Emerging Professions

Introduction

This article looks at the processes of becoming a profession, the need to balance autonomy and accountability, and the critical role of trust in an emerging profession.

The unique characteristics of the new professions are examined, the tensions between professional and managerial roles, and the frontiers of the multiplying emerging professions.

Becoming a Profession

The historical professions of medicine and law were joined over the last century by newer professions such as engineering and accounting. These have endeavoured to achieve similar standards of trust, unique capability and autonomy. However, in more recent decades the technological transformation towards a knowledge economy has encouraged the formation of a vast number of occupations that have aspired towards professional status. As noted in the article on Professionalisation, there is an occupational continuum ranging from well-founded professions to occupations that exhibit significant professional characteristics but require further development in some qualities of professionalism. Finally, there are a great number of occupations that aspire towards becoming professions but are engaged in a lengthy process of building the foundations of professionalism.

In the past, there has been some scepticism about occupational claims for professional status.[1] For example, Greenwood[2] and Wilensky[3] argued that professional work required:

- A long and expensive education and training to acquire the necessary knowledge and expertise;
- Professionals to perform a public service and be autonomous;
- Professionals be guided in their decision-making by a professional ethic or code of conduct;
- Professionals to be in special relations of trust with clients as well as with their managers/employers; and
- Professionals were altruistic and motivated by universalistic values.

In the absence of such characteristics, the label 'occupation' was deemed to be more appropriate and for occupations having some but not all the characteristics the term 'semi-profession' was suggested.[4] However this 'trait' or 'static' approach to defining professions has largely been displaced. Instead there is now a more 'process' focused view of the formation of professions (and more critically a socio-economic view that focuses upon the interests of those negotiating activities in the marketplace of the professions).

[1] Julia Evetts, *Trust and Professionalism: Challenges and Occupational Change* (2006) 54 Current Sociology 515, 519.
[2] Ernest Greenwood, *The Attributes of a Profession* (1957) 2 Social Work 44.
[3] Harold Wilensky, *The Professionalization of Everyone?* (1964) 70 American Journal of Sociology 137.
[4] Amitai Etzioni, *The Semi-Professionals and their Organization: Teachers, Nurses and Social Workers* (Free Press, 1969).

Another typology of becoming a profession similarly distinguishes an attribute, process and power model. The attribute model helps identify the skills necessary to determine a profession; the process model is a guide for the profession through the different stages necessary to complete in order to warrant full professional status; and finally, the power model demonstrates how a profession claims the right to supply goods and services because of higher qualification, skills and training.[5]

The Process of Becoming a Profession

From the process perspective, the distinction between occupations and full professions remains fluid and changing. Occupations begin the work of changing themselves into professions by developing more rigorous formal qualifications with significant elements of education and training. This is followed by examination and the setting up of regulatory bodies with the power to admit members, to discipline them, and to some degree maintain a monopoly. This monopoly control is in certain aspects of the chosen occupation for their members, leading to professional-entry qualifications in emerging professions (Figure 1). With the extensive growth of the professions it is also clear that the essential nature and practice of professions is also changing fundamentally over time. This is in response to demands for greater accountability and more exacting and transparent performance measures.

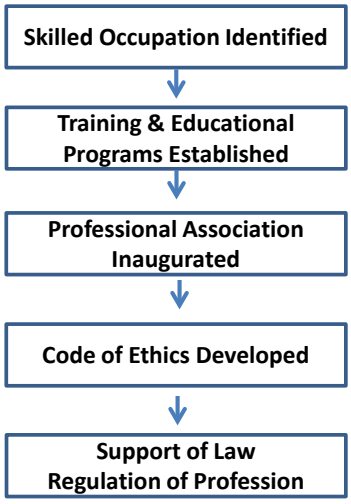
The process of becoming a profession has been formulated in three elements by Bourdieu,[6] and McEwen and Trede.[7] The formation of peak bodies at the national level is the first element. These professional bodies take responsibility for the development of the professional infrastructure. This includes regulation of membership, policy and practices, together with the framing of training and educational courses accredited to appropriate levels. With these professional bodies, the members strive to regulate, through codes of conduct and standards, the services and products traded within the professional practice and ensure they are of the requisite value. These efforts to regulate the emerging profession contribute to the recognition of the profession, and attract institutional support and resources from government and the wider community which help in establishing recognised professional status.

A second vital element in institutionalising the profession is in the building and maintaining of close working relationships between the professional bodies and the relevant national government funding and advisory bodies. Given the inevitability of government involvement in the regulation of all professions, maintaining a close and influential relationship with government is a means of ensuring a common interest in the work of the profession. These interests extend beyond setting standards of practice to wider concerns of governments to maintain an agenda of consumer protection, competition, social equity and the wider public interest.

