PROFESSIONALISM : THEORETICAL CHANGES AND CHALLENGES

Julia Evetts
Emeritus Professor
Nottingham University
School of Sociology and Social Policy

For a long time, 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. Change is a constant feature of professional work but the speed and prominence of change is growing as increasingly professionals (such as doctors, nurses, teachers, social workers) now work in employing organizations; lawyers and accountants in large professional service firms (PSFs) and sometimes in international and commercial organizations; pharmacists in national (retailing) companies; and engineers, journalists, performing artists, the armed forces and police find occupational control of their work and discretionary decision-making increasingly difficult to sustain (Adler et al. 2008; Brante 2010; Champy 2011). How, then, are current changes affecting perceptions of professionalism, professional practice and learning?

There also have been a number of policy and societal developments and changes, and increased complexities in the contexts and environments for professions. This makes it necessary to look again at the theories and concepts used to explain and interpret this category of occupational work. Some long-established differences are becoming blurred. For example, there is no longer a clear differentiation between the public and the private sectors of professional employment. Private funding is now operational in public sector work places and PPP (public/private partnerships) (e.g. in schools, universities and hospitals) enables the promotion of new capital as well as other policy developments (Farrell and Morris 2003; Kuhlmann 2006).

Another complication and variation is the increased emphasis on and calls for professionalism in the voluntary sector, charities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Langer and Schröer eds, 2011). Wherever trust, transparency and accountability need to be demonstrated, then increased regulation, audit and assessment seem to follow (e.g. social work and aid agencies, national and international). In addition, there is wider accessibility to internet knowledge which renders the importance of professional and expert, tacit and experiential knowledge and expertise more open to challenge (Olofsson 2009; Verpraet 2009).

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 (Burrage and Torstendahl, eds, 1990a and b). 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 Evetts, ed, 2008; Orzack 1998). Again, the convergence of professional systems and of regulatory states has required the reconceptualization as well as new theoretical and interpretational developments in the sociology of professional occupational groups (Brint 2006; Noordegraaf 2007; Svensson and Evetts eds, 2003, 2010).

The paper begins with a section on the concept of professionalism, its history and current developments. Three phases will be identified: an early phase which defined professionalism as an occupational or normative value; a second negative phase of critique when professionalism was dismissed as ideological and promoted in the interests of professional practitioners themselves; the third phase which constitutes a reappraisal and a return to professionalism and combines both the ideological critique and the normative value interpretations of professionalism. In this third phase professionalism is defined as a discourse, used by managers in organizations, and reclaimed as an important and distinctively different way of organizing service sector work, which is in the best interests of

customers and clients as well as practitioner workers themselves. The paper continues with a second section on the current theoretical challenges in the sociology of professions and for the concept of professionalism. Professionalism, like professional work and learning, is changing and being changed particularly in the organizational contexts in which practitioners currently practice.

1. Professionalism : history and current developments

The concept of professionalism has a long history particularly in Anglo-American sociology. In Europe the concept has been less prominent until recently. The continental functional proximity between state government bureaucracies, public state universities and professions created a minority of free professions ('freire Berufen' and 'professions liberals') and favoured sociology of class and organization to the disadvantage of sociology of professions (Burrage and Torstendale 1990). The Anglo-American systems of less centralized state governments, private or at least relatively independent universities and free professions, on the other hand, created a majority of market-related professions and an elaborate and detailed sociology of professions, which has had strong impact worldwide.

When considering the history of the concept of professionalism, three phases can be identified: an early phase which defined professionalism as an occupational or normative value; a second negative phase of critique when professionalism was regarded as ideological and promoted in the interests of professional practitioners themselves; a third phase which combines both the ideological critique and the normative value interpretations of professionalism. These three phases are considered next.

1.1. Early phase : professionalism as a normative value

In early British sociological analysis, the key concept was 'professionalism' and the emphasis was on the importance of professionalism for the stability and civility of social systems (e.g. Tawney 1921; Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Marshall 1950). Tawney perceived professionalism as a force capable of subjecting rampant individualism to the needs of the community. Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) saw professionalism as a force for stability and freedom against the threat of encroaching industrial and governmental bureaucracies. Marshall (1950) emphasized altruism or the 'service' orientation of professionalism and how

professionalism might form a bulwark against threats to stable democratic processes. In these interpretations professionalism was regarded as an important and highly desirable occupational value and professional relations were characterized as collegial, co-operative and mutually supportive. Similarly, relations of trust characterized practitioner/client and practitioner/management interactions since competencies were assumed to be guaranteed by education, training and sometimes by licensing.

