

DIVERSITY IN PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE: LEARNING AND WORKING INTERTWINED, OUTLINE FOR A RESEARCH PROGRAMME

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Abstract:

This position paper presents an outline for a research programme for the lectorate in Differentiated Human Resource Management (DHRM) of the Centre of Applied Research (CAREM), part of Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. It addresses the theme of 'learning and working' and is the result of collaboration between academic researchers and representatives from the business community and professional education. The aim of this position paper is, in the first place, to identify the issues in the changing relationship(s) between learning and working, given the diversity of employees and their expertise. In the second place these can then serve as a context for formulating the potential contours of a new research programme. We have applied the model of transitional labour markets developed by Schmid as an organisational framework for setting up such a research programme. On this basis, we present the issues that will form the focus of research over the 2014-2018 period.

Keywords: learning, labour, professional development, diversity, transitional labour markets, research programme

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

This paper has been prompted by the authors' concern about the possible discrepancy between the discourse surrounding lifelong learning on the one hand, and the often more wayward practice on the other (Cöhrs et. al, 2008). To what extent does investment in the education of *all* employees really take place? Do education and training programmes cater for the needs and the potential of older employees? To what extent are education and training packages also targeted at those who are less qualified? And how is it possible to ensure that professionals that have been made redundant as a result of the economic crisis are able to keep their knowledge and skills up-to-date? The non-standard worker, specially the young, differentiated group of new graduates from professional education and the older worker are also a cause for concern given their diminishing chances on the labour market in times of crisis.

This position paper presents an initial outline for a research programme for the Differentiated Human Resource Management (DHRM) lectorate at the Centre of Applied Research (CAREM) within Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands. It addresses the theme of 'learning and working' and is the result of collaboration between academic researchers and representatives from the business community and professional education. Within the programme, our aim is to examine the issue of learning and working at three different levels: the first level covers the wide range of issues in the practice of learning and working in the business community and wider society and (anticipated) changes within these¹; the second level focuses on professional education and its relationship with the professional field; and thirdly we study the theme of learning and working at a meta-level. This relates to the research being done by teachers in professional education themselves as a way of learning in the workplace and/or contributing to the professionalisation of their profession. They learn to conduct research together by choosing practical issues as their research themes. This learning takes place within the research group and this joint knowledge creation has repercussions for the way professional education is organised².

1.2 The Differentiated HRM research group

The lectorate has always looked at HRM practice from the perspective of the differences between employees and their professional expertise (Sennett, 2008, 2012). Diversity forms the framework within which the lectorate works. Diversity is hereby taken to refer to differences in gender, ethnicity, age, level of education, careers and life courses and generations. In light of this framework, we deal with practical questions regarding the collaboration between education and the business community, about diversity in the careers of our alumni, about diversity in learning at work, about the relationship (and diversity) of employees and their varied customer base and on the diversity in the organised relationships between learning and working.

This diversity framework also offers a glimpse of the future. It makes sense to sketch out the broad contours of the future (or *zukünftige Gegenwarte*)³ so that we know the direction our answers will take, whether we adopt a critical stance to that future, how we can shape education and professional practice in readiness for it, etc. What implications does all of this have for the formulation of the practical issues we address and therefore for our methodology?

The changing relationships between learning and working can first and foremost be analysed at an *institutional* level (collective actors such as organisations, and central government) and studied as such as a management issue. This involves changes both *between* and *within* institutions. But, in terms of their consequences, they can also be scrutinised at the level of *individual actors* (employers, the unemployed, apprentices and students) and provide substance for the individual challenges and

¹ In section 3 & 4 we delimit the scope of our research interests.

² Reflection and self-reflection on the subject of professional education and one's own research is an example of reflexive modernity or reflexive modernisation in contemporary social theory. Cf. Beck, Giddens & Lasch (1996), Giddens (1990), Luhmann (1992), Schinkel (2008), Schön (1983), Taylor (1991).

³ See the fascinating observations on the links between the past, present and future made by Koselleck (1989 & 2000). He draws a distinction between future presents (*zukünftige Gegenwarte*) and present futures (*gegenwärtige Zukunften*), future pasts (*zukünftige Vergangenheiten*) and past futures (*vergangene Zukunften*).

obstacles involved in a lifelong education. Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences prefers its research groups to focus on issues within an urban context. We therefore attempt, as far as possible, to see the relationship between institutions as an urban management issue. The lifelong learning careers of individuals are then seen as an issue of urban education.

1.3 Aim and key focus

The aim of this position paper is, in the first place, to define the issues in the changing relationship between learning and working, given the diversity of employees and their expertise. These can then serve as a framework for defining the potential contours of a new research programme for the DHRM research group, in the second place. We want to investigate which issues present themselves to us in professional practice (and in particular the business community) in the light of the situation outline in section 2. We will use the model of transitional labour markets developed by Schmid as an organisational framework (see section 3). On this basis, we will then present, in section 4, the issues that will form the focus of research during the period 2014-2018. The key problem this paper focuses on is: which changes in the relationships between learning and working are most relevant from a (HR)Management perspective and which reasearch topics are potentially raised by these changes?

