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Optimising the Potential of Third Space Professionals in Higher Education

Abstract

This paper develops the concept of what Whitchurch has termed a "*Third Space*" between professional and academic spheres of activity in higher education. These are represented in the paper by three processes described as *Contestation*, *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*. Successful navigation of *Third Space* is likely to involve being able to work through challenges and tensions characteristic of *Contestation*; to build collaborative relationships via perceptions of added value, characteristic of *Reconciliation*; and to construct new forms of plural space during *Reconstruction*. The paper thereby offers a way of understanding increasingly complex working practices and an ongoing mutation of identities.

Keywords

Professional identity, academic identity, Third Space

Optimale Nutzung des Potentials von Third Space Professionellen im Hochschulwesen

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Beitrag entwickelt den Begriff des "Third Space", den Celia Whitchurch für die Sphäre zwischen Akademie und Administration geprägt hat. Auf dem Weg zur Anerkennung als Professionelle durchlaufen die Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeiter in dieser Sphäre die drei Phasen der Umstrittenheit (Contestation), Versöhnung (Reconciliation) und Neuerrichtung (Reconstruction). Wer sich im Third Space behaupten will, muss in der ersten Phase Umstrittenheit standhalten und seinen Kompetenzbereich verteidigen; muss durch die Schaffung von Mehrwerten erfolgreich Beziehungen aufbauen, typisch für die Versöhnungsphase; und daraufhin neue Räume schaffen, in denen Pluralität und Vielfalt möglich ist. Der Beitrag bietet einen Ansatz zum Verständnis von zunehmend komplexen Arbeitspraktiken und laufenden Veränderungen von professionellen Identitäten.

Schlüsselworter

Professionelle Identität, akademische Identität, Third Space

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1   Introduction

This paper summarises the outcomes of a Small Development Project funded by the UK Leadership Foundation for Higher Education (WHITCHURCH & LAW, 2010[2]), which in turn built on an earlier project entitled *Professional Managers in UK Higher Education: Preparing for Complex Futures* (WHITCHURCH, 2006; 2008a). The latter identified the fact that as higher education institutions, and their work-forces, have expanded and diversified to meet the demands of contemporary environments, boundaries between professional and academic spheres of activity are becoming blurred. As a result, what WHITCHURCH has termed a "*Third Space*" has opened up, requiring contributions from a range of professionals, and creating new dimensions to the workforce map, as shown in Figure 1 (WHITCHURCH, 2008a).

In this space, individuals have emerged who are capable of performing "blended" roles, comprising elements of both academic and professional activity (WHIT-CHURCH, 2009). However, this has been a relatively un-remarked development, and the study described in this paper addressed in more detail the nature of *Third Space*, and working practices within it.
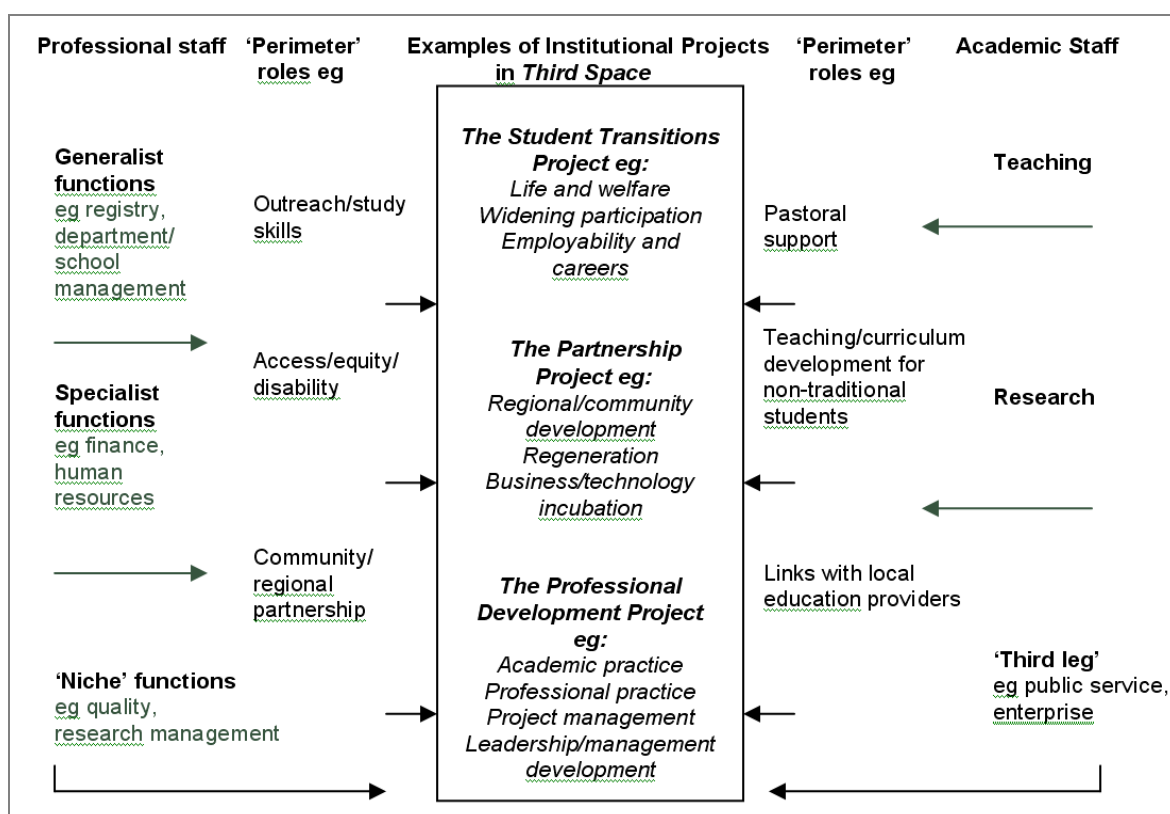

