



**COMPLEXITY IN AUSTRALIAN ENTERPRISE AGREEMENTS: AN
EMPIRICAL STUDY OF AGREEMENTS IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION
AND FAST FOOD SECTORS, 1993–2011**

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Complexity in Australian Enterprise Agreements: An Empirical Study of Agreements in the Higher Education and Fast Food Sectors, 1993–2011

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This paper sets out empirical findings from a study of enterprise agreements made in the higher education and fast food sectors between 1993 and 2011. One of the aims of workplace relations reforms during this period was to facilitate the creation of ‘simple’ enterprise agreements. It was intended that these agreements would set out a clear and integrated set of employment conditions that would be easy for workers to understand and certain for businesses to apply. The empirical study assesses the effectiveness of the policy of simplicity by examining the contents of agreements. Using innovative methods, the study focuses on four types of complexity: technicality, density, differentiation and uncertainty. The findings point to the interaction between legislative reforms and the changing nature of complexity within agreements. These findings also illustrate how a shift in one type of complexity may bring about a corresponding shift in complexity in another form.

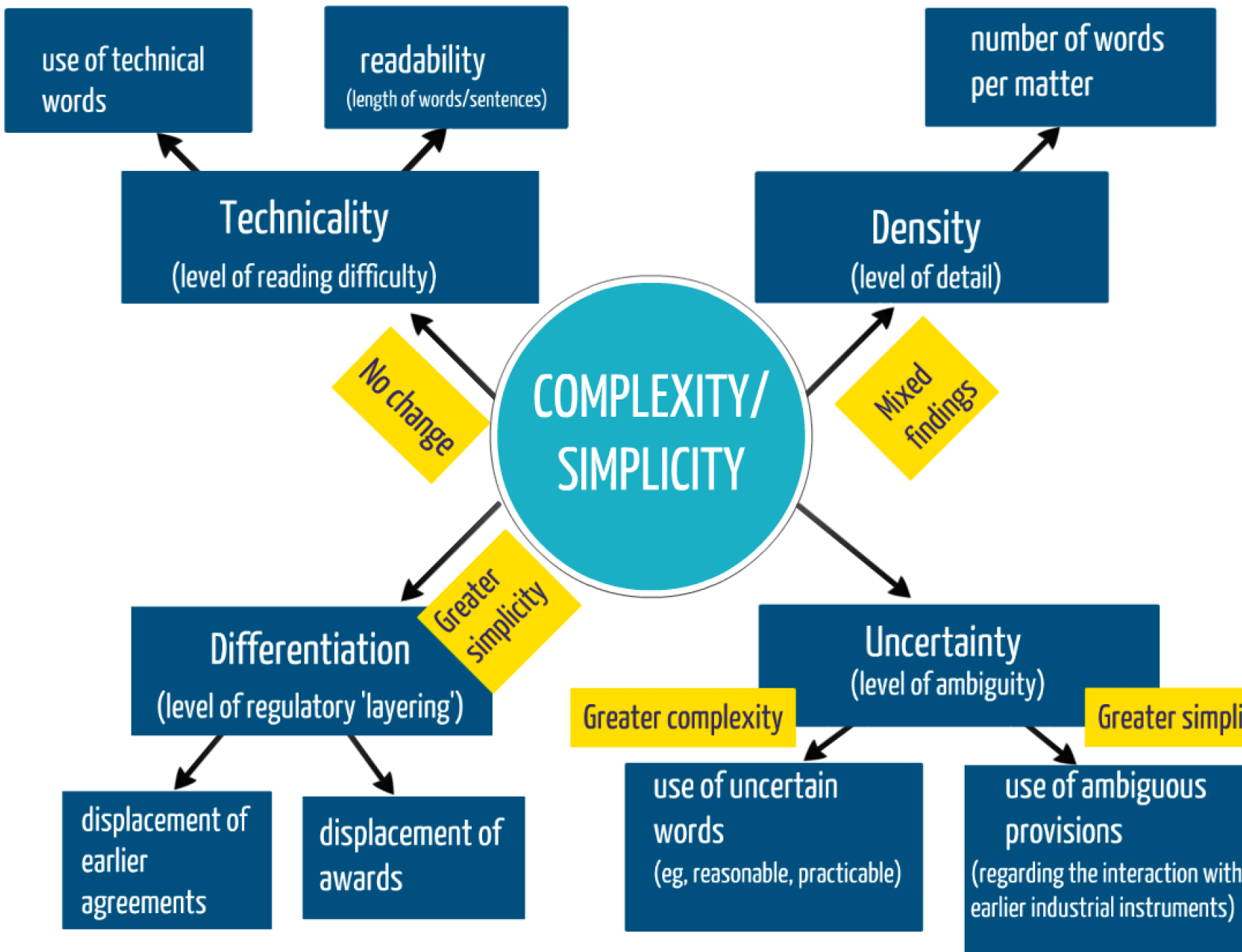
Australian workplace relations system

- Pre-1993
 - Densely regulated system
 - Conditions of employment set out in detailed, overlapping industry awards
- 1993 onwards
 - Conditions of employment to be set out in a single, streamlined document
 - **Aim is to create ‘simple’ enterprise agreements that are easy for workers to read and understand and straightforward for employers to apply**