2. OUTLINE OF THE SITUATION: THE CONTEXT OF LEARNING AND WORKING

A number of important developments have recently been taking place in the relationship between learning and working which have an impact both on professional education and the business community and professional field. First of all, these are economical, social and political developments, currently dominated by the economic crisis. Secondly, they concern the consequences of these developments for individuals (students, employees, the unemployed, the self-employed, etc.), the ways in which they might influence them and their learning needs.

2.1 Economical and social developments

In the 1980s, there were rapid and important changes in society, economics and politics (Castells, 2000) that are linked to changes in the relationship between learning and working:

- a. The emergence and impact of information and communication technology with increased differentiation in terms of consumer goods, the opening up of international markets and competition (e.g. with low-wage countries) and the instantaneous flows of financial capital. ICT has helped to accelerate trade and opened up virtual worlds (web stores, social media, etc.), creating countless new, rapidly changing jobs and professions. In many Western countries the commercial services sector has gained ground, to the detriment of the industrial sector. Knowledge is as important a factor for economic success as the classic production factors (capital, labour, raw materials, favourable geographic location). The digitisation of labour has also enabled a new and innovative way of working (*het nieuwe werken*). This has partially removed the traditional obstacles of place and time. Employees and the self-employed are the modern-day nomads, drifting between home, the café and the office, armed with their notebook and mobile. The collective working rhythm is making way (again partially) for individually chosen working rhythms.

Knowledge – in practice mostly technological knowledge – becomes outdated faster than before. This creates a necessity for people to keep learning throughout their working careers. As part of Collective Labour Agreements, or indeed separately, businesses are investing part of the payroll in staff training and education. Sometimes this involves contracts with external educational providers, such as the regular professional education funded by the state and private training institutes offering education at commercial rates, but also increasingly by means of their own corporate academies. In certain sectors, there are also professional organisations that provide in-service training, refresher courses and a professional register. Learning does not by any means require physical attendance (just think of web-lectures, online courses).

- b. Businesses have become more flexible and dynamic in order to produce competitively in rapidly changing markets. They are also more focused on the short term and on cost reduction. This has created flatter organisations (with fewer layers of management). These focus solely on their core activities and outsource support activities to third parties. In addition,

a part of the business community has taken on a more network-like structure (Castells, 2000; Zijlstra & Verkerk, 2003).⁴ Companies tend to provide training solely to core permanent staff and not to self-employed contractors (known as *zzp-ers* in Dutch) and temporary employees working on a project basis. While these people provide a safety net for the fluctuations and shocks in the goods and services markets, they are 'rewarded' for doing so by having to organise and fund their own education and training. In the case of the unemployed, the social benefits agencies no longer make substantial investments in return-to-work or reintegration programmes, i.e. in retraining their client base. In line with neoliberal Dutch government policy (Zijlstra, 2013a, 2013b), these people are deemed to be personally responsible for their re-entry into the labour market. For students in higher education, higher financial barriers have emerged if they would like to take a second degree after the first in order to increase their chances on the labour market. This is an important difference compared to the previous crisis in the 1980s, when young people were actively encouraged to continue learning for as long as possible.

- c. Since 2008 there is the context of the ongoing economic crisis, characterised by the following:
- (i) It is a *global* crisis that primarily affects the European Union and the United States, and threatens their continued existence as economic and political major powers in geopolitical terms as the (long term) focus of economic and cultural development shifts towards China, India and Brazil and to a lesser extent towards Russia and Africa. The Dutch education and labour market can expect to see the arrival of increasing numbers of workers, students and new graduates from countries hit (harder) by the crisis or from emerging countries. Examples include that of PhD students from countries such as China and India taking up vacant positions in the science faculties at Dutch universities, filling the gap left by a lack of suitable or interested Dutch candidates. It is also conceivable that highly educated young Dutch people with no opportunities on their own labour market will try their luck in other countries.
 - (ii) For many people, the economic crisis is also an *existential* crisis: for the first time since the 1980s, mass unemployment has re-emerged, affecting not only new entrants to the labour market (under the age of 25), but also older employees (over 45), leading, among other things, to a waste of talent and experience and the loss of professional knowledge and skills (professional expertise). In the Netherlands, unemployment is fluctuating at around 7%, but the average for the whole of the EU is approximately 11% (autumn 2012). In the southern EU countries, unemployment levels are even as high as 25%. This existential crisis not only affects the lower end of the labour market but is increasingly also hitting professionals whose qualifications, income and social status place them firmly in the (upper) middle-class. It is only the (cosmopolitan-minded) elites that appear to be escaping this threat to their existence. This challenges the institutions responsible for the effective operation of the labour market (employers, trade unions, national and European governments and the education system) to develop initiatives that will lead to a new social and psychological contract in which existential security and risks are rebalanced (Schmid, 2010).
- d. Most Western countries have seen an increase in cultural diversity in recent decades. This is especially the case in metropolitan areas such as Amsterdam. There has been an influx of refugees, students and labour migrants. The ongoing internationalisation of higher education has resulted in student populations that are more diverse culturally. A similar trend can be noticed in the increasingly multicultural workforce in business. This is the case for both highly educated expats and the lower educated flexible workers at the lower end of the labour market. As a result of these developments, cultural diversity and social inequality interact in complex ways. Generally speaking, there is a widening social and cultural divide in terms of education, income and chances in life. Social inequality has increased significantly (De Beer e.a., 2006). The question is the extent to which education and training arrangements – and especially those based exclusively on meritocratic principles – remain accessible or indeed whether they actually reinforce social inequality (Waslander, 2006; Collins, 1979) and therefore fail to reach *all* employees and the unemployed.

