

## PROFESSIONS IN TURBULENT TIMES Changes, challenges and opportunities

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**Abstract** The sociological analysis of professional work has differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers and in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls of industrial and commercial organizations. But professional work is changing and being changed. The need to reconnect professional occupations and professional organizations is identified and the challenges this presents to professionalism as a normative value which implies occupational control of the work practices and procedures. The opportunities presented for professionals working in organizations are also indicated.

**Keywords:** professionalism, changes, challenges.

**Resumo** A análise sociológica de trabalho profissional tem diferenciado profissionalismo como um meio especial de organizar trabalho e de controlar trabalhadores e em contraste com o controlo hierárquico, burocrático e administrativo de organizações industriais e comerciais. Mas o trabalho profissional está a mudar e a ser mudado. A necessidade de reconectar ocupações profissionais e organizações profissionais é identificada, assim como o controlo ocupacional das práticas e processos do trabalho. As oportunidades apresentadas para trabalhadores profissionais são também indicadas.

**Palavras-chave:** profissionalismo; mudanças, desafios.

**Résumé** L'analyse sociologique du travail professionnel a fait du professionnalisme un moyen spécial d'organiser le travail et de contrôler les travailleurs, en contraste avec le contrôle hiérarchique, bureaucratique et administratif des organisations industrielles et commerciales. Mais le travail professionnel est en train de changer et d'être changé. La nécessité de reconnecter occupations professionnelles et organisations professionnelles est identifiée, ainsi que le contrôle occupationnel des pratiques et des processus de travail. Les opportunités qui s'offrent aux travailleurs professionnels sont également indiquées.

**Mots-clés:** professionnalisme, changement, défis.

**Resumen** El análisis sociológico de trabajo profesional ha diferenciado profesionalismo como un medio especial de organizar el trabajo y de controlar a los trabajadores, contrastándolo con el control jerárquico, burocrático y administrativo de organizaciones industriales y comerciales. Pero el trabajo profesional está cambiando y lo están cambiando. Se identifica la necesidad de reconectar las ocupaciones profesionales y las organizaciones profesionales, así como el control ocupacional de las prácticas y procesos del trabajo. También se indican las oportunidades presentadas para trabajadores profesionales.

**Palabras-clave:** profesionalismo, cambios, desafíos.

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### Introduction

The role of the nation-state, has always been critical in theorizing about professions and, in particular, differentiating between Anglo-American and European systems of professions (Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990). The role of the nation-state had been seen to be paramount because states had granted legitimacy, for example, by licensing professional activity, setting standards of practice and

regulation, acting as guarantor of professional education (not least by giving public funds for academic education and scientific research), and by paying for services provided by professional experts and practitioners. But the internationalization of markets required the reconceptualization of traditional professional jurisdictions. In addition, the increased mobility of professional practitioners between nation-states necessitated recognition and acceptability of other states licensing, education and training requirements. Again, the convergence of professional systems and of regulatory states has required the reconceptualization as well as new theoretical and interpretational developments in the disciplinary field of professional occupational groups.

In sociological research on professional groups three concepts have been used extensively in the development of explanations: profession, professionalization, professionalism. The concept of profession represents a distinct and generic category of occupational work. Definitions of "profession" have been frequently attempted but sociologists have been unsuccessful in clarifying the differences between professions and other occupations and identifying what makes professions distinctive. Definitions of professions as institutional remain unresolved though particular generic occupational groups continue to form the case studies in which to examine and test sociological theories and explanations.

The concept of professionalization is regarded as the process to achieve the status of profession and has been interpreted as the process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group to maintain practitioners own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of the occupational jurisdiction (Larson, 1977; Abbott, 1988). This interpretation was prominent in the field in the 1970s and 1980s and was associated with a critique of professions as ideological constructs (Johnson, 1972).

This interpretation has declined in popularity recently (e.g. see themes of papers presented at recent international conferences) although sociologists interested in gender issues and differences continue to critique the idea of profession as a gendered (historical) construct (Davies, 1995; Witz, 1992). Sometimes they also see a positive outcome, as a process that has benefited particularly female-dominated occupational groups (e.g. midwifery) in competition with medical dominance (Bourgeault, Benoit and Davis-Floyd, 2004). In addition, the concept of professionalization continues to be important in the analysis of newly emerging occupations (e.g. IT consultancy, human resources management, psychology and social care work) perhaps seeking status and recognition for the importance of the work often by standardization of the education, training and qualification for practice (Brint, 2001; Ruiz Ben, 2009).

