transitions for freelancers. Rapid starts to commissions and intense production schedules reduced the porosity of television production, the frequent downtimes which enabled informal training (McKinlay and Quinn, 1999; ScreenSkills, 2020: 4). Her anxiety over the possibilities of skill acquisition and career progression was typical (Work Foundation, 2019: 25-26). Membership required the individual to understand and *contribute* to the studied informality of a television crew (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 134; Randle et al., 2015: 598; Petrilieri et al, 2019: 157). Membership of a social network provided access to information, expertise and opportunity; but continued membership was contingent on accepting a particular role in the labour process. The social network incorporates an implicit, relatively fixed hierarchy that becomes explicit in the crew's work organisation. Heather's employment entailed her becoming entangled in a complex disciplinary web. She was subject to her own sense of professionalism and career development; to her employment contract's formal requirements; and to the highly specific expectations of *that* crew, on *that* project. Her initial obligations were exclusively to *Ray* but through participation in *SciFi* she acquired ties to his network. Reducing her dependence upon *Ray* was conditional on her recognising, accepting and performing these communal obligations (Bechky and Chung, 2018: 620-621). This is the normative control that broadcasters mobilise without cost, and minimal risk, by recruiting a project's senior creative team which then activates its networks. Network connections were important to enter the

sector and gradually accumulated value (Friedman and Laurison, 2019: 115, 134). To recommend another for a job signalled an expectation of present task performance and future reciprocity (Antcliffe et al, 2007: 381).

Television's precarious employment has rendered careers as *mosaics*, enabled by networks and measured and made meaningful by projects, emphasizing their relative precarity, rather than the notion of 'boundarylessness' which emphasizes agency and self-determination (Bevort and Stjerne, 2019). These 'boundaryless careers' are not, therefore, accurate, either empirically or theoretically. Organizations are not post bureaucratic, neither are individuals 'free agents' in the market. Rather the description of 'mosaic careers' which allow for a degree of individual agency but recognises that these careers are embedded in a neo bureaucratic frame which are piecemeal and have considerable potential for 'dark sides' such as long and unpredictable hours, pressures on pay and the potential for (self) may better fit the theoretical and empirical reality, particularly for younger freelancers (and remembering that we only interviewed survivors).

## Conclusion

This paper had two objectives, first to evaluate the role of neo-bureaucracy and commissioners in the development of TV careers in a project-based industry and second, to locate individual careers within the social networks through which employment is found, and reputations embedded. Over the last thirty years, television careers have been transformed. Freelance employment now dominates television production. Initially, independent producers and freelancers had previously worked for major broadcasters. Increasingly, however, younger freelancers have employment histories without the reputation or networking gains from direct employment with broadcasters. For all freelancers, careers were not individual and boundaryless but centred on their technical and social skills within



social networks and as such are better characterised as mosaic. Social networks and the self-discipline of crews are mutually constitutive: an individual's reputation is built during production and reproduced through social networks. Where older freelancers accessed networks via their previous work history, their younger peers used a variety of sponsorship and industry contacts to gain employment. Intangible social 'fit' was essential to access and sustain membership of social networks, highlighting the pivotal role played by commissioners. The freelancers' reputation was earned by credits on prestige programmes especially when embedded in social networks that included elite creatives. The structure of the industry here was important, particularly the commissioning function of neo-bureaucracies which incorporate centralisation - of strategy and information - and a high degree of cultural integration and socialisation. Combined, these have ensured a small group of trusted freelancers who are the hubs of social networks. *Heather's* failure and then success in accessing employment, dependent on *Rod's* sponsorship to gain her production credits and network membership is illustrative of this.

That the TV industry has fragmented has been well rehearsed in the previous literature, as is the precarity of the industry, and neither are novel, theoretically or empirically. However, our paper is novel in three respects. First, as characterising this fragmentation within a theoretical framework of neo-bureaucracy with its distinct set of power and control implications, in which the role of broadcaster-based commissioners are both all-powerful and pivotal. Second, by our characterisation of careers as mosaics. Third, by demonstrating the links between neo-bureaucracies and mosaic careers. In short, mosaic careers are a direct consequence of neo-bureaucratic structures, these concepts have not been addressed before and neither have their inter-connections.