2.2 Political developments

- a. Since the 1980s, politicians inspired by neoliberalism (Thatcher, Reagan, Lubbers, Kok, Balkenende, Rutte) have systematically hived off government activities to the private sector

⁴ There is a tension here with the ongoing top-down way of controlling business processes by formats, protocols etc.

and semi-public institutions. In a range of policy areas, there has been deregulation and privatisation, with no corresponding reduction in the size of official bureaucracy (Willke, 2003; Butterwege, 2008). The most drastic development for employees has been the continuous erosion of the social security system (the collective safety net to cover such existential risks as unemployment, incapacity for work, illness and old age). This goes hand-in-hand with more rigorous sanctions for those who are socially excluded through no fault of their own.⁵ They are left to their own (individual!) devices to survive in society.

The market economy and the social and economic policy of governments and other authorities have 'naturalised' themselves as it were. The developments referred to have been presented as inevitable, thereby excluding any potential systematic criticism of the prevailing economic and social *order* (Zijlstra, 2013a). A new social and psychological contract, offering, among other things, equal opportunities for learning and training to every citizen, rests on the assumption that the spell of naturalisation cast over labour relations will be broken. Of course, the question is how that might happen (Buijs, 2012). Focusing on education – in the form of *public pedagogy* – Giroux (2008) has made some interesting suggestions in this regard, within the framework of a new cultural politics⁶

- b. Then there is the issue, generally seen as a problem, of the ageing population in most European countries. As the proportion of pensioners increases compared to the total working population, the affordability of pensions and care (used more intensively by the elderly) is coming under increasing pressure. At the same time, solidarity in society between the strong and the weaker, the younger and older generations, the (upper) middle-class and the lower classes is being eroded, as a result of processes of individualisation started in the 1960s (Bauman, 2001). In the medium term, the combination of an ageing population and the decline in younger workers relative to the general population will threaten economic growth if the working population remains stable or decreases.

In many EU member states, this has recently led to an increase in the pensionable age, which will in the Netherlands rise to 67 in a few years. For the labour market, the ageing population and the decline in the number of younger workers will mean that relatively large numbers of older people will need to continue to work as the supply of younger workers gradually decreases. Improved facilities for a working population that is becoming older will involve a rethinking of corporate training, an expansion of part-time education, an increased focus on ways in which older people learn and work (Zinsmeister, 2012), etc. A possible influx of migrant workers will also potentially call for additional education and training as well as the need to learn the Dutch language and acquire knowledge of the political and social system and cultural standards and customs.

For older employees (45+), the question will be to what extent employers are prepared to invest in their development and training. This applies particularly to people in the 60+ age category, who will still need to work for at least a further 5-7 years. At the same time, all older employees are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in work (employers consider them to be too expensive) or to return to work (employers consider them to be less productive than younger employees). Despite the rhetoric on lifelong learning, it remains to be seen (and investigated) whether employers and employees really do invest in schooling and training programs for elderly employees.

2.3 Consequences for the individual employee

The developments referred to at the institutional level have far-reaching consequences for the role of employees. The new economic and technological dynamic has resulted in multiple changes for them. Reorganisations – often in the context of cutbacks and mergers – have led to the disappearance of old positions and the emergence of new jobs, especially in larger companies and institutions. At the same time, employees are increasingly becoming self-employed, of their own choice or forced by circumstances. Companies have become more flexible and dynamic and the same approach and attitude is expected from employees, self-employed professionals and temporary workers. In a market economy, everyone is expected to be an entrepreneur and to manage themselves (Han, 2011, 40-41; Bröckling, 2007). Entrepreneurship and self-employment, it is argued, may lead to autonomy and self

⁵ According to the prevailing ideology people who are not successful have only themselves to blame.

⁶ The same is true of Nussbaum (2011, 2012), who, together with the Nobel prize-winning economist Sen, has formulated the theory of human capabilities in order to enable those who are excluded to participate in society and the economy. Cf. also Furedi (2009).

direction. However, in practice there is a permanent pressure to perform, combined with impending deadlines has increased the intensity of work since the 1980s, leading to stress, depression and burnout (Dehue, 2010; Verhaeghe, 2012).⁷ In addition, employees are increasingly subjected to continual and all-embracing (360°) feedback from their stakeholders (co-workers, customers, management) with a target to improving their performance (Bröckling, 2007, 152-282).

People who suffer depression or burnout have simply failed to manage themselves effectively (Han, 2011). They have presumably only tried to get the best from themselves, something they are repeatedly urged to do. Performance targets have become part of the HRM cycle: only the result counts, irrespective of the effort required to achieve it (the employee bears the cost of these, while the management of organisations runs off with the benefits). The late-modern employee may also have a personal development plan (PDP), in which (s)he sets targets with his or her manager concerning long-term career development and the education and training required to achieve it. As entrepreneurial employees, working to improve their empowerment and self-reliance, they remain or still think they remain attractive on the labour market, where possible until retirement age (Bröckling, 2007; Han, 2011). Proper professional expertise calls for professionals who are alert and eager to learn. The notion of learning throughout one's life or career calls for motivated employees.⁸ The HRM cycle is increasingly influenced and motivated by ideas and interventions taken from positive psychology, i.e. 'any intentional activity or method that is based on (a) the cultivation of positive subjective experiences, (b) the building of positive individual traits, (c) the building of civic virtue and positive institutions' (Meyers et al, 2012, 1).