Figure. 1: The Emergence of *Third Space* between Professional and Academic Spheres of Activity
(Diagram adapted from WHITCHURCH, C. "Shifting identities and blurring boundaries: The emergence of *Third Space* professionals in UK higher education." Higher Education Quarterly 62(4): 377-396, 2008. Reproduced with permission of Blackwell Publishing Ltd.)

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[2] Available in full at www.lfhe.ac.uk/research/smallprojects/ioefinalreport.doc.

2   Project Aims and Method

The project focused on staff employed on professional, rather than academic, contracts, although some of them had undertaken academic roles in contiguous environments such as adult and further education. It comprised two in-depth case studies, one in a pre-1992 institution, established before 1992 ('Pre-92'), and one in a post-1992 institution, established by the UK Further and Higher Education Act in 1992 ('Post-'92'). The two case institutions were chosen because each contained established examples of areas of activity that could be characterised as *Third Space*, one focusing on Learning and Programme Support, and the other on Community and Business Partnership.

The categories of activity most frequently mentioned by respondents as part of their current portfolio were as follows:

- Programme development
- Widening participation
- Community and business partnership
- Professional and academic practice
- Learning support
- Institutional planning
- Communications and public relations.

As a basis for comparison, particular attention was paid to individuals working in the broad 'project' areas of Learning and Programme Support and Community and Business Partnership. These areas, which involved a mix of academic and professional participants, sometimes including external partners, might be seen as 'freestanding' *Third Space*. Other individuals were to be found in 'patches' of *Third Space*, for instance in a faculty environment. However, the 'freestanding' examples of Learning and Programme Support and Community and Business Partnership were used in the study to offer a framework in which to analyse what is happening in *Third Space*, and the processes by which new roles and identities are being constructed.

An electronic questionnaire was administered to 213 individuals on professional contracts of employment. The response rate was 32% in Pre-92 and 40% in Post-92, a total of 73 respondents. Questions seeking qualitative information about, for instance, respondents' attitudes to their roles, those aspects of their roles that they felt were positive and/or more frustrating, and challenges likely to be faced in achieving career aspirations, were used to begin plotting the key dimensions of *Third Space*, and to develop a topic guide for the interviews. Ten interviews were conducted, five in each institution, with people who had volunteered to be interviewed at the end of the electronic questionnaire, and were therefore self-selected.