The early American sociological theorists of professions also developed similar interpretations and again the key concept was the occupational value of professionalism based on trust, competence, a strong occupational identity and co-operation. The best known, though perhaps most frequently mis-quoted, attempt to clarify the special characteristics of professionalism, its central values and its 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.

The work of Parsons has subsequently been subject to heavy criticism mainly because of its links with functionalism (Dingwall and Lewis 1983). However, the differences between professionalism and rational–legal, bureaucratic ways of organizing work have been examined in Freidson's (2001) analysis. He examined the logics of three different ways of organizing work in contemporary societies: (i) the market, (ii) organization and (iii) profession and illustrated the respective advantages and disadvantages of each for clients and practitioners. In this analysis he also demonstrated the continuing importance of maintaining professionalism (with some changes) as the main organizing principle for service sector work. Freidson does not use the term 'occupational value' and instead focused on the importance of knowledge and expertise, but he maintained that occupational control of the work (by practitioners themselves) is of real importance for the maintenance of

professionalism. Practitioner occupational control is important because the complexities of the work are such that only the practitioners can understand the organizational needs of the work, its processes, procedures, testing and outcomes. It is by means of extensive (and expensive) systems of work place training and socialization that new recruits develop the expertise to put theoretical knowledge into practice and to use and control the work systems and procedures.

This interpretation represents what might be termed the optimistic view of what professionalism and the process of professionalization of work entails. It is based on the principle that the work is of importance either to the public or to the interests of the state or an elite (Freidson 2001: 214). According to Freidson, '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' (2001: 34/5). Education, training and experience are fundamental requirements but once achieved (and sometimes licensed) then the exercise of discretion (i.e. discretionary decision-making rather than autonomy) based on competences is central and deserving of special status. The practitioners have special knowledge and skill and, because of complexity, it is often necessary to trust professionals' intentions. One consequence is that externally imposed rules (from states or organizations) governing the work are minimized and the exercise of discretionary decision-making and good judgment, often in highly complex situations and circumstances, and based on recognized competences is maximized.

It can also be argued that professionalism represents a distinctive form of decentralized occupational control and regulation which constitutes an important component of civil society. Professions create and maintain distinct professional values or moral obligations (e.g. codes of ethics), which restrain excessive competition by encouraging cooperation as well as practitioner pride and satisfaction in work performance – a form of individualized self-regulation. Indeed it could be argued that professional commitment (professionalism) has frequently covered for the various failures of statutory and organizational forms of work regulation. Where statutory and organizational forms have been seen to impoverish the quality of work, and increase the bureaucracy, professionalism can be defended as a uniquely desirable method of regulating, monitoring and providing complex services to the public (Freidson 2001).

1.2. Critical phase: professionalism as ideology

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. 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).

Critical attacks on professions in general as powerful, privileged, self-interested monopolies, that were prominent in the neo-Weberian research literature of the 1970s and 1980s, resulted in a general skepticism about the whole idea of professionalism as a normative value. Johnson, for example, dismissed professionalism as a successful ideology which had entered the political vocabulary of a wide range of occupational groups in their claims and competition for status and income (1972:32). More recently Davies (1996) has urged researchers to abandon claims to professionalism and instead to recognize the links between such claims and a specific historical and cultural construction of masculinity which fits uneasily with newer and more feminized professions.

During the 1970s and 1980s, when sociological analysis of professions was dominated by various forms of professionalism as ideology theorizing, one concept that became prominent was the 'professional project'. The concept was developed by Larson (1977) and included a detailed and scholarly historical account of the processes and developments whereby a distinct occupational group sought a monopoly in the market for its service, and status and upward mobility (collective as well as individual) in the social order. The idea of a professional project was developed in a different way by Abbott (1988) who examined the carving out and maintenance of a jurisdiction through competition and the requisite cultural and other work that was necessary to establish the legitimacy of the monopoly practice.

Larson's work is still frequently cited and MacDonald's textbook on professions (1995) continued to use and to support her analysis in his examination of the professional field of accountancy. The outcome of the successful professional project was a 'monopoly of competence legitimised by officially sanctioned "expertise", and a monopoly of credibility with the public' (Larson 1977:38). This interpretation has not gone unchallenged. Freidson (1982) preferred market 'shelters' to complete monopolies in professional service provision, which indicated the incomplete nature of most market closure projects. It is also the case that Larson's (1977) careful analysis has been oversimplified by enthusiastic supporters such that some researchers talk about the professional project, as if professions and professional associations do nothing else apart from protecting the market monopoly for their expertise.