The modern personal development plan arrangement is based on the assumption that there is a long-term employment relationship (permanent contracts), while in fact for many employees a job for life or a career with a single employer is making way for a range of different (flexible) jobs with several employers throughout their working career. This is an obvious tension in modern employment relationships. It is relevant to ask to what extent the continuity of an individual's life story (their personal identity) and life course is actually threatened if there are regular changes of jobs, careers and employers. Will this result in a number of separate and disconnected episodes or can other areas of life (one's partner, children or hobbies) perhaps offset this possible lack?

Whatever the case, people's life courses and careers have become much more varied and also less predictable (or more contingent). The standard biography (an initial phase of upbringing and learning at school, followed by a phase of work in a career and the establishment of a family, and finally a phase of rest) has made way for an (assumed) variety of chosen biographies. These can include a mixture of some sequential phases from the standard biography in alternative orders.⁹ The (increased?) diversity of careers pursued by graduates of professional education programmes is a possible implication of this, although the economic crisis (little choice on the labour market, forcing people to accept jobs for which they are overqualified) may be transforming choices into leaps driven by necessity.¹⁰

3. CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND METHODOLOGY

⁷ According to the prevailing neoliberal regime, although people are personally responsible for their own health and vitality, the monitoring (or control) of this by employers is increasing at the same time. Habermas (1981) described this trend in terms of the colonisation of the life world (*Lebenswelt*) by the economic and political systems. In this, he includes education and people's personal life environment (including their own health and vitality). See also Zinsmeister (2012).

⁸ It is also possible to question whether the rhetoric of lifelong learning is not actually self-undermining. After all, if the new knowledge and skills that I learn today are already outdated tomorrow, what is the meaning of any further training or education programmes at all? This touches on what Habermas (1981) once described as the motivation crisis or rationality crisis of the late capitalist system. This takes the form of insoluble tensions foisted on the individual and his life world.

⁹ Ultimately, however, the sequence of people's phases in life cannot really be manipulated or reversed because of their biological, psychological and social development (for example physical ageing, psychological maturity, socialisation). For more on the transition from standard to chosen biography, see Beck (1986), Giddens (1990 & 1991) and Bauman (2002). The qualification *assumed* with reference to the variety of life courses is intended as an empirical observation: for wide strata of the population (especially the lower ends of society) the standard life course has by no means made way for a chosen biography.

¹⁰ Take the increasingly common practice of 'employees 2.0', of being employed in jobs that are below their attained level of education and keeping up their original professional expertise in their own time.

3.1 Schmid's transitional labour market as an organisational principle

In the 1990s, the German economist and labour market expert Günther Schmid put forward a new model for the operation of the labour market (Schmid, 1998, 2005, 2010). This proposal was prompted by the chronic mass unemployment in the European Union (and the US). The post-war ideal of full employment no longer seems feasible and calls for a new interpretation. Changes in society and culture (shifts in public moral convictions) such as the increasing need to make one's own choices in one's working career, the entry of women in the labour market and the resulting debate about the relationship between work and care (the family) and major differences in people's life courses as well as new and different existential risks (anyone can lose their job or experience a divorce) mean that there needs to be a reassessment of the institutional arrangements that are required (cf. Van Hoof, 2007; Verkerk, 2013). Schmid's model is intended as a building block for a new social and psychological contract in which (existential) securities and (existential) risks are balanced more effectively and honestly than is currently the case. We chose his model because he aims to restore societal participation on the part of *all* citizens, thereby overcoming some of the negative consequences of the prevailing neoliberal way of thinking about the economy and society. We apply this model as an organisational framework for our research topics and questions (cf. section 4).

Schmid's point of departure is the participation of all citizens within society. This may be by means of paid employment, but may also involve (temporary) care for the family or education and training. The notion of full employment is replaced by social inclusion for all. Schmid summarises his proposals for labour market innovation with the term *transitional labour markets*. By this, he means the institutional arrangements that offer space and support for changes in employment for citizens or the combination(s) of labour market and other socially significant activities. The boundaries between the economic system (in this case the labour market, companies, trade unions) and other social systems (education, family, government and civil society) need to be more open and flexible (cf. Bauman, 2007). Within this, the new form of full employment is described in terms of (paid) jobs of on average 30 hours per week across men and women's entire working life. Perhaps paradoxically, the new concept of full employment, full social participation, provides room for transitional unemployment or periods in between jobs (AZ/MM).