The characterisation of careers as boundaryless, assumes unconstrained agency so that an individual's career progression is unrestricted and frictionless. 'Boundaryless' employees are

thus purportedly free to switch employers in the search for personal advancement, largely ignoring the temporary host, with their tenure dictated by themselves. Mosaic careers, meanwhile, situate individuals within a series of structural constraints, both personal and within the confines of the control of neo bureaucratic labour markets, and are thus often piecemeal, sporadic etc. They capture the complexity of the work histories experienced by individuals constrained by fragmented employment. This is the reality of all freelancers but particularly younger ones, who are often caught in competitive ‘tournaments’ for work.

---

TABLE 1 HERE

---

How then, do neo-bureaucracies develop their strategy, structure and control processes? Our research suggests the need for longitudinal studies of strategic and structural change of neo-bureaucracies, particularly the development and diffusion of financial and statistical controls inside and beyond the commissioning organisation. This would permit us to understand the long-run dynamics of change in neo-bureaucracies and the process of isomorphism in the television industry. Contemporary broadcast neo-bureaucracies do not operate in boundaryless spaces but activate social networks that vet prospective crew members and manage their performance. This is an oblique form of control that surpasses the possibilities of market or hierarchy. Broadcast commissioners use the social networks of elite creative workers to track and manage freelance workers by proxy. Freelance workers, meanwhile, use their networks to find employment and progress their careers. Generation is a defining boundary for television labour; older workers were much more likely to have learnt their trade and established their reputation in the major broadcasters before 1992. This advantaged these workers in the emergent freelance labour market. Relative labour market advantages proved durable and cumulative, especially for crew with prestigious credits and links to elite creatives. Conversely, younger workers found it more difficult to establish themselves in these networks. It remains an open question how reputations are established

and sustained over the long run although broadcasters and major independents are likely to remain reputational touchstones. Social networks are neither permanent nor ephemeral, but durable. The tension between craft and neoliberal values was greatest for those with longest experience and less problematic for younger television workers. Equally, older respondents were more likely to stress the importance of networking for job search and as a vehicle for mutual support. Networking was a skill acquired, and its value recognised, over time (Lee, 2012b). Reputation, similarly, is not wholly individual but is bound up with membership of social networks. Contemporary career research is predicated on a historic break from internal labour markets, but is dominated by snapshots with little sense of temporality. The temporality of networks remains a major gap in the literatures about project-based industries, precarious labour markets and careers. Following Eikhof (2017), employment decisions and career narratives have to be contextualised in terms of industry structure *and* how networks operate and are reproduced over the long-run. In unregulated labour markets, individual careers are necessarily embedded in social networks. Established freelancers reported relatively regular employment. Freelancers, particularly but not exclusively younger respondents, welcomed the flexibility promised by unregulated labour markets. However, the nature of creative work plus the structural realities of the industry caused pervasive self-exploitation. A recognition of external constraints is neither an acceptance nor, far less, an endorsement in terms of equity. Freelancers' recognition of external constraints did not signify fatalism but an acceptance of individual agency. To understand harsh market realities was necessary to a sense of self as autonomous and enterprising. Precarious employment, even when combined with satisfying work, does not signify the possibility of a boundaryless career. All freelancers faced an insecure existence characterised by long hours and self-exploitation, irrespective of craft, reputation or seniority. To understand the career, we must track individuals and networks over projects, time and space. Television production careers

are not boundaryless but mosaics: composed of fragments employment in organisations and projects and defined by social networks, their overall pattern only discernible post-hoc.