A third concept is professionalism which has had a long history in the disciplinary sub-field. For a long time the sociological analysis of professional work differentiated professionalism as a special means of organizing work and controlling workers and in contrast to the hierarchical, bureaucratic and managerial controls of industrial and commercial organizations. Professionalism was different. Initially professionalism was interpreted as an occupational or normative value, as something worth preserving and promoting in work and by and for workers. Then

later developments interpreted professionalism as a discourse and to an extent this has combined the occupational value and the ideological interpretations. There are real advantages in the analysis of professionalism as the key analytical concept in explanations and interpretations about professional knowledge-based work, occupations and practitioners. In current work and employment contexts (such as professional work in organizations) it is the increased use of the discourse of professionalism in a wide range of occupational work places which is important and in need of further analysis and understanding. The discourse of professionalism is used as a marketing slogan (e.g. “have the job done by professionals”) and in advertising to attract new recruits (e.g. “join the professionals” — the army) as well as customers (Fournier, 1999). It is used in occupational recruitment campaigns, in company mission statements and organizational aims and objectives to motivate employees. The discourse of professionalism has entered the managerial literature and been embodied in training manuals. Even occupational regulation and control (both internal and external forms) are now explained and justified as means to improve professionalism in work. The concept of professionalism has an appeal to and for practitioners, employees and managers in the development and maintenance of work identities, career decisions and senses of self.

The discourse of professionalism can be analyzed also as a powerful instrument of occupational change and social control at macro, meso and micro levels and in a wide range of occupations in very different work, organizational and employment relations, contexts and conditions. The analysis of professionalism as a discourse involves occupational change and control in work organizations where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilized by managers. It is also the case that the use of the discourse of professionalism varies between different occupational groups. I have used McClelland’s categorization (1990: 107) to differentiate between professionalization “from within” (i.e. successful manipulation of the market by the occupational group) and “from above” (domination of forces external to the occupational group). Where the appeal to professionalism is made and used by the occupational group itself, “from within”, then the returns to the group can be substantial. In these cases, historically the group has been able to use the discourse in constructing its occupational identity, promoting its image with clients and customers, and in bargaining with the state to secure and maintain its (sometimes self) regulatory responsibilities. In these cases the occupation is using the discourse partly in its own occupational and practitioner interests but sometimes also as a way of promoting and protecting the public interest.

In the case of most contemporary service occupations, however, professionalism is being imposed “from above” and for the most part this means by the employers and managers of the service organizations in which these “professionals” work. Here the discourse (of dedicated service and autonomous decision making) is part of the appeal of professionalism — this is what makes professionalism attractive to aspiring occupational groups. When the discourse is constructed “from above”, then often it is imposed and a false or selective discourse is used to promote and facilitate occupational change (rationalization) and as a disciplinary mechanism of autonomous subjects exercising appropriate conduct. This discourse of professionalism is grasped and

welcomed by the occupational group since it is perceived to be a way of improving the occupations status and rewards collectively and individually. It is a powerful ideology and the idea of becoming and being a “professional” worker has appealed to many new and existing occupational groups particularly during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, the realities of professionalism “from above” are very different. The effects are not the occupational control of the work by the workers but rather control by the organizational managers and supervisors. Organizational objectives (which are sometimes political) define practitioner/client relations, set achievement targets and performance indicators. In these cases, organizational objectives regulate and replace occupational control in practitioner/client work interactions thereby limiting the exercise of discretion and preventing the service ethic that has been so important in professional work.

It might be the case that professional strategies are increasingly resistant, defensive or conservative which seek to protect jurisdictions and privileges. It is also important, however, to include the new strategies and tactics which are developing as professions adapt to emerging challenges and opportunities. In addition, the contrast between organizational and occupational professionalism and between different occupational principles more broadly might not always be opposites and mutually exclusive but could, instead, be mutually reinforcing. Alternatively, Faulconbridge and Muzio (2008) use the notion of “hybridity” where different strands of professionalism and other organizational principles co-exist and co-penetrate each other producing new hybrid arrangements. It seems that whatever management there is in professional organizations, it is more likely to have consensual rather than executive/directive connotations.

