1. The changing world of professions and professional workers

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INTRODUCTION

There seems to be broad agreement that the lives of professional workers are undergoing significant change; in one sense it was ever thus. However, today we see a combination of globalization, deregulation, managerialism, a decline in public trust and more knowledgeable consumers having changed the context within which professions operate (Adams, 2014; Leicht and Fennell, 2001; Cohen et al., 2002; Dent and Whitehead, 2002; Reed, 2000). One perspective is that these changes are having a particular effect in that they are undermining the power and status of professional workers. As Powell et al. (1999: 4) note: ‘The common thread is a set of professional values, beliefs and aspirations woven into the very fabric of professional firms and organisations’.

In this book we take a broad approach and consider professions from a macro level, an organizational level and an individual level in order to include the agency of actors (Macdonald, 1995; Larson, 1990; Wallace, 1995). The themes of our edited collection reflect these broad interests. Recent interests of scholars in this field include an attempt to distinguish between traditional professions (occupational professions) and managerial professions (organizational professionalism) (for example, Evetts, 2013). Furthermore, it has been proposed that the analysis of professions has largely been linked to occupational closure, social stratification and exclusion, and state formation, but in more recent times a new research focus around the organizational dimension of expert work, and a focus on the professional service firm (PSF) and its management are attracting increasing attention from academics (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011).

In examining professions and professionals, it is necessary to define how we use these terms. First, we agree with Watson (2002) that the concept of ‘professionals’ is all too often both reified and homogenized.
There are of course definitional issues with the use of the terms ‘professional’ and ‘professions’. However, it has been argued that the term ‘professional’ appears to offer promise to disenfranchised groups as it is associated with autonomy, expertise and a body of knowledge, which is bound up with status and social capital and can be translated into power and resources (Morrell, 2004). Thus its further exploration remains compelling if elusive. As a career is better than a job, is a profession better than a non-profession? Indeed, as several of our authors point out, while ‘profession’ used to be thought of only as a noun, it is now increasingly used as an adjective. The effect of this, as Caza and Creary note in Chapter 13 in this volume, is that the concept of a ‘profession’ has become enlarged. Thus, in the past being a professional was defined in a traditional way by Wilensky (1964) whose criteria required that the profession: (1) is a full-time occupation; (2) has a training school; (3) has a university programme; (4) has a local professional association; (5) has a national professional association; (6) develops a state licence; and (7) has a code of ethics (see also Etzioni and Lehman, 1969; Goode, 1957). The academic community has come some way beyond these narrow confines; for example, Abbott (1988) explains professional organizing in terms of the way in which occupational groups control knowledge and skill in terms of the way in which occupational groups control knowledge and skill in terms of contests over legitimacy and boundaries between professional groups. More recently, Alvesson (2013: 154–155) has attempted to define a profession with some similarity to Wilensky:

- It is based on systematic, scientifically based theory.
- There is a long and standardized formal education.
- There is a strong professional association regulating its members.
- Members have autonomy in the sense that professional knowledge rather than bureaucratic position should govern decisions and work within the professional sphere.
- A code of ethics is established by the profession.
- There is a distinct occupational culture.
- There is a client orientation.
- The occupation is socially sanctioned and authorized.
- There are criteria for certification.
- There is a monopoly of a particular labour market via restrictions of entry.
- Collective self-regulation and the professional have authority over work.

However, Alvesson is critical of his own criteria, as he notes that if all these criteria are required, then only doctors and dentists qualify as
professionals, as the knowledge of priests, accountants and lawyers is not based on systematic, scientifically based theory.

While scholars have devoted much time to definitions without achieving consensus, one way around this is to see occupations along a continuum of professionalization (Gorman and Sandefur, 2011). However, there are occupations in areas such as knowledge-intensive fields – for example, consulting – which have ‘hijacked’ (Muzio and Kirkpatrick, 2011: 397) the notion of professionalism to meet their own ends. Thus, we see the operation of ‘professions’ through the adoption, deployment and consumption of discursive resources which can function to enhance perceived legitimacy.

A second theme relates to how professionals are being increasingly ‘managed’, in the era of ‘performativity’ (Lyotard, 1984) and the audit society (Power, 1997), which challenges to what extent the established professions can retain their exclusive positions. One example of this is in the public sector, which is reflective of the new public management agenda (Pollitt, 1990; Walsh, 1995), with its remit to transform public sector values into more commercial ones (Dent and Whitehead, 2002).

