



# The career life of academics: Boundaried or boundaryless?

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## ABSTRACT

The existence of tenure exerts opposing forces on the careers of academics. Ideally, tenure ensures academic freedom and individual autonomy. Yet tenure also regiments the lives of those on the tenure-track and often creates inertia for individuals once receiving it. Consequently, academic careers can be characterized as either boundaried or boundaryless, depending on the individual. This article develops a typology of four academic career types that identifies what differentiates tenure-track individuals who perceive themselves as having either boundaried or boundaryless careers in academia. The typology was developed using interview data from business school faculty, and then confirmed using qualitative data including faculty from multiple academic departments and disciplines. Finally, the typology makes its contribution to career theory by considering the additional impact of career stage theory for academics.

## KEYWORDS

academic careers ■ boundaryless careers ■ faculty careers ■ protean careers

## Introduction

The ivory tower is a term often used to characterize the life of academics. While typically used as a pejorative, it may also be appropriately descriptive, but not necessarily for the reasons that our critics employ it. Certainly, academic careers are fairly unique. For example, academics are bound by a

narrow set of rules that must be met in order to receive tenure. Traditionally, academics have worked hard to receive tenure because it generally provides increased intellectual autonomy and job security. So are academics Rapunzels trapped in the ivory tower, or are they wizards who have created a separate space to do their own work? To use a more current set of terms from the literature, are academic careers boundaried or boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996)? Utilizing data from two qualitative studies, we show that such either/or propositions do not capture the richness of career experiences lived by academics.

The research question that initiated this study focused on how academic careers related to the concepts of boundaryless careers. We utilized a grounded theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) towards the interviews. This tradition within qualitative research allows for ideas and relationships to emerge from the data rather than having pre-existing conceptualizations influencing the analysis. As a result of this approach to the data analysis, we came to some important and surprising outcomes that influenced the development of a pre-tenure typology of academic careers. First, academic careers are not wholly boundaried or boundaryless. On each of the campuses interviewed, and across all disciplines, there were some faculty who experienced their career in a boundaried fashion and others who experienced boundaryless careers. Second, consistent across the boundaried/boundaryless continuum, there appeared systematic differences between people who were experiencing their tenure-track position as either a primary or secondary career. Although there were differences across all interviews, there were also distinct differences between boundaried and boundaryless faculty. Using this insight from the data, we developed a  $2 \times 2$  typology that integrates boundaryless careers with career stage theory (Baldwin, 1990).

The approach taken to analyze the data differed from traditional grounded theory in two ways. First, the study was initiated to better understand boundaryless career theory as it relates to academic careers. While no *a priori* hypotheses were developed, a decision was made to interpret the data through an existing conceptual framework, boundaryless careers. However, as no analysis is ever completely value free (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), this is not problematic. Second, the original data for this study came from tenure-track faculty at three business schools, and it is from this sample that the idea for and composition of the typology were developed. Although the findings from this original sample are compelling, we sought to verify the applicability of the typology by conducting a confirmatory analysis utilizing a second set of interviews. This second set of interviews increased both the number and diversity of faculty, including individuals from multiple

academic disciplines. These interviews were examined to determine the generalizability of the typology developed from the original sample. The results of this second analysis support both the integration of boundaryless and career-stage theories and the characterizations developed as part of the typology.

### **Boundaried versus boundaryless careers**

In discussing boundaryless careers, we have chosen to take an experiential or subjective perspective rather than a more traditional structural or objective explanation of careers (Gunz et al., 2000). The nature of academic careers is such that if one relied upon strictly structural definitions, almost all tenured and tenure-track faculty could be categorized as boundaried (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994). The institution of tenure focuses the early career of academics on the needs and requirements of their university, whereas the job security available to post-tenure faculty potentially reduces the desirability of job mobility. However, how individuals experience, and respond to, the pressures of tenure will give some indication as to whether they are experiencing their careers as boundaried or boundaryless. Those who accept the 'publish or perish' paradigm and respond as being dedicated workaholics typically have relatively boundaryless careers. Conversely, those who feel overworked and overextended by all the demands of the tenure process experience their careers as more typically boundaried (Eby et al., 2003; Peiperl & Jones, 2001).

The example of how people respond to tenure demonstrates Bird's (1994) point that objectively similar individuals can experience very different careers. He differentiated career experiences by focusing on knowledge acquisition, and identified three key factors of boundaryless careers: structure, interaction, and autonomy (Bird, 1994, 1996). Given the traditional nature of academic careers, discussed earlier, it would seem acceptable to de-emphasize the structural factor. Similarly, there is little variance in autonomy given the professional norms of academic freedom that most faculty enjoy, so this factor may also be discounted. This makes interaction the crucial determinant of whether or not a professor could be classified as having a boundaried or boundaryless career. The main characteristic of this factor is whether a person behaves as a local or a cosmopolitan (Gouldner, 1957). In Gouldner's view, those faculty who develop their primary identification and relationships within their university would be classified as locals with primarily boundaried careers. Conversely, those professors whose primary identification is with their academic discipline and who build

relationships mainly outside of their institution would be classified as cosmopolitans with primarily boundaryless careers. This perspective is consistent with the distinction that Peiperl et al. (2000) make between those individuals who have 'individual-centered' rather than 'organization-centered' careers. This is particularly pronounced in academe where faculty have a dual commitment to their institution and their discipline.