### Acknowledgements

We thank the numerous television personnel for offering their time and opinions in the interviews

### Funding

There are no funders to report for this submission

### References

- Alvesson M (2003) Beyond neopositivists, romantics, and localists: A reflexive approach to interviews in organizational research. *Academy of Management Review* 28(1): 13-33.
- Antcliff V, Saundry R and Stuart M (2007) Networks and social capital in the UK television industry: The weakness of weak ties. *Human Relations* 60(2): 371-393.
- Arnold J and Cohen L (2008) The psychology of careers in industrial-organizational settings: A critical but appreciative analysis. In Hodgkinson, G Ford, B (eds) *International Review of Industrial-Organizational Psychology* 23: 1-44.
- Arthur M and Rousseau D (eds) (1996) *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organizational Era*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Ashton D (2015) Making new media workers: Contrasting film and television industry career pathways. *Television & New Media* 16(3): 275-294.
- Baumann A (2002) Informal labour market governance: The case of the British and German media production industries. *Work, Employment and Society* 16(1): 27-46.
- Bechky B (2006) Gaffers, gofers, and grips: Role-based coordination in temporary organizations. *Organization Science*, 17(1): 3-21.

Bechky B and Chung D (2018) Latitude or latent control? How occupational embeddedness and control shape emergent coordination. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 63(3): 607-636.

Berlant L (2011) *Cruel Optimism*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Bevort F and Stjerne IS (2019) Multilevel career analysis in the film industry and professional service firms. In H. Gunz, M. Lazarova and W. Mayrhofer (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to Careers*. Abingdon: Routledge.

BFI (2020) What can we do to help? Freelance survey. London: BFI.

Blair H (2001) “You’re only as good as your last job”: The labour process and labour market in the British film industry. *Work, Employment and Society* 15(1): 149-169.

Born G (2002) Reflexivity and ambivalence: culture, creativity and government in the BBC. *Cultural Values* 6(1-2): 65-90.

Braun V and Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101.

Bundtz-Jorgensen R, Johnsen C and Sorensen B (2019) Against boundarylessness: The liminal career of the flexible employee. *Organization* 26(60): 917-935.

Burns T (1997) *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan.

Butler N and Russell D S (2018) No funny business: Precarious work and emotional labour in stand-up comedy. *Human Relations* 71(12): 1666-1686.

CAMEo (2018) Workforce diversity in the UK screen sector: Evidence review. University of Leicester.

Carney M (1998) The competitiveness of networked production: The role of trust and asset specificity. *Journal of Management Studies* 35(4): 457-479.

Carter C and McKinlay A (2013). Cultures of strategy: Remaking the BBC, 1985-2003. *Business History* 55(7): 1228-1246.

Carter, C, Spence C and McKinlay A (2020) Strategic change, leadership and accounting: A triptych of organizational reform. *Public Administration* 98(1): 62-91.

Cave R (2000) *Creative Industries*. Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press.

Clegg S and Burden S (2019) Exploring creativity and innovation in broadcasting. *Human Relations*, on line.

Clegg S and Courpasson D (2004) Political Hybrids: Tocquevillean views on project organizations. *Journal of Management Studies* 41(4): 525-547.

Collins R (2008) Hierarchy or homestasis? Hierarchy, markets and networks in UK media and communications governance. *Media, Culture & Society* 30(3): 295-317.

Corbin J and Strauss A (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Research*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Currie G, Tempest S and Starkey K (2006) New careers for old? Organizational and individual responses to changing boundaries. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(4): 755-774.

D'Arma A (2018) The hollowing out of public service broadcasting: A constructivist institutionalist analysis of the commercialisation of the BBC's in-house production. *Media, Culture & Society* 40(3): 432-448.

Dex S, Willis J, Patterson R and Sheppard E (2000) Freelance workers and contract uncertainty: The effects of contractual changes in the television industry. *Work, Employment and Society* 14(2): 283-305.

Diamond (2020) *The Third Cut*. London: Creative Diversity Network.

Directors UK (2018) Who's calling the shots? A report on gender equality among directors in UK TV. London: Directors UK.

Ebbers J and Winberg N (2009) Latent organizations in the film industry: Contracts, rewards and resources. *Human Relations* 62(7): 987-1009.



Eikhof D (2017) Analysing decisions in diversity and opportunity in the cultural and creative industries: A new framework. *Organization* 24(3): 289-307.