Another version of the professionalism as ideology interpretation has been the notion of professions as powerful occupational groups, who not only closed markets and dominated and controlled other occupations in the field, but also could 'capture' states and negotiate 'regulative bargains' (Cooper *et al.* 1988) with states in the interests of their own practitioners. Again this was an aspect of theorizing about professions in Anglo-American societies which began in the 1970s (e.g. Johnson 1972) and which focused on medicine and law. It has been a particular feature of analysis of the medical profession (e.g. Larkin 1983) where researchers have interpreted relations between health professionals as an aspect of medical dominance as well as gender relations (e.g. Davies 1996).

Since the mid-1980s, the flaws in the more extreme versions of this professionalism as ideology view have become apparent. Annandale (1998) has queried aspects of medical dominance and has linked this with diversity, restratification and growing hierarchy within the medical profession itself – namely only some doctors can become dominant, along with some nurses and some midwives. More generally, it has turned out that radical governments could successfully challenge the professions. Professions do sometimes initiate projects and influence governments but, as often, professions are responding to external demands for change, which can be political, economic, cultural and social. This has resulted in a reappraisal of the historical evidence, which is still incomplete. One line of development has been the view that the demand-led theory of professionalization needs to be complemented

by an understanding of the supply side (Dingwall 1996). Instead of the question – How do professions capture states? – the central question should be – Why do states create professions, or at least permit professions to flourish? This has resulted in a renewed interest in professionalism as normative values interpretation, and in the historical evidence about the parallel processes of the creation of modern nation-states in the second half of the 19th century and of modern professions in the same period. It is suggested, for example, that professions might be one aspect of a state founded on liberal principles, one way of regulating certain spheres of economic life without developing an oppressive central bureaucracy. The work of the English sociologist Herbert Spencer has provided a useful starting point for this analysis (Dingwall and King 1995) and Dingwall (1996) takes this argument further by considering the need for social order in the rapidly developing global economies and international markets, and how professions might make a normative and value contribution in meeting this need.

In the 1990s researchers began to reassess the significance of professionalism and its positive (as well as negative) contributions both for customers and clients, as well as for social systems. This re-examination indicates a return to the professionalism as normative value system interpretation. One result of this return and re-appraisal is a more balanced assessment (Dingwall 2008; Evetts 2003; Fournier 1999). Thus, in addition to protecting their own market position through controlling the license to practice and protecting their elite positions, professionalism might also represent a distinctive form of decentralized occupational control which is important in civil society (Durkheim, see 1992). It has also been argued that the public interest and professional self-interest are not necessarily at opposite ends of a continuum and that the pursuit of self-interests may be compatible with advancing the public interest (Saks 1995). Professionalism might also work to create and represent distinct professional values or moral obligations which restrain excessive competition and encourage co-operation (Dingwall 1996).

The claim is now being made (for example, Freidson 1994, 2001) that professionalism is a unique form of occupational control of work which has distinct advantages over market, organizational and bureaucratic forms of control. In assessing the political, economic and ideological forces that are exerting enormous pressure on the professions today, Freidson (1994) has defended professionalism as a desirable way of providing complex, discretionary

services to the public. He argues that market-based or organizational and bureaucratic methods impoverish and standardize the quality of service to consumers and demotivates practitioners, and he goes on to suggest how the virtues of professionalism can be reinforced. Thus, professions might need to close markets in order to be able to endorse and guarantee the education, training, experience and tacit knowledge of licensed practitioners, but once achieved the profession might then be able to concentrate more fully on developing the service-orientated and performance-related aspects of their work (Evetts 1998; Halliday 1987). The process of occupational closure will also result in the monopoly supply of the expertise and the service, and probably also to privileged access to salary and status as well as to definitional and control rewards for practitioners. In respect of these privileges, it is necessary to remember the dual character of professions which include both the provision of a service (and the development of an autonomous form of governance) as well as the use of knowledge and power for economic gain and monopoly control (which pose a threat to civility). The pursuit of private interests is not always in opposition to the pursuit of the public interest, however, and indeed both can be developed simultaneously (Saks 1995).

Halliday (1987) also argued that the emphasis on market monopolies underestimated the breadth of professionalism, especially concerning professional influences on states and legislative bodies. For Halliday the closure of markets might only be an issue during the early stages of professional development. In his analysis of the Chicago Bar Association, the preoccupation with market dominance was confined to early developmental stages and, once completed, its importance declined. In the later phase of 'established professionalism' the professional projects are different and a broader range of work is undertaken. Indeed, he (1987:354) stated that 'if it can secure its occupational niche and protect its vital economic interests, then a profession's resources can be freed from market concerns for other causes'.