The transitional labour market model is based on the following three principles. First of all, labour markets have always been subject to external shocks, forcing employees to adapt. What is new about the current (neoliberal) economic order is that changes in the market are being caused internally: in other words, they are the result of policy decisions made by businesses and by governments without any thought about their appropriateness or the unforeseen effects they may have. Secondly, labour markets are not commodity markets, in which supply and demand are automatically balanced, but (unwieldy) social institutions with only a limited capacity to adapt.¹¹ There is also an ethical lower limit for incomes policy: salaries must be fair and sufficient to meet the needs of normal everyday life. Thirdly, periods of (enforced or voluntary) unemployment can be used to carry out other types of socially useful activities, such as voluntary work, investing in one's future career or searching for a new job.

With regard to the relationships between paid employment and education and training, Schmid calls for the reintroduction of regular training by means of the apprenticeship system.¹² During this kind of training period, the employee will need to accept a lower salary.¹³ General education (presumably referring to the acquisition of generic competencies and not specific to a particular company) is paid for by government.

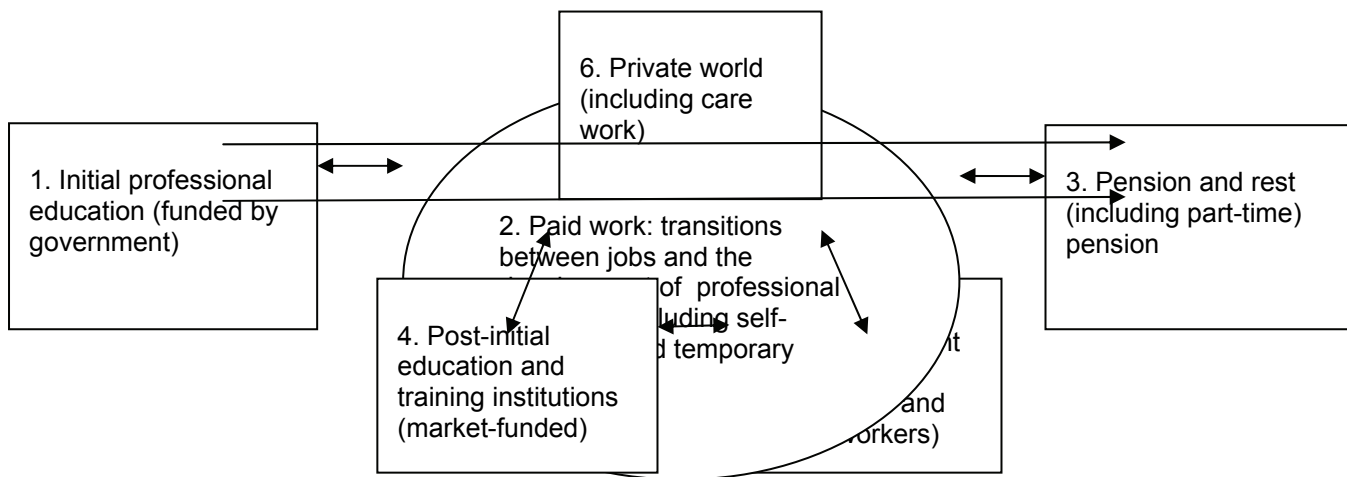
¹¹ Of course, this is based on the assumption that humans are not infinitely flexible. This is an anthropological constant that can only be ignored at the cost of self-exhaustion and a denial of the different phases of life. Sennett (2008) shows that new competencies require a lot of time to become embedded and become routine after reorganisations or changes of job.

¹² For a comparative study of a wide range of systems of learning (in professional education) and working in the OECD member states, see Nelen et al (2010)

¹³ There is, however, also a moral obligation to pay salaries according to need and not solely based on performance. Schmid's proposal also assumes that learning has less added value for society than working. Besides, he does not make any reference to the obligations of employers to contribute to the training of employees (who have been made redundant).

Schmid's conception of transitional labour markets now reflects macro-sociological developments, such as increased social differentiation, the globalisation of the economy, the individualisation of citizens/employees (also in terms of their life courses, with a variety of crises and transitions) and rationalisation (seen as an increased control over one's own life).¹⁴ New social arrangements are required in order to enable and promote the transitions between the labour market and other social systems. In other words, it calls for a new social contract. Schmid's proposal can be interpreted as a revival of the Rhineland model of a stakeholders' economy that provides an alternative to the Anglo-Saxon model of a shareholders' economy that lies at the heart of the neoliberal policies of the past decades (Albert, 1992). His model is presented below in diagram form. In the context of our theme of learning and working, our primary interest is in the transition(s) from education and training to the labour market (paid employment) and vice-versa. What other changes are taking place in both of these directions? Examples could include refresher courses/in-service training/retraining and professional development for employees, the shift from general professional educational programmes (for positions within several labour organisations and companies) to company-specific programmes (focusing strongly on the development of competences for a particular company).

Figure 1: Schmid's transitional labour market model (Schmid, 1998), revised by AZ/MM.



Explanation of the model

Based on the outline of the situation provided in section 2, we have opted to refine Schmid's model slightly (see Figure 1). We will first examine the offering of professional education as organised by government-funded institutions of initial education focusing on apprentices and students (box 1). The core of the model is the world of paid work where (permanent) employees and self-employed contractors work and learn in the workplace, where they may also look for another job (box 2). Here people's own professional expertise is permanently subject to development and renewal; above all because this is considered meaningful in itself: every professional aims to be able to carry out his or her profession as best they can, as a matter of honour (Sennett, 2008). It enables employees to remain or become attractive on the labour market or, in other words, to be able to switch from job to job and/or from employer to employer. This can relate to both horizontal and vertical mobility. The latter involves career advancement or (in the later phase) gradually stepping down the career ladder. In order to meet the demands of continuous development employees and self-employed contractors have to follow market-funded study programmes and training courses (box 4). Box 4 relates to a wide range of different kinds of commercial education, as well as the types of training that have emerged as a consequence of the increasing numbers of professions and professional groups that have to deal with protocols, codes of conduct and certification. In-service training and refresher courses have also become compulsory as a result.