Eikhof D and Warhurst C (2013) The promised land? Why social inequalities are systemic in the creative industries. *Employee Relations* 35(5): 495-508.

Ekman S (2014) Is the high-involvement worker precarious or opportunistic? Hierarchical ambiguities in late capitalism. *Organization* 2(2): 141-158.

Engwall M (2003) No project is an island: Linking projects to history and context. *Research Policy* 32: 789-808.

Friedman S and Laurison D (2019) *The Class Ceiling: Why it Pays to be Privileged*. Bristol, UK: Policy Press.

Grabher G (2004) Temporary architectures of learning: Knowledge governance in project ecologies. *Organization Studies* 25(9): 1491-1514.

Gill R (2014) Unspeakable inequalities: Post feminism, entrepreneurial subjectivity and the repudiation of sexism among cultural workers. *Social Politics* (21(4): 509-528.

Glaser B and Strauss A (2009) *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Piscataway NJ: Transaction.

Greer I and Doellgast V (2017) Marketization, inequality and institutional change: Towards a new framework for comparative economic relations. *Journal of Industrial Relations* 59(2): 192-208.

Grugulis I and Stoyanova D (2011) The missing middle: Communities of practice in a freelance labour market. *Work, Employment and Society* 25(2): 342-351.

Grugulis I and Stoyanova D (2012) Social capital and networks in film and TV: Jobs for the boys? *Organization Studies* 33(10): 1311-1331.

Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S (2008) Creative work and emotional labour in the television industry. *Theory, Culture & Society* 25(7-8): 97-118.

Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S (2010) ‘A very complicated sense of freedom’: Conditions and experience of creative labour in three cultural industries. *Poetics* 38(1): 4-20.

- Hesmondhalgh D and Baker S (2015) Sex, gender and work segregation in the cultural industries. *Sociological Review* 63/S1: 23-37.
- Inkson K, Gunz H, Ganesh S and Roper J (2012) Boundaryless careers: Bringing back boundaries. *Organization Studies* 33(3): 323-340.
- Jay J (2013) Navigating paradox as a mechanism of change in hybrid organizations. *Academy of Management Journal* 56(1): 137-159.
- Jones, C and Maoret J (2018) Frontiers of creative industries: Exploring structural and cultural dynamics. In: Jones, C. Maoret, M (eds) *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 55:1-16. London, UK: Emerald.
- Lave J and Wenger E (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Lee D (2011) Networks, cultural capital and creative labour in the British television industry. *Media, Culture & Society* 33(4): 549-565.
- Lee D (2012a) The ethics of insecurity: Risk, individualization and value in British independent television production. *Television and New Media* 13(6): 480-497.
- Lee D (2012b) Precarious creativity; Changing attitudes towards craft and creativity in the British independent television production sector. *Creative Industries Journal* 4 (2): 155-170.
- Lourenco A and Turner S (2019) The rise of regulation in constituting markets: A co-evolutionary perspective on the UK television production sector. *Journal of Institutional Economics* 15: 615-630.
- McDonald P (2018) How 'flexible' are careers in the anticipated life course of young people? *Human Relations* 71(1): 23-46.
- Mackenzie E and McKinlay A (2020) Hope labour and the psychic life of cultural work. *Human Relations*, online

McKinlay A (2002) ‘Dead selves’: The birth of the modern career. *Organization* 9(4): 595-614.

McKinlay A and Quinn B (1999) Management, technology and work in commercial broadcasting, c. 1979-98’, *New Technology, Work and Employment* 14(1): 2-17.

McKinlay A and Quinn B (2007) Remaking management, work and industrial relations: British commercial television, c.1979-2000. *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations* 23: 155-180.

Manning S (2010) The strategic formations of project networks: A relational practice perspective. *Human Relations* 63(4): 551-572.

Manning S (2017) The rise of project network organizations: Building core teams and flexible partner pools for interdisciplinary projects. *Research Policy* 46(8): 1399-1415.

