**Organizing an entrepreneurial career within knowledge based industries**

Knowledge work is often ambiguous, subjective, abstract and context-dependent (Alvesson, 1993; Morris, 2001; Swart, 2007). This ambiguity affects both clients’ assessments of services bought and knowledge workers’ acquisition of the knowledge and skills they sell. The individual knowledge worker must determine what they need to know (Gann and Salter, 2000; Grabher, 2002a) and the purchaser must develop methods for determining who to employ, with both sides’ decisions often informed by existing relationships (Baumann, 2002; Grabher, 2002a; Tymon and Stumpf, 2003). Given the informality or “looseness” of these mechanisms, contractors must cultivate extensive networks of different and related associates to manage their careers effectively. These occupational communities or ‘cliques’, which are often formed through professional relationships across various types of organizations, provide access to information and work opportunities (Kunda et al, 2002; Barley and Kunda, 2004; Antcliff, et al, 2007) and play an important role in skills acquisition (Adams and Demaiter, 2008). In summary, experts must acquire the tacit knowledge of their field (Lam, 2000), and in these circumstances, processes of enculturation are important (Grabher, 2002b) because agents must become “insiders” by picking up the norms, conventions, language and other signifiers of membership (Barrett, 1998). What does a predominance of informal, network-based allocation of opportunities mean for those who are traditionally excluded from the ‘right’ occupational communities?

Formal equal opportunities procedures, which may increase the opportunities available to marginalized groups, may make little difference when informality governs an occupation (Holgate and McKay, 2007). Furthermore, activities that promote the development of cliques amongst more marginal groups may only serve to further embed disadvantage (Bates, 1997). Similarly, whilst positive benefits have been associated with general business support activities for minority groups, problems remain including skewed membership and ineffective support for new entrants (Fallon and Berman Brown, 2004).

It seems that addressing these issues with a generic “communities” model will not overcome the problems facing specific groups, so it is necessary to identify the ‘social resource matrix’ that supports the differing needs of diverse groups in purposive ways (see Barbieri, 2003). This requires a detailed knowledge and understanding of occupational communities, the differing ways that diverse groups are embedded within them and the various levers available to policy-makers wishing to positively affect the prospects of marginal groups within these communities. This task poses numerous ontological and methodological challenges to researchers, which our presentation will consider.

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