By examining this commitment, one gains insight into the nature and scope of a person's 'know-why' competency (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996). Those who are bounded can be viewed as employer dependent, and those who are boundaryless can be viewed as independent (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994, 1996). Depending on the orientation of the individual he or she will either develop skills that focus on success at their current university or college, or on external marketability (Eby et al., 2003). The thread that ties an individual's career success and experiences together over time is the ability to build skills and continue learning and adapting across experiences either within an organization or within a number of organizations (Bird, 1994, 1996; Eby et al., 2003).

These perspectives on boundaryless careers are consistent with similar categorizations of careers, specifically protean careers (Hall, 1997; Hall & Associates, 1996). A key element of protean careers, to be considered here, is the role of the organization in career development. This concept is built on the belief that individuals, not organizations, are responsible for managing their own careers. A protean career is based on a broad context consisting of personal needs in addition to professional interests, and it is driven primarily by an individual's interests rather than by the interests of any one organization (Hall, 1996). Integrating this perspective into the current discussion, those professors with a more protean or boundaryless orientation may feel less constrained by a university's rigid tenure requirements than those faculty with a traditional or bounded career outlook, as the latter are considerably more dependent on their position with the university or college.

Although a concern with tenure and the focus of identification/relationships are important factors that categorize bounded and boundaryless academics, these are not the only characteristics that differentiate them. Table 1 presents a full listing of all the criteria that were used in this study to distinguish between bounded and boundaryless faculty members. As shown in Table 1, all the criteria are subjective in nature. These factors are consistent with boundaryless, and related protean, theories of careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Hall & Associates, 1996).

**Table 1** Criteria for defining boundaried versus boundaryless careers

<i>Boundaried</i>	<i>Boundaryless</i>
Identity derived from employer	Identity not derived from any one employer (possibly from self and/or profession)
Views career as one-organization model	Views career as series of steps (multiple organizations)
Looks to employer to manage career	Manages own career
Does not demonstrate skill in learning to learn or self-awareness	Possesses/values skill of learning to learn and self-awareness
Loyal to employer	Not loyal to any one employer
Risk-averse	Willing to take risks
Earning money is a high priority	Fulfillment and enjoyment are primary career choice drivers
Does not perceive self as mobile	Perceives self as mobile
Very concerned about succeeding with current employer	Not overly concerned about succeeding with current employer

Adapted from Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Hall and Associates (1996).

### Faculty career stages

Traditionally, academics were perceived to experience their careers through a sequential age-based theory of stages (Baldwin & Blackburn, 1981; Newton, 1983) similar to other professionals (e.g. Dalton et al., 1977). More recently, scholars have argued that faculty careers develop differently from other occupations because of the multidimensional and complex nature of academic life (Cytrynbaum & Crites, 1989). For example, academics seemingly skip the exploration stage of careers, starting in their first position at the establishment phase, unless one were to consider graduate school as a formal part of one's career. In addition, many faculty come to academia after a professional career in a related field. Therefore, a broader theory of faculty careers was needed (Baldwin, 1990; Clark, 1986; Cytrynbaum et al., 1982; Schuster & Wheeler, 1990).

Cytrynbaum et al. (1982) provide one possible expansion by postulating the need to take a life-span approach to define the unique challenges that faced academic faculty. Similarly, Schuster and Wheeler (1990) advocated the development of a more flexible, broadly based career. Revising earlier work,

Baldwin (1990) described the faculty career as a series of stages through which an individual progressed over time. This research emphasized the need to consider faculty careers as an evolving process, one in which faculty experienced different developmental needs at various stages of their careers.

Mirvis and Hall (1996) offer a similar, but alternative, way of conceptualizing careers that integrates career stage theory with protean and boundaryless theories of careers. This perspective recognizes that the flexibility and evolving developmental needs of faculty represent common conceptual space with boundaryless career theory, especially when thinking of boundaryless careers in contextual or subjective terms (Bird, 1994; Gunz et al., 2000). Rather than constraining a person's career to a single-series of linear phases (e.g. establishment or maintenance), individuals have the opportunity to reflect and reinvent themselves by, in essence, restarting their career at any point in their career (Mirvis & Hall, 1996; Tosti, 2005).