Fundamental to how these changes are regarded and theorized are the perceived threats and challenges to professionalism as an occupational value and as an essentially different way of organizing work and workers compared with the managerial hierarchies of industrial and commercial organizations. I turn next to explaining professionalism as an occupational value and how this interpretation has changed over time. Then the changes to and the continuities in the construction of professionalism in these organizational contexts are explored and this enables an assessment to be made of both the novel and the more familiar aspects of what might be termed the “new” professionalism. The last section of the paper is a more speculative discussion section which considers some of the challenges as well as the opportunities of the redefinition of professionalism and its links with management for practitioner-workers and their clients in service work.

### **Professionalism as an occupational value**

The analysis of professionalism as an occupation value in sociology has a very long history. In early analyses of professions, in both Britain and the USA, the key concept was the occupational value of “professionalism” and its importance for the stability and civility of social systems (e.g. Tawney, 1921; Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Marshall, 1950). Early American sociological theorists of professions

developed similar interpretations. The best known, though perhaps most frequently mis-quoted, attempt to clarify the special characteristics of professionalism, its central values and contribution to social order and stability, was that of Parsons (1939). Parsons recognized and was one of the first theorists to show how the capitalist economy, the rational-legal social order (of Weber) and the modern professions were all interrelated and mutually balancing in the maintenance and stability of a fragile normative social order. He demonstrated how the authority of the professions and of bureaucratic hierarchical organizations both rested on the same principles (for example of functional specificity, restriction of the power domain, application of universalistic, impersonal standards). The professions, however, by means of their collegial organization and shared identity demonstrated an alternative approach (compared with the managerial hierarchy of bureaucratic organizations) towards the shared normative end.

Professions, then, involve different ways and means of organizing work and workers, different work relations, compared with organizations. Professional values emphasize a shared identity based on competencies (produced by education, training and apprenticeship socialization) and sometimes guaranteed by licensing. Professional relations are characterized as collegial, cooperative and mutually supportive and relations of trust characterize practitioner/client and practitioner/employer interactions.

The work of Parsons has subsequently been subject to heavy criticism mainly because of its links with functionalism (Dingwall and Lewis, 1983). The differences between professionalism and rational-legal, bureaucratic, hierarchical ways of organizing work have been returned to, however, in Freidson's (2001) last analysis. Freidson examines the logics of three different ways of organizing work in contemporary societies (the market, organization and profession) and illustrates the respective advantages and disadvantages of each for clients and practitioners. In this analysis he demonstrates the continuing importance of maintaining professionalism (with some modifications) as the main organizing principle for expert service work.

This interpretation represents what might be termed the optimistic view of professionalism as an occupational value, and of what professionalism and the process of professionalization of work entails. It is based on the principle that the work is of special value either to the public or to the interests of the state or an elite (Freidson, 2001: 214). According to Freidson (2001: 34-35), "the ideal typical position of professionalism is founded on the official belief that the knowledge and skill of a particular specialization requires a foundation in abstract concepts and formal learning". Education, training and experience are fundamental requirements but once achieved (and sometimes licensed) then the exercise of discretion based on competences is central and deserving of special status. The practitioners have special knowledge and skill and (particularly if its practice is protected by licensing) there is a need to trust professionals' intentions. Consequently, externally imposed rules governing work are minimized and the exercise of discretion and good judgment, often in highly complex situations and circumstances, and based on recognized competences, are maximized.

There is a second more pessimistic interpretation of professionalism, however, which grew out of the more critical literature on professions which was prominent in Anglo-American analyses in the 1970s and 1980s. This second interpretation is critical of the occupational values analysis and during this period professionalism came to be dismissed as a successful ideology (Johnson, 1972) and professionalization as a process of market closure and monopoly control of work (Larson, 1977) and occupational dominance (Larkin, 1983). Professionalization was intended to promote professional practitioners own occupational self-interests in terms of their salary, status and power as well as the monopoly protection of an occupational jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). This was seen to be a process largely initiated and controlled by the practitioners themselves and mainly in their own interests although it could also be argued to be in the public interest (Saks, 1995).

A third and later development involved the analysis of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control — this time in work organizations where the discourse is increasingly applied and utilized by managers. This third interpretation combined the previous two. It returns to professionalism as an occupational value but in this interpretation professionalism is ideological and used as a means of practitioner/employee control. The discourse of professionalism is taken over, reconstructed and used as an instrument of managerial control in organizations, where professionals are employed. Thus professionalism plays a role in attempts to rationalize, re-organize, contain and control the work and the practitioners. The work of Anderson-Gough, Grey and Robson (1998) develops the notion of professionalism as a discourse of occupational control in accountancy firms. Fournier (1999) considers the appeal to “professionalism” as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts. She suggests how the use of the discourse of professionalism, in a large privatized service company, works to inculcate “appropriate” work identities, conducts and practices. She considers this as “a disciplinary logic which inscribes ‘autonomous’ professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance” (1999: 280).