Interviewees worked predominantly in widening participation, outreach, learning support, programme development and community and business partnership. They therefore interacted with a range of constituencies including academic staff, students and prospective students, employers, local businesses, and regional and

funding agencies. When asked about their roles and identities, a sense of in-between-ness was evident. Whereas some were able to position themselves across a number of known activities, so that "[I have] multiple identities: research, teaching and learning professional, project manager", others found precise description more difficult in that, for instance, "there is a job to be done but it can't quite be articulated". Often their work was contiguous with academic activity, for instance writing material supporting the delivery of academic programmes, and involved a knowledge of disciplinary content.

3   The Dynamics of Third Space

Three clearly identifiable processes emerged from the narratives, which were defined as *Contestation, Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*. These were developed to provide a frame through which the dynamics of *Third Space* environments might be described and understood. A parallel account of these findings in relation to staff working across 'public' and 'private' space is given in WHITCHURCH (2010).

3.1   Contestation Process

During the *Contestation* process, individuals define themselves according to what they see as the dominant "rules and resources" (GIDDENS, 1990). In an academic environment, academic space is seen as the 'default' space. Staff who work in 'professional' space may feel that they are seen as outsiders, and even have a sense of disenfranchisement. They are likely, therefore, to find themselves negotiating their position. The following comments illustrate conditions of *Contestation*:

- "… academic colleagues [fail] to see value in what I do".
- "My ideas have been taken away by [academic] managers and developed by them rather than by me".
- "…academic staff have no interest in the area I am involved in".
- "… [I am obliged to be] reactive to others rather than having autonomy to assume more proactive roles".

Reflected in these comments is a sense of self as 'the other', and a lack of under-standing on the part of academic colleagues about activity in Third Space, or of the challenges associated with it.

- The *Contestation* process therefore reflects challenges and tensions that typically arise from those working across professional and academic spheres of activity, including:
- Operational issues associated with process and bureaucracy.
- The speed of and timescales within which activity takes place, described by one manager as different "rhythms" between academic and more project-oriented approaches, geared to achieving outcomes.
- The contractual nature of work involving clients and partners, as opposed to the more open-ended nature of academic work.

- Political issues and negotiations.
- The nature of "Mode 2" research and consultancy activity in Third Space, referred to by two respondents as being seen as "trade" or "dirty" work by academic colleagues.

Individuals also displayed frustrations more usually associated with academic staff, for instance, what were seen as 'management' requirements (perceived as restrictions on autonomy and the ability to make decisions), and resource constraints (such as funding and time).

As a coping strategy during the *Contestation* process, individuals may privately contest inherited "rules and resources", whilst abiding by them for pragmatic purposes. This can result in a process of "doublespeak" or "splitting", which involves "living on the cusp, to deal with two contradictory things at the same time without either transcending or repressing that contradiction…" (BHABHA quoted in MITCHELL, 1995: 5-6). In these dual conditions of acceptance and challenge, approaches to and understandings of working practices are "interrogated and reinitiated" (BHABHA, 1994: 6). The following comments reflect Kehm's comment about the existence of "'secret' managers" (KEHM, 2006: 170), and Rhoades' concept of an "invisible workforce" (RHOADES, 2010):

- "To be able to question assumptions and improve decision-making, you have to be in the room as the decisions are being made."
- "… [the] contributions [of professional staff] are not always recognised and respected, or only after a lengthy period of building… trust".

Furthermore, people who feel "invisible" may be obliged to adopt a persona to make progress with the tasks that they feel they are qualified to undertake.

3.2   Reconciliation Process

The *Reconciliation* process is underpinned by a belief in the possibility of:

- Collaboration between interested parties who can be persuaded that they have something to contribute to, and gain from, joint endeavour.
- Perceived added value such as a development or initiative that would not occur otherwise.
- Overarching aims to which participants feel ideologically committed, such as raising educational or employment aspirations, as well as material benefits such as improving market opportunity.

During the process of *Reconciliation*, difference is negotiated, so as to "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies… that initiate new states of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation…" (BHABHA, 1994: 1-2). In the case of the current study, "originary and initial subjectivities" could refer to working practices and approaches that originate from either professional or academic spheres. The *Reconciliation* process is therefore "a place of invention and transformational encounters, a dynamic in-between space that is imbued with… ambivalence, ambiguities and contradictions, with the feelings and practices of both sites, to fashion something different, unexpected" (BHABHA quoted in

MOLES, 2008: 4). It therefore enables new forms of activity to occur, for instance, for professional staff to undertake work from which they might otherwise be excluded, such as teaching students or institutional research and development.