### **Typology of tenure-track faculty careers**

This article takes a more applied approach to the ideas presented by Mirvis and Hall (1996) by adapting them to faculty careers. Specifically, it differentiates between faculty who are in their first academic position (initial) and those who are no longer at their original placement (subsequent), but who are still on the tenure track. This article further builds on early work by examining such a framework with actual data collected from research interviews. The use of data is an important contribution to the literature as research on boundaryless careers has at times been faulted for being overly theoretical and lacking in empirical evidence (Eby et al., 2003).

With support from the careers literature and the research interviews, we were able to create a model for understanding pre-tenure faculty careers. While tenure is central to the lives of most academics, how it impacts one's experiences differs as a function of whether one is in possession of it. This distinction is probably best highlighted by the phrase 'publish or perish', which is often used to describe the careers of those on the tenure track, but is not heard in conjunction with tenured faculty. Research has also shown that the career strategies and mobility of faculty differ as a function of tenure (Schwab, 1991). Given such differences, it seems probable that faculty will experience their careers differently as a function of having tenure. As such, a model encompassing all faculty regarding boundaryless careers would overemphasize the role of tenure. In order to keep the focus on the differences between bounded and boundaryless faculty we thought it prudent

to look at only one category of faculty. Because of these demands, it was determined to focus on tenure-track faculty.

Even with a focus on only tenure-track faculty, the article develops important ideas on how to conceptualize academic and boundaryless careers. Specifically, the article develops a  $2 \times 2$  typology that contrasts faculty in their initial and subsequent academic positions and crosses this with whether they experience their careers as boundaried or boundaryless. The four types of faculty that result from this typology are presented in Table 2. As shown, each cell is identified by name: Probationer (initial/boundaried), Maverick (initial/boundaryless), Conservationist (subsequent/boundaried), and Connector (subsequent/boundaryless). We believe that this integration provides a more meaningful and accessible model of faculty careers than earlier task-based typologies (Baker & Zey-Ferrell, 1984), and is more consistent with a subjective perspective of careers.

## Methods

### Sample

The data used to develop the typology came from 21 in-depth structured interviews with tenure-track business professors. Confirmatory data were obtained from qualitative interviews with an additional 13 tenure-track faculty from a fourth university and representing a broad range of disciplines. The participants in the initial round of interviews were members of the faculty at one of three different universities. The environment for faculty at two of the universities is commonly referred to as ‘research-focused’, while ‘teaching-focused’ is an appropriate descriptor for the third. Demographically, the sample was both diverse and representative of faculty composition of the schools.<sup>1</sup>

An in-depth, one-on-one interview, approximately one hour in length, was conducted with each participant from the first sample. A structured

**Table 2** Typology of tenure-track faculty careers

	<i>Career style</i>	
	<i>Boundaried</i>	<i>Boundaryless</i>
<b>Academic position</b>		
Initial	Probationer	Maverick
Subsequent	Conservationist	Connector

interview protocol was used for all interviews (Table 3), with follow-up questions tailored to the interviewee responses. Each interview was tape-recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed.

To improve the generalizability of the original sample, we utilized a second set of interviews to confirm the findings that were used to develop the typology. This second sample also has some advantages over the first, which makes it useful for confirmatory purposes and increases the generalizability of this study. One key difference is that although the professors all came from the same university, they came from multiple academic fields and departments across the campus. Of the 13 faculty, they belonged to the broadly defined disciplines of Arts & Humanities (2), Social Sciences (3), Physical Sciences (3), and Life Sciences (5).

A second characteristic of this sample represents both an important strength and possible limitation. Specifically, the data used to confirm the typology were collected as part of another research study that focused on successful faculty. Although many of the interviewees' responses covered similar conceptual ground with those in the original sample, it must be noted that they were not asked the same protocol of questions. Having said that, the use of a sample of faculty already identified as being successful is extremely useful to confirm the current typology. A particularly easy criticism to levy at the typology would be to assert that the key difference between boundaryed and boundaryless faculty is one of success, however, if one can find this difference in career experience within a subset of successful faculty then this represents a powerful confirmation of the typology.

**Table 3** List of core structured interview questions

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1. Tell me about yourself. What is your background? How did you enter this profession? What attracted you to the profession?
  2. How has your career evolved? What are some of the decisions you've made that have led you to this point in your career?
  3. Describe your present position. What activities are you currently involved in? What are some of the aspects you most enjoy about your career? What are some of the aspects of your career you find the most challenging?
  4. What are some of the personal and professional career challenges you are presently facing? What are you trying to accomplish? What makes it easy or difficult to do that?
  5. Are there any (other) career issues facing you now?
  6. Is there anything else you want to say? Anything we talked about you'd like to go back to?
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### Analysis and classification

In the analysis phase, each respondent was assigned to one of four academic career types that were derived from career theory. The first division involved separating faculty in their initial academic position from those in a subsequent position. If the respondent was currently in their first academic position they were assigned to the initial stage cells. An individual was assigned to the subsequent stage cells if he or she had held one or more academic positions prior to their appointment. This operationalization is consistent with the integration of career stage with boundaryless and protean theories by Mirvis and Hall (1996). We did not consider prior non-academic experience when determining placement. The main reason for this is that much of the participants' previous experience was in the corporate world and Peiperl and Baruch (1997) found that managers who left large corporations did so seeking new careers with distinct goals and motivations.