As Cohen et al. (2002) note, given the inherent distance between the roles of managers and professionals, with managers seen as undermining rather than enabling professional employees, some argue that professionals and managers are changing places ‘in terms of their degree of autonomy, status and control over work’ (Leicht and Fennell, 2001: 2). Some claim that we may be seeing the ‘proletarianization’ of professionals (Aronowitz, 1973), with much of the control of professional work no longer being the responsibility of other professionals but of managers. Others suggest that, rather than conflict, we may be seeing renegotiation (Dawson, 1994) or what constructionists refer to as a negotiated arena (McAuley, 1994). This is a theme examined by a number of chapters in this volume (see Evetts, Chapter 2; and Currie and Croft, Chapter 3), which conceptualize and develop the concept of the ‘hybrid manager’. This is a role aimed at synthesizing managerial and professional logics, which is intended to help build the commitment of professionals to managerialism.

But in all this we must be careful not to take a determinist stance, and we need to remember the importance of agency, which has been defined as active sense-making, negotiation and responses of situated actors within real organizational contexts (Cohen et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 2005). Furthermore, Reed (2000) notes that there are centrifugal forces within the expert division of labour itself, and the boundaries between professional domains are increasingly ‘porous and blurred’, resulting in
some ongoing renegotiation of professional expertise. Contexts of professional work are also important; the increasing diversity of work settings calls for more research to elicit implications for professional–managerial relationships (Cohen et al., 2002; see also Wallace, 1995). One theoretical perspective in this field is the ‘continuity thesis’ (Ackroyd, 1996), where theorists see professionals as possessing the cognitive, economic, social and cultural resources to enable them to ‘absorb and adapt to threatening socio-economic, political and cultural change’ (Reed, 2000: 3), and thus to preserve their expert status and autonomy. Our chapters challenge and develop this argument.

Thus our book offers an overview of some of the current debates surrounding the nature of professionals and professional work. Professionals’ relationships with their organizations are variable, indeterminate and uncertain; and the implications of change brought about by the managerialist agenda are still being realized and worked out. However, there is still debate over the way in which these relationships and implications of change for professionals should be characterized and theorized.

This book represents part of a broader collaboration between the Centre for Work, Organisation and Wellbeing at Griffith University, Australia and the Centre for Professional Work and Society at Loughborough University, UK. Members of both centres deliver high-quality research that contributes to national and international debates around the changing landscape of contemporary professional work. The field of professional work is a contested and broad domain which requires some engagement with societal issues in order to be meaningful. The members utilize multidisciplinary perspectives to bring insights to a highly complex and rapidly evolving field. For example, the increasing disaggregation of work environments, which is evident in phenomena such as offshore outsourcing, public–private partnerships, mobile and fractured careers, and teleworking, has important strategic implications for organizations, governments and individuals. Furthermore, meaningful scholarly inquiry into key issues at the heart of these emerging arrangements needs to transcend traditional disciplinary boundaries while addressing important questions around accountability and employee well-being. Research conducted by the authors addresses these compelling challenges. A distinctive element of the work of both centres is to situate understanding of work and employment processes within a broader societal context. In empirical terms, the centres’ research incorporates a range of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives addressing professional, work and societal issues with research that has theoretical import, practitioner utility and policy relevance. We intend that this will be evident in the chapters we now move on to describe below.
OVERVIEW OF THE REMAINDER OF THE BOOK

In Chapter 2 on hybrid organizations and hybrid professionalism, Julia Evetts considers how the field is subject to changes, continuities and challenges. Many professionals are increasingly working in positions which are under corporate control that have the potential to reduce both discretionary decision-making and occupational control of their work. This chapter is premised on a theoretical interpretation of professionalism as both an occupational value and a discourse. The chapter progresses to discuss optimistic and pessimistic views of what professionalism and the process of professionalization entails, before moving on to explore how the two are evident in a third development of professionalism as a discourse of occupational change and control. The concept of ‘hybridity’ is demonstrated to be useful to show the co-existence and co-penetration of professionalism and organizations into one another. The resulting hybrid forms of professionalism may be an evolution of an historical model of contemporary knowledge-based work in global societies, but the author questions whether ‘professionalism’ will continue or survive as an occupational or normative value which provides a different and distinctive way of organizing and controlling work.