The features of the occupational professionalism which made it distinctive and different to organizational means of controlling work and workers were somewhat idealistic (probably ideological) and based on a model and image of historical relations probably in the medical and legal professions in predominantly Anglo-American societies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The legacy of this image, whether in fact or fiction, has provided a powerful incentive for many aspiring occupational groups throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century and helps to explain the appeal of professionalism as a managerial tool.

The image or the ideology of professionalism as an occupational value that is so appealing involves different aspects. Some might never have been operational; some might have been operational for short periods in a limited number of occupational groups. Aspects include:

- control of the work systems, processes, procedures, priorities to be determined primarily by the practitioner/s;



- professional institutions/associations as the main providers of codes of ethics, constructors of the discourse of professionalism, providers of licensing and admission procedures, controllers of competences and their acquisition and maintenance, overseeing discipline, due investigation of complaints and appropriate sanctions in cases of professional incompetence;
- collegial authority, legitimacy, mutual support and cooperation;
- common and lengthy (perhaps expensive) periods of shared education, training, apprenticeship;
- development of strong occupational identities and work cultures;
- strong sense of purpose and of the importance, function, contribution and significance of the work;
- discretionary judgment, assessment evaluation and decision-making, often in highly complex cases, and of confidential advice-giving, treatment, and means of taking forward;
- trust and confidence characterize the relations between practitioner/client, practitioner/employer and fellow practitioners.

These aspects are not intended to be regarded as the defining characteristics of a profession. Rather these are aspects of the image and the ideology of professionalism which can account for the attraction and appeal of professionalism as an occupational value and increasingly as a managerial tool in work organizations. In previous publications I have referred to these aspects as ideal-types of occupational professionalism and contrasted these with organizational aspects of professionalism (Evetts, 2006). But professionalism is changing and being changed. The next section examines some of these changes to the occupational value aspects of professionalism.

### **A new professionalism? Changes and continuities**

Professionalism has undergone change and these changes have been seen as part of a governmental project to promote commercialized (Hanlon, 1998) and organizational (Evetts, 2006, 2009b) forms of professionalism. Within this context Brint (1994) has discussed an epochal shift from the rhetoric of trusteeship to the rhetoric of expertise. Organizational principles, strategies and methods are deeply affecting most professional occupations and expert groups, transforming their identities, structures and practices. Whether a “new” form of professionalism is emerging is debatable since there are elements of continuity as well as of change. It is important, therefore, to clarify what exactly has changed and what continues in order to be able to assess the likelihood (or otherwise) of professionalism surviving as an occupational value.

Aspects of change certainly include elements of hierarchy, bureaucracy, output and performance measures and even the standardization of work practices, all of which are more characteristic of organizational rather than professional forms of occupational control. When service sector professionals have proved enduringly

difficult to manage and resistant to change, then an important part of the strategy became to recreate professionals as managers and to manage by normative techniques. The discourse of enterprise becomes linked with discourses of professionalism, quality, customer service and care. Professionals are also tempted by the ideological components of empowerment, innovation, autonomy and discretion. Furthermore, attempts to measure and demonstrate professionalism actually increase the demand for explicit auditing and accounting of professional competences. Thus, managerial demands for quality control and audit, target setting and performance review become reinterpreted as the promotion of professionalism. It is necessary to recognize, however, that output and performance measures also represent a “discourse of competition” (Hoggett, 1996: 15) or what Broadbent, Jacobs, and Laughlin (1999) termed “individualization”. The danger is that social cohesion and institutional action are undermined whilst competition threatens both team working and collegial support. Thus, the quest for professionalism and accountability is highly competitive and individualistic, but it is also a bureaucratic means of regaining and exercising control of a market-directed enterprise staffed by professionals.