As for the distinction between boundaried and boundaryless careers, the criteria for determining how an individual experienced his or her career are presented in Table 1. Again, these distinguishing factors are based on existing theoretical research on boundaryless careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; Briscoe & Hall, in press; Hall & Associates, 1996). Each interview was read and then reviewed to determine how many times a respondent gave information that appeared to be in the boundaried and boundaryless categories (using characteristics depicted in Table 1). Individuals were assigned to a category based on the primacy of an orientation. Assignments were cross-checked by the researchers to eliminate interpretation errors.

After both classification processes were completed, the sample was found to be composed of 19 percent Conservationists, 33 percent Connectors, 29 percent Probationers, and 19 percent Mavericks. This allowed the researchers to conduct the final phase of the analysis. The interviews were grouped by career type for purposes of the content analysis. This analysis focused on commonalities among the interviewees and factors that differentiated them from the other career types. These factors emerged from the transcripts as part of the grounded-theory approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researchers allowed the factors that distinguished the individual career types and the characteristics of those common within each to emerge from the transcripts, rather than using a pre-existing conceptual frame. This approach generated five distinct factors that distinguish faculty members adhering to each of the four career types. These factors include: Role/Identity, Motivation Factors, Tenure Concerns, Other Concerns, and Career Management. These factors are used to structure and facilitate our results.

## Results

After carefully analyzing the individual transcripts and then referring to relevant career theory we developed the typology first presented in Table 2. Having explained the rationale for the typology, this section explores and describes what it means for an individual to identify with one of the four distinct career types: Probationer, Maverick, Conservationist, and Connector. This presentation of the results includes two main sections. We first provide two tables that give both comparative and summative information for each of the four types. In Table 4, we summarize the interviews for the four types along five dimensions: Identity, Motivation, Tenure Concerns, Other Concerns, and Career Management. Table 5 includes representative quotes from the interviews so that one can gain a deeper understanding of each type. Following the tables, we include richer descriptions of each type so that the reader can gain an understanding of how the five key factors, used in Tables 4 and 5, relate to each other and more fully define these individuals. As a way of introduction, each of these descriptions starts from a quote contained in Table 5. It is telling that the most representative quote for each type comes from a different factor. Specifically, the quote for Conservationists is a reflection of their motivation; for Connectors the quote shows their lack of concern with tenure; for Probationers it is their identity as faculty; and for Mavericks it is the cavalier way in which they express their views on career management. Thus, these single quotes go a long way toward detailing the differences between the types of careers that tenure-track faculty experience.

### Probationer

I like teaching. I enjoy the research but have little time for it . . . I give more priority to my professional life because I am on the tenure-track and work about 80 hours a week.

Probationers are tenure-track faculty who are in their initial academic positions and manage their career in ways that can be described as boundaried. Their primary identity is derived from the institution in which they are employed rather than their discipline. They see themselves as teachers and researchers and have little interest in or time available for any other activities. Most Probationers are drawn to academe because they had a strong desire to move into a structured environment that still offered intellectual challenge and provided a reasonable level of economic comfort. However, they are also among the youngest and least settled members of the sample

**Table 4** Distinguishing profiles of tenure-track faculty career types

	<i>Probationer</i>	<i>Maverick</i>	<i>Conservationist</i>	<i>Connector</i>
Identity	Traditional teacher/researcher	Entrepreneurial	Narrow definition	Multi-faceted
	Focus on institution not discipline	Personal expertise	Lifetime teacher/researcher	Focus on discipline not institution
Motivation	Intellectual challenge	Enjoy the learning process	Lifestyle	Career autonomy
	Preference for structured environment	Variety of roles/opportunities available to them		Mentor/teach
Tenure concerns	Unsure of system	Not concerned with system	Know rules	Issue of fit not ability
	Unsure of focus/ability	Focus on personal interests and expertise	Concerned about personal ability to achieve	Back-up plans
				Change agent in institution
Other concerns	Basic teaching skills	Time-management due to number of activities	Unmet lifestyle expectations	None unable to handle
	Personal issues		Pressures of grade expectations	
Career management	Rely primarily on employer	Personally manage career	Responsibility of employer	Personally manage career through maximizing networks
		Focus on developing connections in discipline		