Work in the *Reconciliation* process is characterised by comments about facilitating understandings and developments across different spheres of activity, such as:

- "… giv[ing] voice to the student learner, whilst presenting findings to the relevant committees".

- "… work[ing] with a wide pool of colleagues from a wide geographical patch, making linkages across the network and being able to offer development opportunities".

- "… connect[ing] people together to solve problems and translate their different languages (technical, business, education); enabl[ing] them to meet their own challenges".

During the *Reconciliation* process, new understandings are found by "learning how to conceptualise 'contradiction' or the dialectic as that state of being or thinking that is 'neither the one nor the other, but something else besides'" (BHABHA, quoted in MITCHELL, 1995: 9-10). This involves "cultural translation" (BHABHA, 1990: 211), to offer a safer, more permissive place for new activities and relationships.

The *Reconciliation* process might, therefore, be said to be "a place of critical exchange where the… imagination can be expanded to encompass a multiplicity of perspectives… the original binary choice is not dismissed entirely but is subjected to a creative process of restructuring that draws selectively and strategically from the two opposing categories to open new alternatives" (SOJA, 1996: 5). It is, therefore, a place where opportunities emerge, in relation to, for instance, institutional research and development, and new forms of relationship between teachers, learners and professional and academic staff.

3.3 Reconstruction Process

Activities undertaken and identities formed during the *Reconstruction* process are no longer defined solely by "rules and resources" deriving from one or other "originary" spaces, but via the creation of a plural environment in *Third Space*. They are represented by comments such as:

- "Interaction with, and respect received from, academic colleagues on an equal intellectual footing".

- "[Gaining] acceptance of project officer experiences as relevant background…"

- "I have a good deal of freedom to produce solutions appropriate to the situation and/or project".

Throughout the process of *Reconstruction*, therefore, new "rules and resources" are created. In BHABHA's terms, the space it offers "displace[s] the histories that constitute it, and set[s] up new structures of authority… which are inadequately understood through received wisdom… a new area of negotiation of meaning and

representation" (BHABHA, 1990). These might be represented by, for instance, recognition of a project within institutional structures via representation on a formal committee; by the creation of a new department or unit; or, at a system-wide level, by the development of a professional association or publication relating to a new form of activity, such as institutional research. In this sense new space is being created that is not defined solely by being 'in-between' professional and academic space.

Reconstruction, therefore, involves the active contribution of individuals to the formation of new, plural space. As shown in the case profile below, they are, during this process, likely to develop new identities for themselves and their teams. This is reflected in comments such as:

- "… finding time to undertake a doctorate… required within higher education to be taken seriously".
- "… there is always a tension between general management skills and craft-specific skills. I am studying for an MBA to improve the former and training at work for the latter".

During the *Reconstruction* process, individuals are likely to develop networks that enable them to contextualise problems, integrate different threads of activity and thereby mitigate tension between different groupings. They therefore invest in "strong" ties, spending time on close and regular relationships with key individuals and networks, as well as taking advantage of the opportunities provided by "weak ties" via extended networks (GRANOVETTER, 1973). They are also likely to be ideologically committed to the work they are doing, and to be motivated by that commitment, as illustrated in comments such as:

- "Moving forward an agenda I believe in".
- "I'm working for an institution that can transform the world for the better".

3.4 A Case Profile

The case profile of a Media Developer who worked in learning and programme support illustrates the processes of *Contestation, Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction* at work:

The Media Developer

This individual had a technical background with skills in software and media development and experience in industry. Their key area of responsibility was in the development of learning materials and, to that end, training others in their use. Although responsible for programme delivery, they demonstrated how an ability to translate and interpret academic concerns and objectives was of paramount importance in aligning content with appropriate delivery mechanisms.