In general, then, some recent Anglo-American analyses of professions have involved the re-interpretation of the concept of professionalism as a normative value system in the socialization of new workers, in the preservation and predictability of normative social order in work and occupations, and in the maintenance and stability of a fragile normative order in state and increasingly international markets. This current interpretation has built on earlier (perhaps less critical) analyses but the result is now a more balanced and cautious reappraisal. There is due recognition, for example, of the power and self-interests of some

professional groups in wanting to preserve and indeed promote professionalism as normative value system. This current interpretation of professionalism as value system involves a re-evaluation of the importance of trust in client/practitioner relations (Karpik 1989), of discretion (Hawkins ed. 1992) as well as analysis of risk (Grelon 1996) and expert judgement (Milburn 1998; Trépos 1996). It also includes a reassessment of quality of service and of professional performance in the best interests of both customers (in order to avoid further standardization of service provision) and practitioners (in order to protect discretion in service work decision-making) (Freidson 1994).

1.3. Third phase: professionalism as a discourse

A third 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 is a combination of the previous two and includes both occupational value and ideological elements. Fournier (1999) considered the appeal to 'professionalism' as a disciplinary mechanism in new occupational contexts. She suggested how the use of the discourse of professionalism, in a large privatized service company of managerial labour, worked to inculcate 'appropriate' work identities, conducts and practices. She considered this to be 'a disciplinary logic which inscribes "autonomous" professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance' (1999: 280).

It is also the case that the use of the discourse of professionalism varies between different occupational groups. It is possible to use McClelland's categorization (1990: 170) to differentiate between professionalization 'from within' (that is, successful manipulation of the market by the group e.g. medicine and law) and 'from above' (that is, domination of forces external to the group e.g. engineering and social work). In this interpretation, where the appeal to professionalism is made and used by the occupational group itself, 'from within', then the returns to the group (in terms of salary, status and authority) 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 bargaining with states to secure and maintain its (sometimes self) regulatory responsibilities. In these instances 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 (e.g. medicine).

In the case of most contemporary public service occupations and professionals now practicing in organizations, however, professionalism is being constructed and imposed 'from above' and for the most part this means by the employers and managers of the public service organizations in which these 'professionals' work. Here the discourse (of dedicated service and autonomous decision making) is part of the appeal (or the ideology) of professionalism. This idea of service and autonomy are what make professionalism attractive to aspiring occupational groups. When the discourse is constructed 'from above', then often it is imposed and a false or selective discourse, because autonomy and occupational control of the work are seldom included. Rather, the 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 (e.g. aspiring caring occupations). 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 20th century (e.g. social work and social care occupations throughout Europe and North America).

However, the realities of professionalism 'from above' are very different. The effects are not the occupational control of the work by the worker/practitioners. Instead the emphasis is control by the organizational managers and supervisors (e.g. health and social care work). Organizational objectives, which are sometimes political, define practitioner/client relations, set achievement targets and performance indicators. In these ways organizational objectives regulate and replace occupational control of the practitioner/client work interactions, thereby limiting the exercise of discretionary decision-making, and preventing the service ethic that has been so important in professional work. Organizational professionalism is clearly of relevance to the forms of public management currently being developed in the UK, Europe, North America and more widely, in educational institutions (schools and universities), hospitals and primary care practices.

The appeal to professionalism can and has been interpreted as a powerful motivating force of control 'at a distance' (Burchell *et al.* 1991; Miller and Rose 1990). It is also effective at the micro level where essentially it is a form of inner-directed control or self-control where close managerial supervision is not required – professional workers do not need supervisors. Organizational professionalism will be achieved through increased occupational training and the certification of the workers/employees – a process labelled as credentialism by Collins (1979, 1981). In these cases the appeal to professionalism is a powerful mechanism for promoting occupational change and social control.

But the appeal to the discourse by managers in work organizations is to a myth or an ideology of professionalism (Evetts 2003). The myth includes aspects such as exclusive ownership of an area of expertise, increased status and salary, autonomy and discretion in work practices and the occupational control of the work. The reality of the professionalism is actually very different. The appeal to professionalism by managers most often includes (i) the substitution of organizational for professional values; (ii) bureaucratic, hierarchical and managerial controls rather than collegial relations; (iii) managerial and organizational objectives rather than client trust and autonomy based on competencies and expertise; (iv) budgetary restrictions and financial rationalizations; (v) the standardization of work practices rather than discretion; and (vi) performance targets, accountability and sometimes increased political control.