Manning S and Sydow J (2011) Projects, paths and practices: Sustaining and leveraging project-based relationships. *Industrial and Corporate Change* 20(5): 1369-1404.

Mayrhofer W, Meyer M and Steyrer J (2007) Contextual issues in the study of careers. In: Gunz, H. and Peiperl, M (eds), *Handbook of Career Studies*: 215-240. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage.

Mayers V (2011) *Below the Line: Producers and Production Studies in the New Television Economy*. Durham NC: Duke University Press.

Mills B with Horton E (2017) *Creativity in the British television comedy industry*. London: Routledge.

Mitever M, Engwall M and Jerbant A (2017) Mechanisms of isomorphism in project-based organizations. *Project Management Journal* 48(5): 9-24.

Moran F (2005) Structural vs. relational embeddedness: Social capital and managerial performance. *Strategic Management Journal* 26(12): 1129-1151.

- Morris J and Farrell C (2017) Neo bureaucratic forms, technology, control and contingent work: the case of UK TV. *New Technology, Work and Employment* 32: 115-30.
- Morris J, Farrell C and Reed M (2016) The indeterminacy of temporariness': control and power in neo bureaucratic organizations in UK TV. *Human Relations* 69 (12): 1274-97.
- Nahapiet J and Ghoshal S (1998) Social capital, intellectual capital, and organizational advantage. *Academy of Management Review* 23(2): 242-266.
- OFCOM (2019) Diversity in UK television: Freelancers. London: OFCOM.
- O'Mahony S and Bechky B (2006) Stretchwork: Managing the career progression paradox in external labour markets. *Academy of Management Journal* 49(5): 918-941.
- Paterson, R (2001) Work histories in television. *Media, Culture and Society* 23(4): 495-520.
- Paterson R (2017) Early independent production entrepreneurs in the UK television industry: Pioneering agents of neoliberal intervention. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing* 9(3): 280-298.
- Petrilieri G, Ashford S and Wrzesniewski A (2019) Agony and Ecstasy in the gig economy: Cultivating holding environments for precarious and personalized work identities. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 64(1): 124-170.
- Powell WW (1990) Neither market nor hierarchy: Network forms of organization. *Research in Organizational Behavior* 12:295-336.
- Preston A (2003) Inside the commissioners: The culture and practice of commissioning at UK broadcasters. Glasgow: The Research Centre.
- Pringle, J and Mallon, M (2003) Challenges for the boundaryless career odyssey. *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 14(5): 839-853.
- Randle, K Forson, C and Calveley, M (2015) Towards a Bourdieusian analysis of the social composition of the UK film and television workforce. *Work, Employment and Society* 29(4): 590-606.

Reed M (2011) The post-bureaucratic organization and the control revolution. In: Clegg, S  
Harris, M and Hopfl, H (eds) *Managing Modernity: Beyond Bureaucracy*. Oxford, UK:  
Oxford University Press.

Roper J, Ganesh S and Inkson K (2010) Neoliberalism and knowledge interests in  
boundaryless careers discourse. *Work, Employment and Society* 24(4): 661-679.

Rowlands L and Handy J (2012) An addictive environment: New Zealand film production  
workers' subjective experiences of project-based labour. *Human Relations* 65(5): 657-68.

Scharff C (2016) The psychic life of neoliberalism: Mapping the contours of entrepreneurial  
subjectivity. *Theory, Culture & Society* 33(6):107-122.

ScreenSkills (2020) High-end television in the UK 2019 workforce research. London:  
ScreenSkills.

Siebert S and Wilson F (2013) All work and no pay: Consequences of unpaid work in the  
creative industries. *Work, Employment and Society* 27(4): 711-721.

Spicer, A (2016) Autonomy and dependency in two successful UK film and television  
companies: An analysis of RED Production Company and Warp Film. *Film Studies* 14(1): 5-  
31

Starkey K, Barnatt, C and Tempest S (2000) Beyond networks and hierarchies: Latent  
organization in the UK television industry. *Organization Science* 11(3): 299-305.