Contestation

The Media Developer illustrated two key aspects of the *Contestation* process, firstly, that there is likely to be more than one 'language' being spoken in any institution. Thus: "I hear one thing [from the Vice-Chancellor] about the way we're trying to move

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the organisation forward… but I see the management decisions tak[en] around me that seem to be contradicting what I've just heard the Vice-Chancellor say… you've got two different groups of people often talking two different languages". These languages expressed different preoccupations and concerns, for instance, in relation to the way that learning outcomes might be achieved so as to meet both academic and institutional objectives. This manager had actively engaged in a learning process so that they could understand and translate between these different languages. Secondly, they did not allow themselves to be bound by organisational or structural hierarchies in developing a relationship with colleagues whose support they needed to enlist: "I've had to create my own role, find my own ways into systems and force my way into meetings, rather than wait for someone to ask me to contribute…" They therefore took the initiative in entering fora that might be uncomfortable or challenging in order to progress the debate about the opportunities offered by technology, both to learning and teaching and to institutional strategy.

Reconciliation

While acknowledging that they provided a service, the Media Developer saw themselves as an "equal partner" among teaching and learning "thought leaders" and senior managers who developed the university's e-learning strategy. Thus, they effectively acted as an internal consultant, advising programme teams and contextualising problems within a wider framework: "you don't optimise the problem where it is, you try and optimise it within the system in which it occurs…" They were, therefore, not simply interpreting and translating, but articulating problems in new ways: "Sometimes just me going in as a 'third eye'… is all that's needed…" They therefore acted as a catalyst by having "the confidence to challenge", which enabled programme teams to come to their own accommodation and resolution of problems. Thus, they facilitated a process whereby "… you combine multiple views of the same situation [so] that you are able to understand the whole picture and identify those areas that are important."

Reconstruction

In finding a way of working round and across organisational structures and encouraging others to do the same, the Media Developer saw their role as: "…helping to knock down silos… standing on them once they're knocked down and trying to encourage people to build bridges rather than silos". In this situation, relationships rather than structures became the critical factor: "if you get the relationships right, everything else falls into place". It also involved raising aspirations and confidence levels of both academic and professional groupings in gaining familiarity with each others' fields, and challenging them to develop new skills and competencies rather than becoming defensive about existing ones: "… you need to be able to give people the opportunities… to actually move into new areas… to move the thinking forward…" This person was therefore trying to achieve congruence between innovation, the professional development of individuals, and the development of the institution, relating the somewhat messy nature of activity in *Third Space* to both academic and institutional purposes: "There are a lot of ideas that never really deliver, and the question is… can you turn it into advice which helps in future decision making and thereby leads to discernable value?"

4 The Processes of *Contestation, Reconciliation* & *Reconstruction* and their Implications

While the possibilities provided for professional growth during *Reconstruction* appear to mitigate some of the frustrations that characterise *Contestation*, the *Reconciliation* and *Reconstitution* processes would be unlikely to be achieved without the challenges of *Contestation* being addressed. In practice, the three processes may occur sequentially or in parallel. Individuals may be more closely aligned with one or other of the three processes at any one time, according to circumstances or the stage of their career. This may shed some light on the fact that there was evidence among respondents of both ideological commitment to, and some frustration with, *Third Space* environments. Those who felt frustration might well have been involved in processes of *Contestation* at the time.

Some people may regard a *Third Space* environment as one destination among others, in which they work for the time being, as suggested by the following comment:

> "I have a PhD. Currently higher education does not support people like me – there is a conflict between publishing papers and making systems benefit communities… It is hard for people like me to stay in higher education."

Such individuals might be termed 'tourists', using their stay as an exploratory or learning process, and occupying roles that are time limited, such as an internal consultant for a special project. There was some evidence that these people would be more likely to be involved in the *Contestation* process, rather than investing in new forms of activity, but a larger study would be required to explore the extent of this. Because they are able to accommodate a degree of open-endedness, uncertainty and even risk, this enables them to be relatively un-phased by *Contestation*.