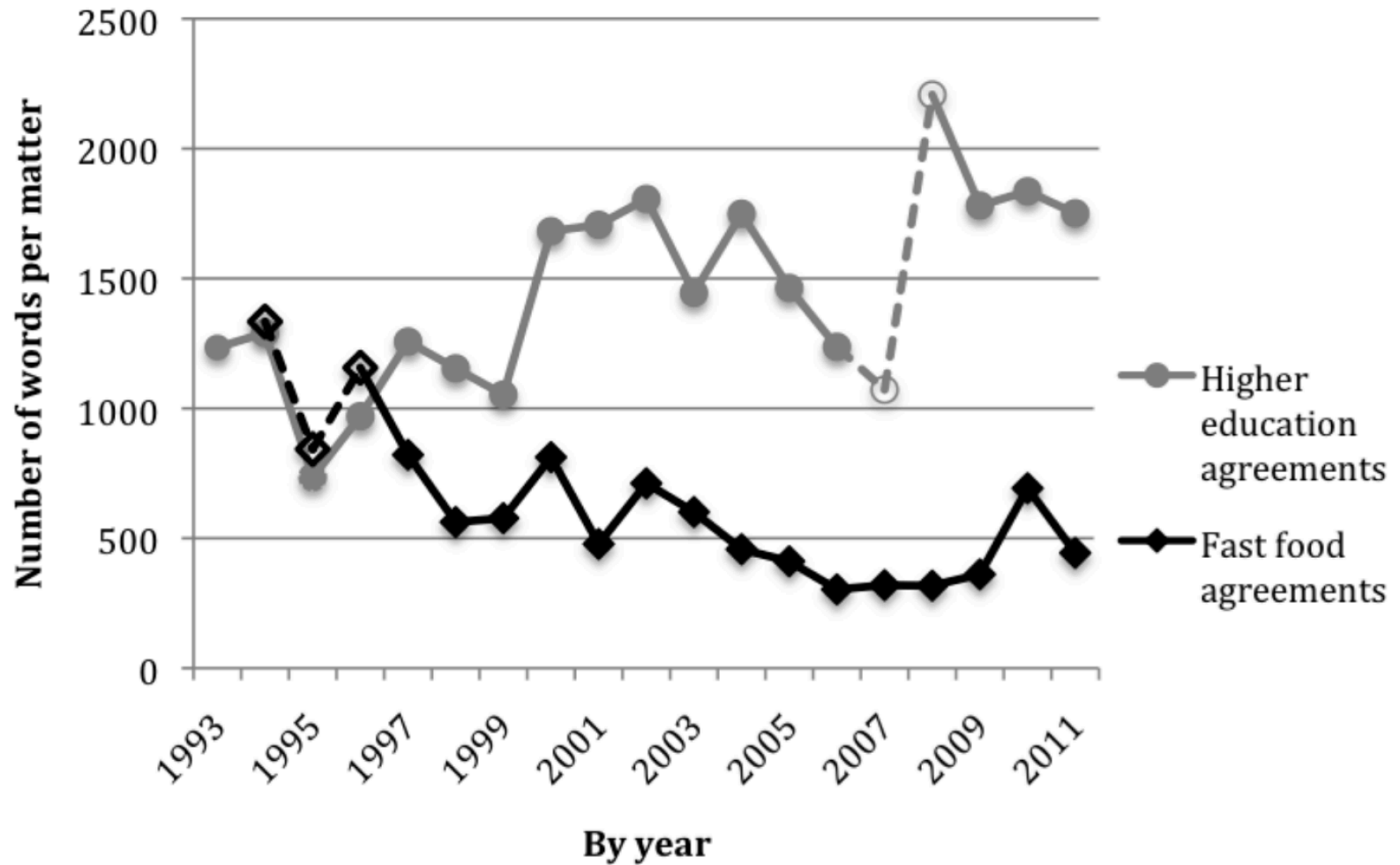
The empirical study

- considers whether this policy goal of creating simple enterprise agreements has been met
- uses quantitative content analysis methods
- assesses enterprise agreements made in the higher education and fast food sectors between 1993 and 2011.

**COMPLEXITY/
SIMPLICITY**



Density of agreements, by year



- Please email me for a copy of the full paper: carolyn.sutherland@monash.edu
- Other publications from the study:
 - ‘Mapping Complexity in Australian Enterprise Agreements: A Multi-Dimensional Approach’ (2013) 26 *Australian Journal of Labour Law* 50;
 - ‘The Elusive Quest for Simplicity: Measuring and Assessing Readability of Enterprise Agreements, 1993 to 2011’ (2013) 35 *Sydney Law Review* (forthcoming).