¹⁴ The latter – included at the start of his paper (Schmid, 1998, 3) – is at odds with a comment made at the end when he remarks that transitional labour markets entail an increase in the complexity and contingencies within the employment relationship (33).

Periods of unemployment (box 5) are used to update or maintain professional competencies in order to gain renewed access to the labour market. In this box we have also included persons incapacitated for regular work as well as uneconomic and unpaid workers.¹⁵ Other options include participation in society in the form of voluntary work, or more broadly, in civil society. The latter point is beyond the remit of our research, which is why we did not include it in a separate box. Older employees – the category aged 55 upwards – will gradually begin to focus on their retirement (box 3). They may for example only be able to do less strenuous or less intensive work (demotion) or may start to work part-time. At the peak of life – broadly between the ages of 25 and 50 – periods of paid work can alternate with periods of care (parental leave, sabbatical year). For older employees, this will often involve caring for one or more close relatives (box 6). Of course, there are, in practice, all kinds of mixed types of (part-time) paid employment, care obligations, education and training activities and sometimes also (part-time) unemployment.

In the lectorate's (new) research programme, we intend to develop projects relating to practical issues in the relationships between paid employment (including professional expertise) and professional organisations, professional education, private training institutes (such as corporate academies), periods of unemployment and finally the process leading to the retirement phase of life. A key question will always be how the relationships between learning and working can be shaped in new arrangements (as part of a new social contract).

We can use the model to examine both the institutional level and the level of the individual employees and their life courses. As an addition to Schmid, we draw a distinction between *formal* (box 4) and *informal learning* (box 2). Formal learning takes place in institutions specialised for that purpose, such as schools and colleges for professional education and private training institutes. Informal learning concerns learning at the workplace, for example from colleagues during peer reviews or keeping abreast of professional literature independently. In Figure 1, the double arrows between box 2 and respectively box 1 and box 4 refer to formal relationships between learning and working. The contents of box 2 concern informal learning and the process of socialisation within a profession or trade. This is also the case for the double arrow between box 4 and box 5. Post-initial courses and training can provide new opportunities (e.g. traineeships). This may be both formal learning or informal learning (with colleagues in a peer-reviewed context or keeping one's professional expertise as up-to-date as possible by means of voluntary work [civil society] or starting afresh as an independent contractor). The double arrows between box 2 and boxes 1 to 5 and between box 4 and box 5 form the potential sources for our areas of research. In section 4, we provide the first formulation and details of this.

Seen from the level of individual employees, we would note that the axis of the model – represented by the two arrows from box 1 via box 2 to box 3 – symbolise the life course. The early years are devoted to initial education, the phase from around 20 to 67 is the period of working life, and the final phase is the period of retirement. This standard life course has become more varied in recent decades. As a result of macro-developments, such as individualisation, internationalisation (including migration), the decline in younger workers and the ageing population, the specific character of different generations and a society driven much more by choice (see section 2), individuals have begun to exhibit differences in a range of areas. This means that people's life courses have begun to vary much more and there is also room for people to make their own choices. In other words, the diversity of individuals has become more important.

As a consequence, one study programme may offer greater opportunities for a position on the labour market than another. One particular job or employer offers a greater chance of becoming unemployed than another job or employer. People's first job is often a significant defining factor in their further career because the opportunities for choices and networks (social contacts) may be less open at a later stage. People's life courses are dependent on the degree of (long-term) unemployment, the intensity of care activities required in their private lives and health-related setbacks or good fortune, etc. Although it is possible to categorise people according to a range of different characteristics such as their age, gender, ethnic background, level of education, profession, etc, it is still possible to identify specific types or categories of life courses.

¹⁵ Disabled workers have been declared unfit for regular jobs, uneconomic workers cost more than they bring in and unpaid workers have traineeships in companies with an attractive 'family' culture (Apple, Ikea etc.) without receiving a salary.

In some cases, a specific identity (characteristic) can gain the upper hand to such an extent that people are reduced to a single identity alone. A specific identity then becomes absolute, turning into the dominant identity ('*woekeridentiteit*') (Shadid, 1998; Taylor, 1991) and crowding out all other characteristics. This can often happen in crisis situations. When threatened with redundancy, employees are suddenly old. They are stigmatised as belonging to a specific group: a group of older employees with little chance of returning to the labour market. In some sectors, people from a non-Western immigrant background may have little or no chance of securing a job. While studying for a degree - in finances, say - they are not viewed through this lens. However, when the time comes for them to find an internship or a job in the labour market, they are suddenly reduced to a single category. They are reduced to their ethnic background alone, irrespective of their capacities and level of education. In the business world, and by extension also in the lectorate's areas of research, we will therefore distinguish between various categories of employees. When we are researching the (institutionalised) relationships between learning and working, we are particularly interested in the effects on these categories.

