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## Careers, Identity, and the Transition from Academia

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## FIRST PERSON RESEARCH

# Careers, Identity, and the Transition from Academia

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In his 1996 article “Protean Careers of the 21st Century,” Douglas T. Hall wrote, “The traditional psychological contract in which an employee entered a firm, worked hard, performed well, was loyal and committed, and thus received ever-greater rewards and job security, has been replaced by a new contract based on continuous learning and identity change, guided by the search for what Herb Shepard called ‘the path with a heart’” (p. 8). Perhaps in no field is the protean career more typified than among tenured academics, where the opportunity to learn, shape one’s identity, and gain perspective, particularly in the transition out of academia, can be meaningful and important in the face of an uncertain future.

In their article in this issue, “Making Sense of Late Academic Careers: Stories, Images, and Reflections,” Stephen Brown, John Ogilvie, Diana Stork, and Jill Woodilla have engaged in a highly collaborative and reflexive sensemaking process as they explore their own careers and identities as late career academics in transition. Their method has involved a series of sequential steps through which dialogue and a deeper sense of sensemaking emerged among the collaborating authors. These steps included early conversations among the authors about late academic careers, writing up and sharing each member’s career

stories, coding these stories for similarities and differences, making links back to career theory, engaging in narrative analysis of each story, crafting graphical representations of career and self, and, finally, reflecting on identity as it pertains to late career academic transition.

The authors conclude, “The four of us began this project with the idea that we might create more intentional professional futures if we examined and understood the past—identifying the threads of continuity in our careers, as well as the fits and starts we experienced along the way . . . [and] ended . . . with a deeper understanding of our career and insights into our present professional lives and our lives looking forward.” As many baby boomers make plans for leaving their academic careers, this article provides a set of useful collaborative methods and tools for fostering dialogue, sensemaking, and learning that can enrich and enliven the transition process going forward.

## REFERENCE

Hall, D. T. (1996). Protean careers of the 21st century. *Academy of Management Executive*, 10(4), 8–16.

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