Organizational Professionalism: changes, challenges and opportunities

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Paper Summary

Section 1 : professionalism as an occupational value;

how professionalism is changing and being changed;

organizational and occupational professionalism

Section 2 : changes and continuities

Section 3 : challenges to professionalism as a 'third logic'

Section 4 : opportunities for professions and professional workers in organizations

Professionalism as an Occupational Value

Long history but interpretations have changed over time.

1. Positive interpretations (Tawney 1921; Carr-Saunders and Wilson 1933; Marshall 1950; Parsons 1939; later Freidson 2001)

2. Negative and critical interpretations (Johnson 1972; Larson 1977; Larkin 1983; Abbott 1988; early Freidson 1970)

3. Positive and negative; professionalism as a discourse used by managers in organizations; a value which is ideological (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2003)

Ideological Aspects of Professionalism as an Occupational Value

1. Occupational control of the work (Freidson)

2. Professional institutions/associations control the work

3. Collegial authority, legitimacy, mutual support and cooperation

4. Common, lengthy, (expensive) periods of shared education, training, apprenticeship

5. Strong occupational identities and work cultures

6. Importance and significance of the work

7. Discretionary judgement, assessment, evaluation and decision-making

8. Trust and confidence between practitioner/client, practitioner/employer and fellow practitioners

Two different forms of professionalism in knowledge-based work

Organizational professionalism

- discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations

- rational-legal forms of authority

- standardized procedures

- hierarchical structures of authority and decision-making

- managerialism

- accountability and externalized forms of regulation, target-setting and performance review

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- linked to Weberian models of organization

Occupational professionalism

- discourse constructed within professional groups

- collegial authority

- discretion and occupational control of the work

- practitioner trust by both clients and employers

- controls operationalized by practitioners

- professional ethics monitored by institutions and associations

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- located in Durkheim's model of occupations as moral communities

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

Professionalism in Organizations : risks

- threats to the 'third logic' (Freidson) and to professionalism as a distinctive and different mode of work and practitioner control (particularly in public sector service work)

- difficult to define and standardize the nature of the work process

- difficult to define the outputs of the work (and what constitutes success)

- unintended consequences (e.g. imposition of targets in teaching, the police and medical work)
  - prioritization of target achievement
  - neglect of other less-measurable tasks and responsibilities

- professional service work defined as service products to be marketed, priced-tagged, evaluated and remunerated; it is, in that sense, commodified

- clients become customers

- organization defines the priorities, not the profession

Professionalism in Organizations : opportunities

- incorporation of Human Resource Management (HRM) from the organization into professional employment practices, processes, procedures (e.g. job contracts, interviews and selection, rights and benefits, family-friendly policies, career advancement procedures, appeals)

- management (from the organization) used by practitioners (as career strategy) and by professional associations (to improve the status and respect of an occupation and its standing)

- organizations as sites for (and objects of) professional control and domination

- jurisdictional disputes and negotiations (Abbott 1988) but this time played out within organizations rather than in the wider arena of labour markets and education systems.