3.2 Research and teaching in higher professional education

Since 2001, in the Netherlands lectors (professors at the universities of applied sciences) have been appointed with the aim of transforming institutions of higher professional education into knowledge institutions, bearing the name 'Universities of Applied Sciences' (UAS).

The aim of the research supervised by these lectors is:

1. To contribute to the development of knowledge for the professions for which higher professional education prepares its students
2. Professional development of staff
3. To contribute to the improvement of teaching
4. Increased cooperation with professional organisations in the wider professional field.

If policy documents call for the setting of priorities in terms of these objectives and for a focus on knowledge development as research groups are being developed, the choice of the theme 'Learning and Working' successfully ensures that the organic cohesion of the above objectives is preserved within the lectorate DHRM. The various levels of learning and working, described in section 1, are in line with the objectives of the lectorates at the UAS. Research that focuses on improving the quality of our own teaching and study programmes relates to learning and working within education. Professional development of the teaching profession is at the core of the research carried out by the research group.

3.3 Research methods

In this section we will discuss our research methods because, in contrast to what the term University of Applied sciences might suggest, our primary aim is not applied research or the testing of existing theories in practice, but *practice-oriented* research. This means that the subjects for research come from the world of professional practice, but the results of the research can make a significant contribution to the formation of theory. The professional practice approaches the research group with a question and we work with the organisation posing the question to transform the practical question into an issue that can be effectively researched. In most cases organisations that provide an assignment for a research project also pay for it. Because the question originates from professional practice, the AUAS makes a contribution towards a reflection upon and in some cases to solutions of practical problems and, therefore, to improving professional practice. All kinds of research can contribute to improving professional practice. However, this contribution is not self-evident. Especially in the field of Management & Organisation (M&O) / HRM, solutions to everyday problems do not automatically result in improvements in practice. The researcher's critical capacities and the discussion with the professional field of practical questions and potential solutions are important competencies in which researchers in the research group must be proficient. Communicating the results, not only with the commissioning party, but also incorporating it within the curriculum and propagating it within the professional field as a whole, is part of the research group's mission.

The questions may be limited in scope and may even be suitable subjects for students to base their graduation project on. Other, more complex issues will call for more experienced researchers and a longer project period. Some questions from the world of practice require more fundamental study and

greater cooperation with academic institutions, such as research universities and institutes. Because of these complex questions, PhD research also has a place within the UAS and the research group. And this means the research group also formulates its own research questions that do not always arise from the day-to-day practice of companies and institutions. This could include a critical review of current education practices, for example, or of the bottlenecks people encounter when trying to enter the labour market, or an investigation of certain groups' inability to participate in specific professional groups, or the use of what are often rather veiled terms in professional practice, which can lead people to make wrong choices. Practical problems or issues in the field of M&O/HRM are numerous and wide-ranging. For this reason, we have sharpened the focus to the theme of *Learning and Working* in the urban environment. Dutch and international companies and organisations in major cities and the cooperation between them: *urban management*. These also the key areas of focus of Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences.

The research methods that will be used in order to find answers to the practical questions will of course depend on the specific area under research and the chosen theories. All of the methods will meet the requirements of reliability and validity set for scientific research. The research questions will emerge from the world of practice, which means that many of them will come from a specific context. As a result, it will not always be possible to guarantee that the results can be applied more generally. Frequent use will be made of the *case study method*, where the results and recommendations will often apply only to the specific context in which the research was conducted.

Researchers in the professional field are often looking for improvements to the professional field or the context in which the profession is practised. We will therefore often use the *action research method*, in which not only the issue being researched but also the implementation of the research itself will be carried out in close consultation with the world of practice. Action research is a method that intends to (1) change practice(s) and (2) generate knowledge. Both the practitioner and researcher are responsible for the practical and theoretical results of research. Action research also makes it possible to study and influence professional practices in action. Action research repeatedly passes through a number of phases: a planning phase, an observation phase and a reflection phase. The founder of this methodology, Kurt Lewin, also argues there should be a close relationship between fundamental and practice-oriented research (Lewin 1946). Apart from case studies, questionnaires, field studies, web research and other methodologies are also being used in order to improve practices in/of organisations.

Research into learning and working can be carried out in a number of different ways and at a number of different levels. Individual experiences of learning and working can also be placed in the model (Figure 1). They are an object of research. However, these experiences occur in the context of schools, companies and/or institutions. The institutional context and collaboration between institutions in the area of working and learning are therefore also objects of research within this research programme. However, learning and working not only form an *object* of research, but also a *method* of research. Both learning and working through research in the organisation ('the learning organisation') and learning through research as a form of professionalisation of the researcher are core activities of the research group, as is learning to collaborate in an interdisciplinary group of researchers.

4. CONCLUSION: CURRENT AND POTENTIAL AREAS FOR RESEARCH

Below we list a number of themes arising from the model in Figure 1. We have formulated the themes along general lines, so there is sufficient scope for (professional) practice to raise all manner of more specific questions. In addition, lecturers and students will also be able to formulate research questions that fit within the research themes. For each theme we list examples of research projects that have already been undertaken or are going to be undertaken by the research group (CAREM, 2010).