Currie and Croft examine hybrid managers in Chapter 3. Hybrid managers are defined as people with managerial responsibilities, but who have a background and training in a particular profession. The development of such roles is seen as a strategy for the implementation of managerial principles in professional contexts. The importance of examining hybrid managers is argued to be due to the growing significance of their use, which is intended as a way of introducing managerial principles within a professional context which circumvents professional resistance to such efforts. This chapter examines experiences of hybrid managers, examining their attitude to acting as conduits for managerialism, as well as how they are affected by undertaking such roles. Empirical illustrations from four public sector contexts in the UK are examined. These are healthcare (nurse managers), social care (managers in social work teams), education (school principals), and policing (middle-management-level resource managers). While the empirical cases are all UK-based, the analysis is argued to have international relevance, as use of hybrid managers is occurring in a wide range of countries including the UK and other European countries as well as in the USA. All four empirical cases suggest that those in hybrid managerial roles are either resistant to, or ambivalent about, the implementation of managerialism in their work contexts, and thus to some extent buffer professional colleagues from the
intrusion of managerialism. The experiences of hybrid managers suggest that they experience a number of negative costs, and that those who did not attempt to leave or retire often experienced stress and illness, a sense of identity conflict, and various negative emotions.

Worall, Mather and Cooper (Chapter 4) analyse data from two phases of the UK-based Quality of Working Life Survey, from 2012 and 2007. This allows the chapter to examine how contemporary macro-level changes, flowing from the financial crisis of 2008, are impacting on managerial and professional workers. The empirical focus is on large firms only (more than 250 employees). The chapter aims to examine the impact of macro-level changes on both the level of organizations and, at the micro level, different types of staff. The focus of analysis is on managerial and professional workers. With respect to management the focus is on junior, middle and senior management, but not director levels. In terms of worker experience, a labour process perspective is adopted, to demonstrate how the nature of managerial and professional work activities has evolved. The survey analysis suggests that in the time period examined, managerial and professional work has changed significantly, with these changes being largely negative. The broad trajectory of change affecting managerial and professional workers since 2008 has been focused on cost control and cost reduction. As a consequence, in broad terms, managers and professionals report that their work has been both intensified (having to work harder), and extensified (working longer hours). Further, levels of trust in senior management have declined, and there is a general perception that levels of control have reduced for most levels of management, with control being increasingly centralized in the hands of senior-level managers. The survey results suggest that as a consequence of these changes the health and well-being of managerial and professional staff has declined.

In Chapter 5, on discourses of professional work, Christine Coupland discusses the role of micro and meta themes that are mobilized when people talk about professions. In the fine detail of everyday interactions, where speakers draw upon hegemonic, powerful, shared modes of understanding, the world of the professional and what they are able to say and do with some degree of legitimacy is illustrated. Written and spoken texts and non-verbal behaviours have been important in the historical creation of professional practices, they continue to reproduce and reconstruct the reshaping of these practices in contemporary times. ‘Profession’ has been more recently interpreted as a discourse which combines ideological meaning with occupational values; this is in keeping with an apparent growth in ‘professionalism’ as a discourse of organizational change and control. ‘Professionalism’ may also be
regarded as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts to inculcate appropriate work identities and practices. In addition to increasing attention being paid to how power is enacted through professional discourses, technology and globalization have been identified as important influencing factors that will affect conditions for professional discourses in the future.

Boussebaa and Faulconbridge (Chapter 6) note that global professional service firms (GPSFs) are arguably now one of the key sites for professional work, given their size and power relative to the professions they represent. GPSFs are particularly important because of their central role in choreographing the global economy and setting the rules of the game for capitalist activities. In their chapter, Boussebaa and Faulconbridge consider the work of GPSFs, both in terms of their activities and internal organization as ‘global’ firms, and in terms of their impact on economies and, ultimately, societies worldwide. In doing this, they draw attention to the intimate connections between the firms’ mode of organizing, their activities in markets throughout the world, and the structure of the global economy. In particular, they highlight five research agendas which relate to a pressing series of questions about the power, politics and effects of the international work of GPSFs in the early years of the twenty-first century.

Coupland and Boyle (Chapter 7) have provided a chapter through which active members of some professional institutions have contributed to the edited volume. From the UK context three professional bodies were selected: the Chartered Institute of Builders (CIOB), the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) and the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA). From Australia the professional bodies selected for this chapter were the Law Council of Australia (LCA), Engineers Australia (EA) and the Australian Institute of Architects (AIA). The authors interviewed key members from these professional bodies in order to do some comparative analysis of what they perceive as threats or pressure, how they operate as professional organizations and how they see their futures. This is presented as an opportunity to hear ‘voices from the field’.