In addition, there are other characteristics (particularly the professionalism developed under the guise of New Public Service Management — NPSM — in the UK and elsewhere) which seem to point to a new and distinct variant of professionalism. The emphasis on governance and community controls, the negotiations between complex numbers of agencies and interests, and the recreation of professionals themselves as managers, are all examples of this. Thus, in public sector professions, control is increasingly achieved by means of normative values and self-regulated motivation. In professional services firms a discourse of enterprise is fitted alongside the language of quality and customer care and the ideologies of empowerment, innovation, autonomy and discretion. In addition, this is also a discourse of individualization and competition where individual performance is linked to the success or failure of the organization. These all constitute powerful mechanisms of worker/employee control in which the occupational values of professionalism are used to promote the efficient management of the organization.

In numerous ways centralizing, regulatory governments, intent on demonstrating value from public service budgets seem to be redefining professionalism and accountability as measurable. But before we acknowledge the decline (and possible demise) of occupational forms of professionalism, it is necessary also to acknowledge some of the ways in which occupational professionalism continues to operate. Adler, Kwon and Hecksher (2008) argue that the market, hierarchy and community are not necessarily mutually exclusive but can be mutually supportive. More market pressures often lead to more community based practices such as multi-disciplinary teams and cooperative working which are consistent with occupational forms of professionalism.

Also the occupational control of work is still important in some traditional professions such as law (though less so for medicine). It is also of increased importance in some newly powerful professional groups such as international accountancy. The organization can provide new territories and opportunities for professionalization (e.g. management and personnel management) and there are



**Table 1** Changes and continuities in professionalism as occupational value

Changes	Continuities
Governance	Authority
Management	Legitimacy
External forms of regulation	Prestige, status, power, dominance
Audit and measurement	Competence, knowledge
Targets and performance indicators	Identity and work culture
Work standardization. Financial control	Discretion to deal with complex cases, respect, trust
Competition, individualism, stratification	Collegial relations and jurisdictional competitions
Organizational control of the work priorities	Gender differences in careers and strategies
Possible range of solutions/procedures defined by the organization	Procedures and solutions discussed and agreed within specialist teams

examples of attempts by some occupational groups to reclaim professionalism. In these cases, both national institutions and European professional federations are involved in aspects of the regulation of the occupational groups including the development of performance criteria, target setting and continuing professional development (CPD). In assisting governments to define and construct these regulatory systems, these national professional institutions and European federations are continuing to exercise occupational control over work whilst constituting a form of moral community based on occupational membership. There are also examples of the sharing, modification and adaptation of particular regulatory regimes between different professional institutions and federations (Evetts, 1994; Flood, 2011).

Other characteristics of occupational professionalism remain and seem resistant to change, sometimes despite clear policies and incentives for change. Gender differences in professional careers and occupational specialisms continue, although some interesting variants are emerging and situations are complex. Women are entering established professions in larger numbers and proportions, and men are entering female professions, and many are successfully progressing their careers. Other professionalizing occupations (often where women are numerically dominant) have utilized professionalism in order to secure new tasks, responsibilities and recognition. Women are increasingly becoming managers, but management itself is being changed and standardized such that it might be the case that men are leaving this (less interesting and powerful) field and moving upwards where they can and sideways (e.g. into consultancy or private practice) when they cannot.

The following table summarizes aspects of change and continuity in the interpretation of professionalism as an occupational value in service professions. This is a simplification of what is, in fact, a highly complex, variable and changing situation. Professional occupations are different both within and between nation-states and contexts are constantly changing as new nation-state and European policies emerge, develop and are adapted and modified in practice and in local work places. Used with care and due caution, these aspects might enable an assessment of the prominence of organizational and occupational professionalism to be made in different occupations and work places.

### Discussion: consequences, challenges and opportunities

What, then, are the consequences for practitioners and clients? Is occupational professionalism worth preserving as a distinct alternative and contrasting way of controlling work and workers (compared with organizations and markets) and with value for both practitioners and their clients? What are the challenges and opportunities of changing aspects of professionalism as an occupational value?

#### *Consequences and challenges*

The consequences of and challenges to professionalism as an occupational value, are being documented by researchers interested in different occupational groups in Europe and North America (e.g. Schepers, 2006; Wrede, 2008; Champy, 2008; Dent et al., 2008; Boussard, 2006; Bolton, 2005; Bourgeault and Benoit, 2009) and research links with sociologists of organizations are developing (Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2008). There are also some early indications of what might be a retreat from or a substantial redefinition of certain aspects of managerialism and NPSM by policy-makers in respect of some service work (e.g. Dahl, 2008). There is no established causal link between the organizational changes and challenges to occupational professionalism and a deterioration of professional values so any linkage remains speculative. In addition, there are several complicating factors which make a causal link difficult to establish. Complicating context factors (some general, some nation-specific) include the demystification of aspects of professional knowledge and expertise; cases of practitioner malpractice and "unprofessional" behaviour; media exaggeration and oversimplification, and political interference; large fee and salary increases in particular professional sectors and divisions between commercial (corporate clients) and social service (state-funded) practitioners; increasing trade union activism on behalf of professionals which carry a perception of self rather than public interest.