**Table 5** Summary of representative statements

	Probationer	Maverick	Conservationist	Connector
Identity	<i>I like teaching. I enjoy the research but have little time for it. . . . I give more priority to my professional life because I am on the tenure-track and work about 80 hours a week</i>	<i>I tend to do different things and move on to different projects</i>	<i>I came here just wanting to do my research and do my teaching . . . I'm happier not being involved in other things</i>	<i>(I was) working originally in one type of work . . . over time I was drawn further into two other areas so I'm really here as a member of three departments</i>
Motivation	<i>No one defines the number of articles needed and the quality of articles needed (I'd like more structure)</i>	<i>Give me all the autonomy in the world and I'll perform, I'll contribute</i>	<i>I thought that it was the perfect lifestyle where one gets to . . . live a comfortable life, and publish once in a . . . but that clearly isn't the way here</i>	<i>I was offered a visiting appointment at a university in another country and I thought 'oh what the heck, I'll go off and do this, it sounds like a neat adventure'</i>
Tenure concern	<i>Well, you feel pressure to publish. I mean, as soon as the dissertation was done it's like you can't celebrate too long because you know that you're already behind</i>	<i>. . . there is a personal issue whether or not you really think you have a tenure chance here. That wasn't a high priority (for me) . . . but that isn't my objective, the objective is to go and do research and then if I don't get tenure, fine, . . . I'll go elsewhere</i>	<i>We have a small group here . . . I might find myself being reviewed by people who are not familiar with the things I do</i>	<i>Now the real question is 'does it (what I want to do) fit into the organization that I'm in?' If not, then we go find an organization that it does fit in</i>
Other concerns	<i>The hassles that go along with teaching in the sense, dealing with students and students being upset about grades. So there is the component of that I can see the seeds where in a couple of years I'm probably going to feel a lot more tired of teaching than I do</i>	<i>I don't find it (being on the tenure track) particularly stressful here</i>	<i>I generally give lower grades than any of the other tenure-track faculty in the college. So I get lower ratings. I want higher ratings without giving higher grades</i>	<i>(I'm) disciplined enough that I can divide up my time between my family commitment and my (academic work). I set my goals and (am) fortunate enough (to be able to) achieve them</i>
Career management	<i>Nobody has really told me right from the beginning, clearly this is what you have to do</i>	<i>. . . you have to keep your vita in shape and be ready to move when the time comes and if you do that, you'll be a happy guy</i>	<i>I have my doubts about the system. But I can't suggest anything better. It's upsetting because I know it (tenure) is going to come down to numbers and . . . to writing</i>	<i>I have a network of relationships that I've developed over the years and no matter where I'm at, that network is pretty much still there. It's a network between me and those people as opposed to the University and those people</i>

and this had important implications in terms of how they experienced their careers.

Probationers viewed their role in academe very traditionally, keenly aware of the many constraints under which they operate, and highly concerned about the prospect of not receiving tenure from their current employer. This concern originated from a belief they lack the information necessary to make the right decisions about how and where to invest their time and resources. They were also concerned about the lack of information (or about changing information) regarding the criteria on which they would be evaluated. Further, Probationers were very concerned they were not receiving appropriate feedback and guidance, and found it difficult to connect professionally with more senior colleagues. They viewed their institutions hierarchically and thought it inappropriate to initiate career conversations with more senior faculty.

Despite these concerns, they expressed little interest in positioning themselves for employment elsewhere. Rather, they took a short-term view of their current career situation and focused almost exclusively on what they perceived to be the requirements for advancement at their current institution. Because of Probationers' lack of teaching experience prior to assuming their current position, mastering the skill of teaching was a time-consuming, demanding, and central activity in their professional lives. A related concern was the extent to which service activities decreased the amount of time available for either research or teaching. Probationers indicated that they were placed continually in situations where competing time commitments prevented them from making progress toward their longer term professional objectives. This resulted in Probationers expressing a generally low degree of self-confidence and self-awareness in regard to academic success. Consequently, Probationers were generally risk-averse, restricting their activities to those they thought were absolutely essential.

Although Probationers hoped they would receive tenure, they did not concentrate on learning how to manage their careers strategically to ensure they were headed in the right direction. Probationers viewed others as wholly responsible for their ability to receive tenure. They sought counsel from only a few individuals, and were not networked sufficiently either internally or externally to receive appropriate feedback and guidance. Probationers anticipated that eventually their employer would provide clear guidelines about promotability. They did not actively seek out this information independently.

### Maverick

... you have to keep your vita in shape and be ready to move when the time comes and if you do that, you'll be a happy guy.

Mavericks are tenure-track faculty who are in their initial academic position and manage their careers in ways that can be characterized as boundaryless. They are independent and seemingly unconstrained by the structural limitations built into the tenure-track system, interpreting their role in academe very broadly (e.g. they were often engaged in consulting and other external activities). They see themselves as independent contractors or entrepreneurs whose expertise and experience are their primary sources of professional identity. Their primary loyalty is to their discipline, for example, collaborating with colleagues, publishing independently or with co-authors, attending and presenting at professional conferences, not to their employer. Mavericks express little to no concern about their prospects for obtaining tenure. Instead, they rely on the fact that their expertise, if not valued by their current employer, will always be valued by the job market.