Time, and temporal organizing processes, were seen to play a role in both contexts in slightly different ways. In both national contexts identities and relevance emerged as very important issues for the participants. Legitimacy and representation as professional bodies were key features in their talk as they discussed competition for members, accountability and a broad remit to attend to societal pressures. Future concerns appear to be mostly about credibility in a technologically advancing global environment. One evident pressure for members of professional
bodies is that what a profession ‘is’ is a continuously transforming activity which will increasingly demand that representational bodies are ready for this.

Hislop (Chapter 8) builds from existing research on the topic of work-related mobility. His chapter starts from the assumption that for a growing proportion of workers, the need to undertake work-related journeys between diverse locations is an increasingly important element of their work. For example, an intrinsic element of Castells’s (1996) concept of the network society is that the ‘flow’ of workers (as well as objects, knowledge, information and culture) plays a key role in sustaining and reproducing contemporary business organizations. The focus here is narrowly on managerial and professional workers, who are argued to be a group of workers particularly affected by this trend towards increased levels of work-related spatial mobility (defined as travel between different locations that people are required to undertake in carrying out their work). In examining work-related mobility among managerial and professional workers it is more accurate to talk of ‘mobilities’, rather than ‘mobility’, as a heterogeneous range of different types and patterns of work-related travel are undertaken. The fundamental aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of these patterns. While a number of typologies have been developed to distinguish between different types of work-related mobility, it is argued here that a crucial, though neglected, dimension of variation in work-related spatial mobility patterns is the spatial scale, or distances involved in work-related journeys. Fundamentally, it is suggested that there is too narrow a focus on certain types of journey, specifically long-distance journeys involving plane-based travel which require people to stay away from home overnight. The chapter highlights how the spatial mobility of managerial and professional workers can involve undertaking quite different types of journeys on different spatial scales.

Russell, Trusson and De (Chapter 9) examine two different occupations, one old and one relatively new, both of which engage with professional work activity. Information and communication technologies are essential in both practices, with tele-nurses making use of medical algorithms to provide a portal into the healthcare system, and information technology (IT) service support staff using such technologies to do further repair work upon them for third-party users. In both instances, tele-nursing and IT service support, required expertise is increasingly subordinated to standardized processes. If by ‘professionalism’ we understand the exercise of an autonomy that is anchored in deep stocks of theoretical knowledge for the purpose of arriving at decisions relating to how best to accomplish a goal that the individual is committed to, they
may term this 'professionalism from below'. We are led to conclude that for the subjects of this study, professionalism from below is compromised to a considerable degree. That is, workers are unable to take decisions outside of tightly defined processes in their work. Increasingly, professionalism as sociologically understood is practised at the margins of working experience in these fields. Instead, what seems to be emerging is a 'professionalism from above', or a 'managed professionalism', where workers carry out prescribed protocols that they have had little hand in developing in the course of their work.

King and Fitzgerald’s Chapter 10 reviews the current changes and challenges being faced by the accountancy profession. The four key environmental factors influencing the profession are: globalization; technology and digitization; corporate restructuring; and environmental sustainability. All these factors are having significant impacts on the accounting profession and impacting on the nature of the work done by accountants. Broadly, there are changes in the nature of financial reporting processes, changes in the domain of accounting, and changes in accounting roles and functions. The authors also consider how various scandals and controversies where the accounting profession is implicated – such as the Enron collapse, and the 2008 financial crisis – negatively impact upon both how the profession is viewed, and the extent to which it is trusted. They conclude by considering how the various UK-based accounting professional associates are responding to these circumstances.

Most broadly, attempts to consolidate and merge UK accountancy professional associations are being resisted, with each professional association (the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, CIMA; the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, ACCA; the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales, ICAEW) making attempts to differentiate themselves from each other. One response is for each association to internationalize via the development of different strategic alliances and linkages.

Architecture is a profession under pressure, as Roan and Matthews demonstrate in Chapter 11. While the concept of professions under pressure is not new, unlike some other professional groups the boundaries that define a professional architect are highly penetrable and can be legitimately (recognized by the public and the industry) occupied by others. This situation is further complicated by the intense competition within the industry, the vulnerability of the industry to economic downturn, pressures from technological change, and an identity where many architects aim to pursue social and aesthetic agendas. The authors also examine the position of women in architecture, and show how despite
much progress in the industry, with women being accepted as architects, these pressures do not assist the cause of gender equality.