It is also the case that powerful professionals have often been resistant to managerial intervention and organizational controls. Many organizations in the public services (e.g. hospitals and universities) are complex professional bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1983) characterized by the involvement of several different professional groups. These groups have a history of relative autonomy over their working practices and often have high status which gives them both power and authority. In addition, the "outputs" of these organizations (and the professionals in them) are not easily standardized and measurable. When the ability to define and standardize the nature of the work process is limited and the definition of the outputs of the work (and what constitutes success) is problematic then such service work would seem to be unsuitable for both market and organizational controls.

A decline in occupational professionalism and the possible expansion of organizational forms of professionalism is then one of several complicating factors (also see Adler, Kwon and Hecksher, 2008, alternative interpretation). It can be stated, however, that organizational techniques for controlling employees have affected the work of practitioners in professional organizations. The imposition of

targets in teaching and medical work — and indeed for the police (see Boussard, 2006) — have had “unintended” consequences on the prioritization and ordering of work activities, and have brought with them a focus on target achievement to the detriment or neglect of other less-measurable tasks and responsibilities. Increased regulation and form filling takes time which might arguably be devoted to clients. The standardization of work procedures, perhaps using software programmes, is an important check on the underachieving practitioner but can be a disincentive to the creative, innovative, and inspirational professional.

It is important to remember also that the way professionals regard their service work and their working relationships are also being changed and this is an important consequence of redefining the occupational value aspects of professionalism. An emphasis on internal as well as external markets, on enterprise and economic contracting, are changing professionalism. In tendering, accounting and audit management, professionalism requires practitioners to codify their competence for contracts and evaluations (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; Lane, 2000; Freidson, 2001). “Professional work is defined as service products to be marketed, price-tagged and individually evaluated and remunerated; it is, in that sense, commodified” (Svensson and Evetts, 2003: 11). Professional service work organizations are converting into enterprises in terms of identity, hierarchy and rationality. Possible solutions to client problems and difficulties are defined by the organization (rather than the ethical codes of the professional institution) and limited by financial constraints. The role of organizations as institutional entrepreneurs has also been identified including the lobbying of the state in order to change professional regulation in their favour.

The commodification of professional service work entails changes in professional work relations. When practitioners become organizational employees then the traditional relationship of employer/professional trust is changed to one necessitating supervision, assessment and audit. Relationships between professionals and clients are also being converted into customer relations through the establishment of quasi-markets, customer satisfaction surveys and evaluations, as well as quality measures and payment by results. The production, publication and diffusion of quality and target measurements are critical indicators for changing welfare services into a market (Considine, 2001). The service itself is increasingly focused, modeled on equivalents provided by other producers, shaped by the interests of the consumers and increasingly standardized. The increasing focus on marketing and selling expert solutions (Brint, 1994) connects professionals more to their work organization than to their professional institutions and associations. Clients are converted into customers and professional work competencies become primarily related to, defined and assessed by, the work organization.

### *Opportunities*

The challenges to professionalism as an occupational value seem numerous but are there any opportunities associated with these changes which might improve both the conduct and the practice of professional service work and be advantageous for

both practitioners and their clients? Are there some advantages in the combination of professional and organizational logics, of hybrid organizations and organizationally located professional projects, for controlling work and workers?

Using the list of changes and continuities already identified, it would seem important to try to retain some form of occupational control both of work processes and relations. All aspects would need evaluation and assessment by research but it is possible to argue that identity, work culture, specialist team working, discussions among specialists, knowledge and expertise formation and its maintenance all improve the conduct of professional work and its practice while being of benefit to both practitioners and their clients. Other items apparently of importance to organizations would seem to be of less relevance and indeed to have a detrimental affect on professional control of their work. These include auditing measurement, targets and performance indicators. In several instances, these have been shown to distort work processes, procedures and work priorities producing “unintended” consequences for practitioners and clients. Other aspects of organizational change, including credentialism, governance and external forms of regulation, would seem to produce some benefits (for example of transparency and control of more extreme professional powers) while, at the same time, resulting in detrimental effects such as increased bureaucracy, form-filling and paper-work. These all take time which, arguably, could be better spent in client contact and service work as defined by the profession itself rather than by the work organization. These aspects would seem to have benefits and costs, therefore, and their appropriateness for professional work would need to be monitored over time.