Mavericks were motivated to join academe for several reasons. Mavericks were drawn to academe by the diversity of opportunity and variety of roles available to them. They also valued the chance to be innovative in their teaching, research and other activities (e.g. consulting, executive education), seeing these as opportunities to enhance the value of students' and colleagues' understanding of important issues. Because of their inclination to be involved in multiple roles and activities, time management was an important concern for these professors. This was of particular importance because the opportunity to be in control of their own career focus and mobility was one of the main attractions of academe for them.

Although acknowledging that the tenure process is lengthy and ambiguous, Mavericks were very self-contained and were not concerned about lack of feedback or information from their institution. Mavericks made conscious decisions to focus on the professional activities in which they were the most interested, regardless of whether their choices would result in receiving tenure. They were more focused on their own development than on engaging in activities that would be deemed as appropriate by others. Mavericks were not concerned about their work being supported by their colleagues. They understood the expectations their institution had of them and assumed responsibility for either meeting these objectives or moving elsewhere.

Mavericks also made a conscious effort to develop contacts that could be helpful to them both within and outside their current institution.

Mavericks were strategic in considering both the short- and long-term effect on their career of participating in certain activities. Mavericks were focused on learning what they needed to know to do well in the profession overall, not to simply succeed in their current environment. They did not hold their employer responsible for providing this information although they welcomed it when it was made available. Mavericks took charge of obtaining accurate information when it was necessary for and meaningful to them. Although they devoted the time and energy necessary to progress in their career at their current institution, they were well aware that tenure was not a guarantee, and envisioned several academic as well as non-academic career alternatives for themselves if tenure was not granted by their current employer.

### Conservationist

I thought that it was the perfect lifestyle where one gets to . . . live a comfortable life, and publish once in a while . . . but that clearly isn't the way here.

Conservationists are bounded faculty who have moved on from their original position after graduate school. Conservationists have a very strong, albeit narrow, definition of what constitutes life in academe. As the name implies they are keenly interested in maintaining this image/life for themselves and are greatly concerned with anything that threatens this stability. They see themselves as teachers and researchers for life, preferably with their current employer. In addition to the intellectual attraction of academe, Conservationists are also drawn to the career by the opportunity to 'lead a comfortable life,' and the perceived structured environment offered by academe. Unfortunately, the reality of long hours and a lack of financial resources contribute to a perception by Conservationists that the 'comfortable life', which they anticipated may elude them.

Although hard-working, devoting the time they thought necessary to improve their teaching and pursue their research, Conservationists reported a perceived lack of support, both financial and collegial. They also demonstrated little experience in soliciting feedback from their colleagues, internally or externally. This added to their lack of knowledge about the expectations their institution had of them. As a result, many did not have well-developed networks of colleagues, either within their institutions or externally within the profession.

Similarly, Conservationists were keenly concerned about their prospects for obtaining tenure. They either knew the 'rules' needed to

succeed in their environment and were concerned they would not be able to meet their department's expectations, or did not understand the rules and were concerned they and/or their research would not be acceptable for promotion. Conservationists did not express willingness to learn about or adopt strategies that could be employed to improve their grasp of the tenure system or to achieve clarity about the institution's expectations of them.

Conservationists did not perceive themselves as being 'in charge' of their careers. They viewed their promotability (e.g. ability to obtain tenure) as a function of department/institution prerogative and judgment. They viewed their superiors (e.g. department chair, hiring committee and/or tenured colleagues) as responsible for providing them with the information and guidance needed to succeed at their institution. Conservationists held their employer responsible for providing them with the resources necessary for promotion (e.g. time, funding), and did not display initiative in leading this effort or in participating with their employer in this effort. Furthermore, they expressed little or no interest in learning to learn or in strengthening and using their self-awareness in generating alternative career strategies, basically keeping 'all of their eggs in one basket.'

### Connector

Now the real question is 'does it (what I want to do) fit into the organization that I'm in?' If not, then we go find an organization that it does fit in.

Connectors are boundaryless faculty who have moved on from their original position after graduate school. They perceive their roles as going beyond the traditional boundaries of teacher and researcher. Connectors view themselves as consultants, writers, trainers, and freelancers. They are motivated by the opportunity to be innovative and create new knowledge. To them, academe provides the ability to influence others including students, colleagues and clients.

The primary professional identity and loyalty of the Connector is to the profession and not the institution in which they are employed. Connectors, although confident about their ability to achieve tenure, have well-developed plans for alternative opportunities if tenure is not granted by their current employer. They have extremely well-developed networks of associates within and outside their current institution. This provides them with a base of support for their work and also with a professional support system should feedback or information be needed.