Brandis and colleagues (Chapter 12) examine a number of important drivers that will shape the nature and complexity of professional contributions to healthcare in communities. Discoveries from research and practice in biomedicine and bioscience are key drivers of role and task responsibilities in developed and developing healthcare systems. The development and availability of technology (in its widest sense, including biomedical equipment, drug therapies, information technology, models and approaches to care delivery as well as modes or programmes of prevention and care delivery) affects the way care is provided and what care and treatments are available. Change and reform – either planned or organic – are key drivers of reform. Education, training, development and system management all have impacts on the growth and development of professionals and their work in healthcare. There will be changes in individual health worker roles brought on by both discovery and development. In the context of the increasing complexity of roles, tasks and the system, professional management and leadership will be necessary to optimize the opportunities and impacts that are occurring for work in the health sector. New roles, such as hybrid clinical managers and specialist roles such as clinical informatics specialists, will be required to manage this demand and opportunity.

Caza and Creary (Chapter 13) have reviewed the literature on identification and identity construction. They have extended the literature to focus on how individuals structure their professional identities around multiple professional roles. Their chapter discusses five different identity structures professionals may utilize to manage their engagement in multiple professional roles. They highlight the benefits of identity complexity and discuss ways in which individuals and their social context can enable complexity in professional identity structure. The subjective nature of identity construction in combination with the increasing agentic nature of the modern workforce has allowed individuals to craft their own unique professional identities. A narrowed academic focus on individuals in very specific occupations together with stifling behavioural expectations will no longer be sufficient to understand professions. Instead, there is an apparent move towards understanding professional identity as being a unique construction of self when finding ways to contribute meaningfully to society.

Higgins, Roper and Gamwell (Chapter 14) identify human resources (HR) as an emerging managerial profession and examine the United Kingdom and Hong Kong contexts with their core commitment to furthering organizational values over external professional codes of
ethics. However, they note that there is scope for independence, and discretion remains at the higher end of the occupational ladder. They are heartened by the finding that when professional membership standards are considered thematically, the role of HR ‘professional’ compared to say that of ‘strategist’ or ‘technicist’ is ranked highest amongst all participants from both economies. The professional theme includes such responsibilities as ‘being required to ensure legal/regulatory compliance’ and ‘acting with integrity’. At present, this chapter suggests, HR practitioners from both economies are less willing to challenge senior managers than middle managers and employees on HR issues.

In Chapter 15, on his family’s movement into the professional classes, Ackers presents a social science biography. Through a richly detailed account he brings to life how his family moved from a primary income earned by a skilled factory worker to the next generation belonging to the professional middle classes. Peter identifies two sets of resources, characteristic of the English working classes, which were crucial to this movement: the Nonconformist Christian chapel and the trade union. The account makes more visible the individual men and women who more normally disappear in the mainstream social sciences under abstract reifications such as ‘structures’ and ‘institutions’. The chapter provides an example of alternative ways to theorize social movement, as a contrast to a career shaped by pre-existing class structures, forged by entrepreneurial individuals, and with an emphasis on the role of the state in lifting up the masses, by arguing for attention to be paid to the contribution of associational institutions. The role of Churches and trade unions as sources of social and cultural capital is presented in the account of social mobility and professionalization. Through an institutionally focused biographical method, Ackers argues that new questions may be asked of future research around careers and professions.

Sage (Chapter 16) looks at a trajectory of professionalization occurring within the domain of project management in the construction industry in the UK. However, this is used as an illustration of broader trends affecting a range of professional staff. Fundamentally, in contemporary ‘fast capitalism’, professional workers are experiencing a range of temporal pressures which are intensifying and fragmenting the experience of work, creating work–life balance problems, and inhibiting the development of coherent careers. Project-based organizing is suggested as being emblematic of this process, as this form of organizing is seen as helping to alleviate the inflexibility of traditional bureaucratic forms of organizing that are regarded as problematic. This chapter considers the extent to which the professionalization of project work can act as a brake to such pressures, considering not just the impact of project-based
temporal demands on professional workers, but also how the professionalization of project management may provide a means to modify or even resist these pressures. Sage also examines two discourses within the professionalization of project management (rational-normative and socially disciplined), and considers how they individually, and in tandem, can help to alleviate the temporal pressures that project management workers are experiencing.

REFERENCES