4.1 Theme 1 professional education (box 1), paid employment (box 2) and the relationship between them.

Within this theme a range of different research projects could be carried out focusing on the way in which professional education prepares students for the labour market. It does so by way of placements, for example. The research group has carried out research into the effectiveness of team placements for the participating students in senior secondary vocational education (MBO) and higher

professional education (HBO), and the influence of these on their choice of subsequent education. Research into the way in which lecturers prepare students for participation in a multicultural society has been a spearhead of the lectorate for some years now (Meerman et al. 2009). However, the demands made on professional education by professional practice also fall within this theme. Currently a PhD project is being carried out that focuses on language competencies in the financial professions and the possible implications for language education. This kind of research makes the institutional cooperation between professional practice and professional education into the object of study.

The transition from education to the labour market is a frequently recurring topic of research. The lectorate has already produced publications about the career trajectories of highly educated young people (Ballafkih et al., 2008). Our emphasis is on diversity in that transition and we are interested in finding out how specific groups fare in the transition from initial education to the labour market. Currently, for example, a group of HRM alumni are being followed over a longer period as they take their first steps on the labour market. We know that it is more difficult for students with a non-western immigrant background to find placements in certain financial professions and want to find out if this is still the case after they have graduated. Drop-outs, i.e. students who fail to graduate, must also make their own way in order to acquire a place for themselves within or outside companies and institutions. At the institutional level we have recently completed a study looking at a more intensive form of cooperation between institutions of preparatory secondary vocational education (VMBO) and the business sector in the northern section of North Holland (Petrusa et al., 2011).

4.2 Theme 2: Private training institutes (box 4), paid employment (box 2) and the relationship between them.

This theme covers research into the formal and informal demands that the labour market places on the professionalisation of specific professional groups. This relates to the fact that certain groups must meet requirements of permanent education in order to be allowed to continue to carry out their profession. We focus on how companies and institutions, but also independent professionals, react to the demands of lifelong learning and what consequences it has for the way people carry out their professions.

The programme also provides room for drawing up an overview of external training trajectories in the framework of Human Resources Development. In that framework we carried out research into the professionalisation of lecturers in an economic domain (Zijlstra et al., 2011a, 2011b). In the coming period the lectorate wants (in cooperation with the lector responsible for the financial degree programmes) to focus on the development and professionalisation of financial professionals such as accountants and controllers.

4.3 Theme 3: Formal and informal learning in the workplace (box 2)

For as long as the HRM research group has existed, companies and institutions in the Amsterdam region have asked a wide variety of questions on this subject. These relate to formal learning trajectories for specific groups, such as management trajectories (Glastra & Meerman, 2012), trajectories for professional groups such as HRM officers, financial professions, teachers and independent professionals. What effects do such training activities have on the employability and career trajectory of employees? And also: how do diverse categories of employees evaluate the range of training courses on offer? These are examples of research questions.

From a more structural point of view we are interested in the way(s) in which organisations and sectors organise learning and working in internal HRD trajectories, in in-company training programmes or even in company academies. How are these organised? In most sectors provisions related to schooling and professionalisation are described in the collective labour agreements. The topic has an important place in modern-day labour relations. However, the way in which such provisions are implemented, which is a responsibility of HRM, is sometimes lacking. We want to explore the differences between sectors and companies and the participation of employees.

Informal learning in the workplace also has a place within this theme. Learning to innovate bottom-up (Lopes de Leguna et al., 2013), 'the learning organisation', knowledge sharing in teams, and diversity in teams are some of the key catchwords that are currently doing the rounds in organisations. We also ask ourselves which informal networks help self-employed professionals and employees with temporary contracts to operate on the labour market for the course of their professional lives.

4.4 Theme 4: Unemployment (box 5), training institutes (box 4), paid employment (box 2) and the relationship between them.

During an economic recession and rising unemployment figures we cannot avoid paying attention to unemployment as a possible phase in the working life of employees. We question the need to maintain professional employability when this is entirely dependant on the commercial training market, and we ask ourselves how people equip themselves in order to get back onto the labour market, in what way they (are going to) relate to paid employment. What requirements does professional practice demand from unemployed young people and older people? Does acquiring knowledge and skills have an effect on their employability? These are just a few of the questions we ask at the level of the unemployed person. Questions focusing on the institutional context relate to effective cooperation between the institutions in boxes 2, 4 and 5 and the influence it has on the degree to which unemployment is just a temporary phase (*in between jobs*) in people's working lives.

4.5 Theme 5: Transitions between paid employment (box 2) and retirement (box 3)

Research into the employability of older employees across the whole spectrum has been a topic pursued by the research group from the beginning (Zinmeister, 2012). This relates to the evaluation of the employment of older (experienced) employees in different sectors, and the possibilities and opportunities they are given or not given. Currently we have not yet developed expertise on combining work and care in the private sphere (box 6). In principle research on this topic is also possible within the lectorate, but there are sufficient research groups elsewhere that focus on that particular theme.

We hope to have convinced you of the commitment, themes and approach of the HRM research group. Based on an analysis of the economic, social and political context, as well as its influence on individual employees, and using an adapted version of Schmid's model of the transitional labour market, we have put together a sample of ongoing and future research themes and questions.

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