Some individuals may prefer to focus on the people aspects of their work, working with different groups, interpreting between them and negotiating solutions as part of the *Reconciliation* process. Others may be involved in all three processes and might be characterised as 'permanent residents' who create new forms of space to which they have a sense of belonging. They are therefore more likely to become involved in the *Reconstruction* process, and to be able to cope both with being 'an other' in relation to academic staff, and of being professionals in their own right. They are more likely than 'tourists' to make a career in *Third Space*, contributing to the establishment and development of new forms of territory that may in future become mainstream. Nevertheless, the *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction* processes depend on an ability to recognise and work with the tensions and ambiguities in the *Contestation* process. Individuals working in *Third Space*, therefore, may wish to consider how they might be located vis-à-vis the processes of *Contestation, Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*, and how these might work for them.

The narratives of those in the study suggest that being able to work through the tensions of *Contestation*, and also to reshape institutional relationships and structures via *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*, are likely to be critical aspects of moving on working practices and achieving creative outcomes that in turn contribute to institutional development. In the case of the Media Developer, this involved

developing their listening skills to work through all three processes, tolerating a significant degree of ambiguity, uncertainty and even risk as they did so. They not only demonstrated the ability to challenge the status quo in the form of given organisational structures, but also saw the potential for building new activities, knowledges and spaces by understanding the language and perceptions of their academic colleagues. Their ability to negotiate new relationships in the *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction* processes reflects HABERMAS' concept of "communicative action", that is "oriented to reaching understanding … on the basis of common situation definitions …" (HABERMAS, 1984: 286). Although this person was able to make progress with respect to all three processes, other people may, because of their specific interests, talents or circumstances, focus on one or other process.

Although it was not possible to draw generalisable conclusions on the basis of a sample of two institutions, evidence of the three processes of *Contestation*, *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*, and the struggle associated with realising potentials, were found in both. In Pre-92 particularly, there was evidence of both an attachment to, and frustration with, the structures that existed. Although in one sense individuals wanted to be 'set free' from these, there was concern about managing the freedom that this would imply. For institutions, the *Contestation* process raises issues about how a range of views might be accommodated and used to effect, rather than individuals necessarily being perceived (or feeling that they are perceived) as being 'in opposition'. Creating the conditions in which this might occur, and tolerating the debate that is likely to ensue, can be a challenge for institutional managers. As one respondent suggested: "Until you value dissent you're not going to be making good decisions".

One way in which the potentials of *Third Space* working might be enhanced in this type of situation is by the development of wider networks of like-minded individuals:

> "…what's happened for a lot of people is that they've formed their own networks. I certainly have a group of colleagues with a similar range and level of experience as myself and we support… each other, and also… new colleagues coming in."

Such networks are also based on acknowledgement that, in complex organisations and sectors, "you have to know other people and be able to call on expertise or just to ask questions, you can't possibly know everything". This reinforces the sense of 'voluntarism' as an essential element of *Third Space* activity. Furthermore, the parameters of *Third Space* are not fixed, and the shape of activity may change as higher education institutions take on new projects and areas of interest, to reflect what one respondent referred to as "continually shifting networks".

Institutional responses to *Third Space* working and, in practice, the response of managers of departments and functional units, may vary from active encouragement to allowing it to evolve by default. Institutions may wish, therefore, to consider what might be the conditions and variables that affect this ways in which *Third Space* might be made to work for them. These might include, for instance:

- Staffing profile (background, length of service, experience, networks, qualifications).

- The nature of individual projects (balance of activity, number of partners, maturity of partnership, extent of "strong" and "weak" ties (GRANOVET-TER, 1973).

- Institution/sub-institution mission, aspirations, niche market.

Issues arising from the study suggest that institutions may also wish to review:

- The development of 'mature' relationships via the processes of *Contestation*, *Reconciliation* and *Reconstruction*, which may supplement formal reporting lines.

- The development of management practices that are facilitative rather than controlling of the three processes.

- The creation of job descriptions that facilitate mobility and role enhancement.

- Inclusion in workload models and promotion criteria of activities such as, for instance, partnership building and development activity.

- The use of rewards and incentives (not necessarily financial), such as responsibility allowances, eligibility for special awards, and professional development opportunities for those working in *Third Space*.

- The use of attachments and associateships to recognise crossover activity, for instance to an institutional centre for teaching and learning or higher education studies.

- How to give recognition to the fact that for some individuals the lack of structure and clear parameters in *Third Space* may be uncomfortable, and even cause anxiety, and how to find ways of supporting them via, for instance, mentoring or coaching.