Connectors generally understood their departments' and institutions'



rules and believed they could serve as 'change agents' when necessary to advocate for their interests within their institution. They were comfortable with the ambiguity inherent in their institutions' guidelines and policies. They did not report concerns about their teaching skills or about their student evaluations. They recognized that other faculty held these concerns, but Connectors believed they 'fit' with the culture of their current institution and this was not an issue for them. They viewed the prospect of not receiving tenure as a sign of lack of fit, not of personal failure. Consequently, the process of obtaining tenure was not as much a source of anxiety for them, as it was for the Probationers or Conservationists in this study.

Finally, Connectors viewed themselves as completely in charge of their careers. They did not have structured, well-defined career plans, but were open to a variety of alternatives should they arise. They had a strong self-identity and made career decisions that allowed them to 'follow their own path,' satisfying internal needs rather than satisfying society's or their profession's external expectations. Connectors highly valued learning, their own as well as that of others, and devoted attention to learning whenever required for career advancement. They were highly confident and self-aware and enjoyed seeking out opportunities that played to their strengths. Connectors had a high-risk orientation. Several had given up tenure elsewhere to pursue tenure with their current employer. All were open to a variety of academic and non-academic career opportunities should they not receive tenure, and could see themselves being successful in a variety of career environments outside their current employer.

### **Confirmatory sample**

Using the same method of classifying interview transcripts that was utilized with the initial sample, we were able to recreate the four cells of the typology that has just been discussed. Table 6 provides sample data from this second data analysis. As the typology had already been fully constructed with the first model, Table 6 simply contains representative quotes that demonstrate the consistency in how each of the four career faculty types experiences their careers. Comparing the quotes in Tables 5 and 6 with the criteria in Table 4 and the quotes and descriptions in the text, there appears to be a good deal of consistency between the samples. The second set of faculty interviews provides substantiation and confirmation of the typology developed and discussed in this article.

Keeping in mind that this second sample had faculty representing multiple departments and disciplines, there did not appear to be any systematic differences. Science professors were just as likely to have boundaried

**Table 6** Confirmatory quotes of tenure-track faculty career types

		Career style	
		Boundaried	Boundaryless
<b>Academic position</b>			
Initial	<b>Probationer</b>		<b>Maverick</b>
	<i>My biggest tasks and responsibilities are teaching and research. Research is the paramount thing here. (Identity)</i>		<i>I am the only person at this university who does the kind of research I do . . . I came away thinking 'oh this is not a big deal, I can overcome this.' (Tenure concerns)</i>
	<i>Need to have an understanding of what the standards and expectations the university has for their faculty especially junior faculty going through the process. (Tenure concerns)</i>		<i>You have to let a few balls drop . . . people aren't used to that but sometimes you have to do that so you can focus on the true important things. (Other concerns)</i>
Subsequent	<i>I should have been pushed more . . . It would be nice to have someone standing over or at least occasionally reminding me saying 'hey what is the status on this project?' (Career management)</i>		<i>You have to be aggressive (in seeking others out) I kind of invited them (to look at my stuff) and started writing up my dissertation while waiting for other things to develop. (Career management)</i>
	<b>Conservationist</b>		<b>Connector</b>
	<i>So I knew that coming here is the situation where it is a tenure-track position so you have that stability here. (Motivation)</i>		<i>I am motivated to do research . . . there is a need to do things that are missing . . . I don't want to be like my colleagues who say, 'I don't care about that I am just trying to get my publications out.' (Identity)</i>
	<i>During this academic year I have had one day off. Thanksgiving. Period. (Other concerns)</i>		<i>I sought to develop something to be used by other teachers . . . I ask myself what are some of the ways I can help teachers understand this process? (Motivation)</i>
	<i>One of the most important things for young faculty in getting their research career jump started is a teaching release. (Career management)</i>		<i>(It is important) to be successful with networking across campus. I spend a lot of time in other places on campus. (Career management)</i>

careers as those in the humanities, and vice versa regarding boundaryless careers. This sample was composed of faculty who were identified as being successful academics, showing the typology was not biased by having only successful faculty among those with boundaryless careers, and less successful faculty in the boundaried group.

## Discussion

This article utilized data from a qualitative study in order to further our understanding of faculty careers. The interview data from professors at three different university campuses provided valuable insight into how tenure-track faculty members experience their careers. Furthermore, this information laid the foundation for a typology of faculty career types that integrated theories of both boundaryless careers and career stages. A second sample of faculty interviews that included multiple departments and disciplines at a single research university was analyzed and provided confirmatory support for the proposed typology.