Stjerne I and Svejenova S (2016) Connecting temporary and permanent organising:  
Tensions and boundary work in sequential film projects. *Organization Studies* 37(12): 1771-  
1793.

Storey J, Salaman G and Platman K (2005) Living with enterprise in an enterprise economy:  
Freelance and contract workers in the media. *Human Relations* 58(8): 1033-1054.

Stoyanova D and Grugulis I (2012) Tournament careers: Working in UK television. In:  
Mathieu, C (ed) *Careers in Creative Industries*. London, UK: Routledge: 88-96.

Sullivan S and Baruch Y (2009) Advances in career theory and research: A critical review and research agenda for future exploration. *Journal of Management* 35(6): 1542-1571.

Svejenova S (2005) 'The path with the heart': Creating the authentic career. *Journal of Management Studies* 42(5): 947-974.

Sydow J (2018) From dualism to dualities: On researching creative processes in arts and sciences. *Environment and Planning A: Environment and Space* 50(8): 1795-1801.

Sydow J and Windeler A (2020) Temporary organising and permanent contexts. *Current Sociology* 68(4): 480-498.

Tempest S, McKinlay A and Starkey K (2004) Careerism alone: Careers and social capital in the financial services and television industries. *Human Relations* 57(12): 1523-1545.

Tomlinson J, Baird M, Berg P and Cooper R (2018) Flexible careers across the life course: Advancing theory, research and practice. *Human Relations* 71(1): 4-22.

Townley B, Beech N and McKinlay A (2009) Managing the motley crew: Managing in the creative industries. *Human Relations* 62(7): 639-662.

Tunstall J (2015) *BBC and television genres in jeopardy*. Oxford: Peter Lang.

Uzzi B (1997) Social structure and competition in interfirm networks: The paradox of embeddedness. *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42(1): 35-67.

Work Foundation (2019) Annual ScreenSkills Assessment. London: BFI..

Zoellner A (2009) Professional ideology and program conventions: Documentary development in independent British television production. *Mass Communication and Society* 12(4): 505-536.

Zoellner A (2020) Commissioning and independent television production: Power, risk and creativity. *International Journal of Communication* 14:1-19.

**Biographies**

Catherine Farrell is a Senior Lecturer in Public Management in Cardiff University’s Business School. Her research interests are in the areas of leadership and governance and the changing careers of professionals across a range of different occupations. Her work has been published in journals including *Public Administration*, *Public Management Review*, *Policy and Politics*, *Human Relations* and *Industrial Relations*. [farrellcm@cardiff.ac.uk]

Alan McKinlay is Professor of HRM at Newcastle University Business School, UK. His research interests include business, labour and management history, social theory and creative work. He has published widely in international scholarly journals including *Business History*, *Human Relations* and *Organization Studies*. His most recent book is *Jimmy Reid: A Clyde-built Man*. [Email: [alan.mckinlay@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:alan.mckinlay@newcastle.ac.uk)]

Jonathan Morris is Professor of Organisational Analysis and Associate Dean for Research at Cardiff University's Business School. His research interests are primarily in the managerial implications of new organizational forms the impact of neo liberalism upon professional and creative work and management and organisation in east Asia. He has published eight books and over 100 articles on these themes, amongst others, in journals such as *Organization Studies*, *the Journal of Management Studies*, *Human Relations* and *Industrial Relations*. [email: morrisjl@cardiff.ac.uk]



**Table 1: Boundaryless and mosaic careers compared**

### **Boundaryless Careers**

Decontextualised, neo classical (free market) economic assumptions of fragmented labour markets.

Individuals ‘free’ agents and unrestrained and ‘nomadic’, largely unrestricted.

Individuals therefore pursue unrestrained career progress.

Importance of networks underplayed.

### **Mosaic Careers**

Contextualised, neo-bureaucratic organizing of fragmented labour markets.

Individual agency, but constrained by institutions and marked by inequalities; role of power and control.

Careers piecemeal and characterised by fragmentation and uncertainty.

Social capital crucial, importance of networks