Reference to this checklist might be made in preparing institutional and sub-institutional plans and in staff review and development processes. In relation to the latter, it might be that STRIKE's "Career Climbing Frame" (STRIKE, 2010: 88), allowing a range of different career routes with crossover between them, could be adapted for professional staff.

5   Concluding Remarks

The study has begun to describe the complex dimensions of *Third Space* as an emergent space in its own right, and the dynamic nature of the processes involved in working there. It achieved a sense of the challenges faced by individuals in their relationships with their colleagues and institutions, and in their careers, and ways in which they manage these. The study also points to ways in which individuals might move beyond the concept of organisational "silos", and the constraints perceived to be imposed by them (SHINE, 2010).

The concept of *Third Space* has been applied to higher education institutional environments to illustrate "another mode of thinking about space that draws upon… traditional dualism, but extends well beyond [it] in scope, substance and meaning" (SOJA, 1996:11). By developing the concepts of *Contestation*, *Recon-*

ciliation and *Reconstruction*, the study has progressed understandings of roles and relationships in *Third Space*, including the creation of new spaces and identities. This model incorporates a sense of resistance and struggle, via the *Contestation* process, as a legitimate part of identity construction and working practice. It therefore offers a way of acknowledging the more challenging aspects of *Third Space*, at the same time as those that are more developmental and creative, providing a tool for understanding increasingly complex relationships.

By acknowledging the 'darker' side of *Third Space*, the study also avoids what might be seen as idealised accounts of boundary crossing in relation to activities such as networking and the building of effective relationships (for instance, WILLIAMS, 2002: 121). It demonstrates that a greater emphasis on relationships than on organisational structures can reduce checks and balances and leave some staff, particularly those who are less experienced, feeling vulnerable. Feedback from the EDUHUB conference in Montreux on 27-28 January 2010 suggested that there is also a sense in which *Third Space* could become all things to all people, or a default position for people who feel that they do not 'fit' the formal structures, possibly with a hint of the 'subversive'. It could also foster a sense of a lack of identity if an individual was moving from project to project as a 'project manager', especially if they did not have a title that linked them into established institutional structures. Nevertheless, the narratives of respondents in the study showed that although the ambiguity of *Third Space* environments presented some challenges, these could also be used to advantage. For instance, specific projects could be presented as having a close association with the parent institution, or at one remove, as appropriate for the immediate purpose. *Third Space* could also be used to trial or evaluate new activities before they were formally launched, for instance new forms of access programme.

The study suggests that optimising the potentials of those working in *Third Space* is likely to be a joint process, with responsibility on institutions to recognise and respond to changes that are occurring, and an onus on individuals to 'educate' their institutions about how *Third Space* might be used most advantageously. This is reflected in the comments of one respondent working in learning support that:

> "… one of the main constraints is history, that there is that established relationship [between professional and academic staff], and getting people to understand that the relationship that existed in the past isn't [necessarily] going to be useful in the future is perhaps one of the main challenges that we need to address… there needs to be changes on both sides… academics need to… allow others to make decisions about certain aspects of the way learning is delivered, because they won't have all the knowledge needed to deliver that learning experience. And at the same time I think that [professional] staff will need to acquire more confidence that they do have a role to play in answering those questions".

Furthermore, this illustrates the fact that *Third Space* is unlikely to occur simply by institutions 'designing it in', and that it depends on the combined initiative of individuals and institutions.

Moreover, although *Third Space* working has implications for the relationship between institutions and their staff, this does not necessarily mean a major shift in approach. It may, rather, be a question of being creative within existing mecha-

nisms, so as to give credit for new forms of activity (WHITCHURCH & GOR-
DON, 2010). For instance, *Third Space* activity can be supported by more flexible
employment packages for individuals who occupy a broader range of roles than
hitherto, and develop careers that do not follow a traditional academic or
professional pattern. What seems clear, however, is that relationships rather than
structures are at the heart of the way that *Third Space* works for individuals and
institutions. Both, therefore, may wish to review the concept of *Third Space,* the
processes associated with it, and ways in which they might make it work for them.

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