The use of the discourse of professionalism as operationalized by managers in work organizations is also a discourse of self-control which enables self-motivation and sometimes even self-exploitation. Born (1995) illustrates this process in the work context of French professional music practice and it is present more generally in the work culture of artists, actors and musicians in general. Once self-defined as a professional artist, imposing time or other limits on one's efforts are rendered illegitimate. This is also the case with professionals in general. The expectations by self and others of the professional have no limits. For the professional, of all kinds, the needs and demands of audiences, patients, clients, students and children become paramount. Professionals are expected and expect themselves to be committed, even to be morally involved in the work. Hence managers in organizations can

use the discourse of professionalism to self-motivate, inner-direct and sometimes to exploit professionals in the organization.

The analysis of professionalism has, then, involved different interpretations – sometimes positive, sometimes negative, and in the latest interpretation combined – of what the professionalization of an occupational group entails. The characteristics of 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 19th century. The image was of the doctor, lawyer and clergyman, who were independent gentlemen, and could be trusted as a result of their competence and experience to provide altruistic advice within a community of mutually dependent middle and upper class clients. The legacy of this image, whether in fact or fiction, has provided a powerful incentive for many aspiring occupational groups throughout the 20th 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 a number of different aspects. Some might never have been operational; some might have been operational for short periods in a limited number of occupational groups. The range of 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 (probably 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;

    and

- 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 which makes it necessary to look again at the theories and interpretations we are using. The next section considers some of the current theoretical challenges in the field of sociology of professions.

2. Current theoretical challenges

The sociology of professions has important links to sociologies of work (from which it originated) and organizations as well as to other specialist fields such as education, health, law and the armed forces. All fields face theoretical challenges as contexts and conditions, macro and meso, are constantly changing. One such challenge for the sociology of professions is globalization because theories of professions have been mostly confined to explanations and interpretations within nation-states. An exception is Faulconbridge and Muzio (2011) who have suggested how sociology of professions might become transnational. However, their paper focused on neo-Weberian and ideological theorizing only. It is also important to focus on the occupational and normative value aspects of professionalism, on the functional role of professional projects, on professional strategies and tactics as professionalism tries to co-exist with powerful supra-national actors, agencies and institutions.

An additional challenge, or perhaps a part of the same transnational requirement, is the need to reconnect theorizing on professionalism and professional occupations with professional organizations (see Muzio and Kirkpatrick, eds, 2011). Burrage and Torstandahl (1990)

identified four key actors in the development of professions – practitioners, users, states and universities – but now it is increasingly important, in all societies and transnationally, to add a fifth which is the role of the employing organization. Most professional work now takes place in organizations, both publically managed services or large international private sector firms and corporations. It might even be the case that professionalism is no longer a distinctive 'third' logic (Freidson 2001) since the exercise of professionalism is now organizationally defined and includes the logics of the organization, the market and enterprise.

The analysis of professionalism as a discourse, which includes both normative and occupational value as well as ideological aspects, still constitutes a theoretical challenge. It is also an opportunity, however, because such an analysis could meet the global need as well as the requirement to reconnect professional occupations and professional organizations. One way of analysing the concept of professionalism globally is to ask how the balance between the normative and ideological control elements of professionalism is played out differently in the various service and knowledge-based occupational groups with very different employment situations in different societies. In considering this aspect, it can be argued that the Anglo-American over-emphasis on medicine and law as the archetypal professional groups has been largely unhelpful. One consequence has been that Anglo-American social scientists have developed a distorted view of the power of a limited number of occupational groups to influence states, demand and retain regulatory powers from those states, and control (through monopoly practices) the markets for their knowledge and services. For other occupational groups (such as engineers, teachers and health workers), however, the ideology has worked, and has been working in other ways. See also Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011) on the need to reconnect the sociologies of professions and organizations.

In general, then, a focus on (previously) powerful occupational groups has deflected attention away from analysis of occupations which generally have been less successful in using the ideology in their own interests (such as engineers and teachers) see Evetts and Jefferies, 2005 on engineers and Gewirtz et. al. 2009 on teachers. Indeed, it has handicapped and prevented discussion of how and why so many new service and knowledge-based occupational groups are attracted to the normative aspects of the ideological appeal.