There are other benefits from the combination of the logics of professionalism and the organization which might prove advantageous. One of these is the incorporation of Human Resource Management (HRM) from the organization into professional employment practices, processes and procedures. Job contracts, job descriptions, formal interview and selection procedures, employment rights and benefits, appeals procedures, sickness benefit and cover, maternity, caring and other absences, are all examples which have benefited the majority of professionals working in organizations and have for the most part replaced less formalized social networking and informal recommendation procedures. Indeed, human resources procedures have contributed to the spectacular growth in professional employment over the last 20 years and have improved diversity and equal opportunities.

Standardization and formalization of selection, retention and career development procedures have also increased the transparency of what were often hidden, even “mysterious” arrangements in respect of promotion, career progress and departmental relationships and links within the organization. Less formalized procedures benefited only a select few privileged practitioners and were perceived as unfair and inequitable by the majority. Increased transparency can then result in more emphasis on career choices, dependent on personal circumstances, rather than the sponsorship of the privileged few. Career inequalities clearly continue (including in respect of gender and ethnicity), as well as some reliance on networking, informal advice and recommendations but, in general, the incorporation of HRM

procedures and regulations from the organization into professional employment practices have been an opportunity and of benefit for practitioners and their work.

Other opportunities would seem to be explained by the increased recognition that organizational management and managerialism is not only complex but is also multi-layered and multi-dimensional. Management is being used to control, and sometimes limit, the work of practitioners in organizations but, in addition, management is being used by practitioners and by professional associations themselves as a strategy both in the career development of practitioners and in order to improve the status and respect of a professional occupation and its standing.

As a micro-level strategy, there is some evidence, particularly from health professionals such as nursing and midwifery (Carvalho, 2008; Bourgeault, Benoit and Davis-Floyd, 2004) but also now from medical doctors (Kuhlmann, 2008) and teachers (Gewirtz et al., 2009), of individual practitioners acquiring qualifications in management (e.g. the MBA) with the clear intention of furthering their careers. In the case of health professionals such as nurses and midwives this can also be interpreted as a collective mobility strategy as increasingly hospital management at middle and senior levels is perceived as a career opening for those with appropriate management credentials, experience and motivation.

As a meso level strategy, it is also interesting to note the work of Langer (2008) in respect of social work in Germany. Masters level programmes for social workers in Germany are incorporating management training as a way of increasing the status, standing, reputation and respect for social work as a professional occupation in the field of social services work. Following the Bologna process and standardization of higher education levels in Europe, in Germany there is a large development of Masters programmes which qualify (in this case) social workers to apply for leadership positions in non-profit organizations and social services departments. These developments can be interpreted, therefore, as both a micro and mezo level strategy in respect of social work.

In addition, organizations can constitute sites for (and objects of) professional control and domination. Jurisdictional disputes and negotiations were originally described by Abbott (1988) but now they are being played out within organizations rather than in the wider arena of labour markets and education systems. Within organizations, occupations seek to process and control tasks and task divisions to suit their own occupational interests. The medical profession – particularly doctors employed by the state – continue to use their cultural authority and legitimacy to maintain dominance (Larkin, 1983; Freidson, 2001; Coburn, 2006). Armstrong (1985) describes competition between professionals in management (accountancy, engineering and personnel) in colonizing key positions, roles and decision-making within large organizations. In these ways organizations constitute arenas for inter-professional competitions as well as professional conquests.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has explained professionalism as an occupational value and argued the importance of retaining and perhaps recreating this interpretation for service sector professional and occupational work. But professionalism is changing and being changed as service professionals now increasingly work in large-scale organizational work places and sometimes in international professional forms. Then the paper examined the changes to and the continuities in the construction of professionalism in these organizational contexts. I also examined some of the changes and challenges to professionalism as an occupational value as well as some of the opportunities for practitioner-workers and their clients in service work. It is important to remember that the redefinition of professionalism and its links with management present opportunities and benefits for professional work and workers as well as important challenges. Perhaps continuities, challenges and opportunities, for professionalism as an occupational value is one of the most important tasks for professional institutions and for governments over the next few years.

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