Integrating these theoretical perspectives generated four career types, labeled the Probationer (initial/boundaried), Maverick (initial/boundaryless), Conservationist (subsequent/boundaried), and Connector (subsequent/boundaryless). Although we utilized this typology to group the individual interviews, we employed a grounded-theory approach for understanding the key factors that distinguished these types and the characteristics common to faculty within them. This process elicited five key factors (Identity/Role, Motivation Factors, Tenure Concerns, Other Concerns, and Career Management) that could be used to describe differences in faculty careers.

As summarized in Table 4 and illustrated in Tables 5 and 6, the results of the content analysis clearly demonstrate characteristics that distinguish the four career types. Importantly, this distinctiveness is meaningful across both dimensions (boundaryless career and career-stage theory), providing support for the proposed typology for tenure-track faculty.

The factor of Tenure Concerns, in addition to being a central theme, is particularly illustrative of this support. For example, Conservationists know the rules needed for tenure but doubt their ability to achieve it. Meanwhile, Probationers, who share a boundaried career experience but differ in career stage, are mainly concerned about not making tenure because they do not know the rules and lack assurance as to the proper direction of their research agendas. As for Connectors, who have also moved on to another academic position but who experience boundaryless careers, they believe that tenure is basically about fit and are therefore not concerned about the rules or their ability. Finally, Mavericks, who differ along both dimensions, focus on the academic/market demand for their expertise and this fact and not fit is the basis for their lack of concern about the tenure requirements at their individual institution. A similar robustness in the distinctiveness of the four career types can be found using any of the other factors identified in the analysis.

### Limitations

Although the data provided were rich in content, some limitations of the study's findings merit discussion. First, the study focused only on tenure-track faculty. An important next step would be to extend the research to tenured faculty. Given the prominence of tenure and tenure concerns as explanatory factors it will be important to see whether faculty continue to experience their careers as both boundaried and boundaryless once tenured.

Second, although a diverse set of professors was selected from multiple campuses, only one of the three business schools would be described as 'teaching-focused.' Similarly, the confirmatory sample of interviews included faculty from a 'research-focused' institution. The reason this represents a limitation is that all the faculty from this 'teaching-focused' institution were on the boundaryless dimension. Although they were all boundaryless, they were split by career stage into both the Connector and Maverick cells. Furthermore, these cells both contained interviewees from the other two universities. More research is needed to understand whether this result is an artifact of the sample or of 'teaching institutions.' This result may reflect the fact that faculty at these schools face less onerous research requirements, and that facilitates the experience of a boundaryless career.

### Implications

The findings from this study have important implications for career scholars and researchers. First, the study makes important contributions to the scholarship on boundaryless careers. The study achieves this, in part, by finding qualitative evidence supporting the largely theoretical literature on boundaryless careers (Eby et al., 2003). Also, this study advances boundaryless career theory by integrating it with career stage theories, resulting in the proposed typology of faculty careers. Additional research should be conducted to both confirm and expand our understanding of the typology.

Second, the richness of the data collected provides insight regarding new research questions. For example, to what extent do an individual's demographic factors mediate his or her faculty career experiences? Another implication that emerged from the analysis concerned the role of the school's strategic orientation (e.g. research focused) in shaping an individual's experiences. Additional research needs to be conducted to understand the role of one's employer in moderating one's career experiences.

Another set of implications focuses on the individual careers of academics. First, the typology provides psychological validation for faculty

members who may have otherwise felt isolated in regard to how they experience their career. Furthermore, the typology provides structure for individual faculty members conducting self-analysis and career planning, which may allow them to develop more appropriate and effective career strategies. For example, Probationers and Conservationists may recognize the need to become more involved in managing their careers proactively, whereas Mavericks and Connectors may understand the importance of demonstrating institutional commitment. This implication corresponds to previous research that has found individual perceptions of careers to be related to career development and subsequent success (Fournier, 1997).

Second, the typology provides department chairs and senior faculty with valuable insight into the motivations and concerns of junior faculty. Utilizing this information should facilitate and improve the processes of mentoring and development that are so important for tenure-track faculty (Lease, 1999), and career success (Clawson, 1980; Kram, 1996; Kram & Isabella, 1985). For example, while providing structure may be a beneficial tool for Probationers, Mavericks might find such development interventions as annoyances rather than facilitators. Consequently, the typology will help with the identification and implementation of appropriate development initiatives for junior faculty.

## **Conclusion**

Although the majority of faculty in the traditional university structure receive their doctorates and obtain tenure in basically the same manner, they experience their careers in disparate ways. This article proposed a typology for understanding these career experiences of tenure-track business faculty. This typology was developed using interviews with tenure-track faculty, and integrated career-stage theory with emerging theory on boundaryless careers. This process resulted in a dynamic typology that was confirmed through the use of a second sample of faculty interviews. Finally, important implications from these interviews were discussed with reference to faculty careers as a subject of both research and personal development.

## **Note**

- 1 Owing to concerns about confidentiality and because of small sample size the results are not reported by demographic category.

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