It is, however, this willingness by states to concede professional powers and regulatory responsibilities, and for occupational groups to construct and demand professionalism 'from within' that is now almost universally in question. The consequence of this is still diversity in the balance of normative values and ideological control aspects of professionalism between different occupational groups - although this diversity might be reducing. The legal profession now (in contrast to medicine) is perhaps the best example of an occupational group in a relatively privileged normative position and still able to construct professionalism 'from within' (Olgiati, 1998). There are however numerous occupational groups within the profession of law and groups can be categorized as social service, or as entrepreneurial (Hanlon, 1999). In general, groups which are publicly funded compared with commercial practices are occupations where the ideological control elements are stronger than the normative (Milburn, 1998; Schepers, 1998; Speranza 1998).

The medical professions are similarly highly stratified and differentially powerful in the sense of being able to construct and demand professionalism 'from within' (Annandale, 1998; Witz, 1992). It is also interesting to observe that the professional groups who are becoming powerful in international markets (for example some accountancy and legal professions) might be different from the occupational groups who have been powerful at state levels in the sense of constructing and demanding professionalism 'from within' (Cooper and Robson, 2006; Flood, 2011; Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006; Grey, 1998).

In order to be able to analyze and discuss these occupational shifts and changes at state and international levels, however, it is necessary to be able to assess, evaluate and compare the balances between normative and ideological control elements of different occupational groups both historically (over time) and comparatively (between groups and in different social systems). In many of the new occupational contexts, where professionalism is being imposed 'from above' the normative value of the concept of professionalism is being used as an ideological instrument and a mechanism to promote and facilitate occupational change. In effect, professionalism is being used to convince, cajole and persuade employees, practitioners and other workers to perform and behave in ways which the organization or institution deem to be appropriate, effective and efficient. And 'professional' workers are very keen to grasp and lay claim to the normative values of professionalism.

The meaning of professionalism is not fixed, however, and sociological analysis of the concept has demonstrated changes over time both in its interpretation and function. All of these different interpretations are now needed in order to understand the appeal of professionalism in new and old occupations, and how the concept is being used to promote and facilitate occupational change.

The different balances between normative values and ideological control aspects in occupational groups, and the differences between professionalism constructed and operationalized 'from within' or 'from above' can help to explain the wider and more general appeal and attraction of professionalism. These different balances between occupational groups can also be applied in other societies and parts of the world where issues to do with the closure of markets or the 'capture' and manipulation of states never occurred. Thus Freidson's analysis (2001) of professionalism as the third logic - namely control and order of the work and workers by the occupation rather than by the logics of the market or the organization – warrants further elaboration. Control continues to be by normative and ideological means but the balances vary between different occupational groups and are critically dependent on where professionalism is constructed and operationalized.

It is precisely the highly contested nature of the meaning of professionalism which according to Fournier (1999) makes professionalism as an ideological mechanism such an imperfect form of governance. For all occupational groups this leaves space for professional institutions (where they exist) and for professional workers to act as a countervailing force against organizational as well as political and state bureaucracies of ideological control. This entails that professionalism as both normative value system and ideology of control need to continue to be contested and challenged in new and old occupational contexts.

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Abstracts :

Change is a constant feature of professional work but the speed and prominence of change is growing as professionals now work increasingly in professional organizations. How are current changes affecting professionalism, perceptions of professionalism and its realisation in organizational contexts? The paper begins with a section on the concept of professionalism, its history and current developments.Three phases are identified: professionalism as a normative and occupational value; as an ideology; and as a discourse used increasingly by managers in organizations. The paper continues with a second section on current theoretical challenges in the sociology of professions and for the concept of professionalism.

Key Words :

Professionalism – organization – professional work – Social Control – Occupational change

Résumé :

Le changement est une constante de l'activité professionnelle, mais de nos jours la diffusion et l'importance de ces changements augmentent à mesure que les professionnels travaillent de plus en plus dans des organisations en tant que salariés. Comment ces changements actuels affectent le professionnalisme, les perceptions du professionnalisme et ses réalisations dans des contextes organisationnels ? Premièrement, cet article présente le concept de professionnalisme, son histoire et ses développements actuels. Trois phases sont identifiées : le professionnalisme comme valeur normative et professionnelle ; comme idéologie ; comme discours utilisé de plus en plus par le management dans les organisations. Deuxièmement, l'article traite des enjeux théoriques actuels de la sociologie des professions et du concept de professionnalisme.

Mots clés :

Professionnalisme – Organisation – Travail professionnel – Contrôle social – Changement professionnel