[5] National Initiative for Cybersecurity Education, *A Historical Review of How Occupations Become Professions*: White Paper (2012).
[6] Pierre Bourdieu, *La Distinction: Critique Sociale du Jugement* (Éditions de Minuit, 1979).
[7] Celina McEwen and Franziska Trede, *The Academisation of Emerging Professions: Implications for Universities, Academics and Students* (2014) 6 Power and Education 2.

A third element of the formation of a profession is to raise the standards of induction into the field of practice with intending professionals reaching given competency standards. This involves more developed induction, involving higher standards of education and training. This is in order for the members of the profession to conduct their work to the highest standards. This is needed for the profession to gain the legitimacy and prestige necessary to maintain public esteem. As the historical gatekeepers of the established professions, the universities are the ultimate portal towards an occupation fully achieving professional recognition.[8] The introduction of taught courses as a route to professional status in universities is a demanding task. It often encounters the tension between the instrumentalism of the profession, and the intellectual and critical orientations of the university.[9]

Figure 1: The Process Model of Becoming a Profession



Balancing Autonomy and Accountability

The constant tension between the professions' demand for autonomy and the wider claims for accountability from government and the market are illustrated in Figure 2. Any emerging profession has to safely navigate these tensions.[10] The classical professions insisted on considerable autonomy in the conduct of their work. They claimed a monopoly of the esoteric knowledge required to perform their work. Increasingly this view has been challenged by the state insisting on regulatory frameworks to assure accountability and high performance. This call for greater accountability is often supported by wider stakeholders including related institutions, employers and clients or patients.

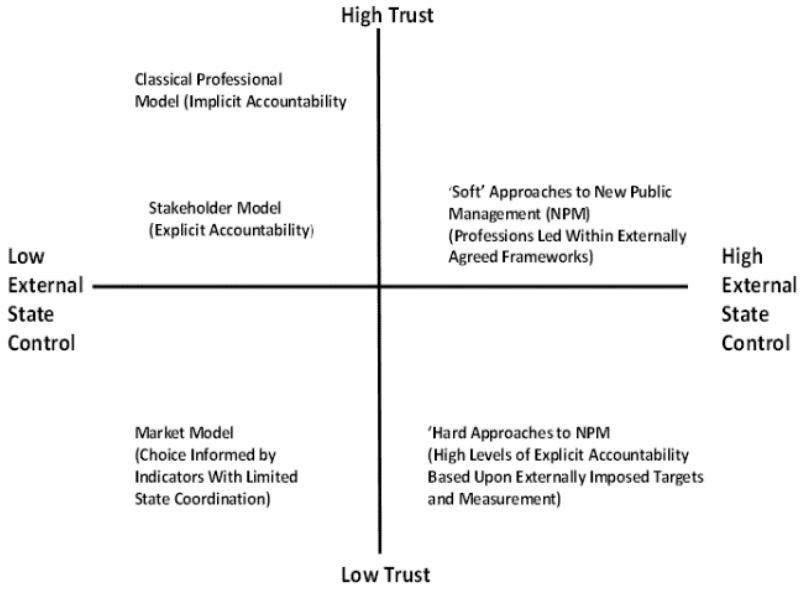
[8] Andrew Norton, *Mapping Australian Higher Education* (Report No. 2012-1, Grattan Institute, Melbourne, 2012).
[9] Kerry Mahony, 'The Politics of Professionalisation: Some Implications for the Occupation of Ambulance Paramedics in Australia' (2003) 1 *Journal of Emergency Primary Health Care* 1; Ronald Barnett, *Being a University* (Routledge, 2011); Zygmunt Bauman, 'Education in Liquid Modernity' (2005) 27 *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* 303; McEwen and Trede, above n 7.
[10] Rosemary Rowe and Michael Calnan, 'Trust Relations in Health Care: Developing a Theoretical Framework for the "New" NHS' (2006) 20 *Journal of Health Organization and Management* 376.

One solution to these dilemmas of professional accountability is to move away from the idea of the autonomy of the profession and apply much higher levels of explicit accountability with externally imposed targets, measurement and regulation of reward. This has occurred increasingly in large areas of government where the state has responsibility for major funding including professional areas of health and education.

Another solution to these dilemmas is to provide professional services in competitive markets where choice is reinforced by freedom of competition with less direct state coordination. Where professions work largely within the public sector as in the health, social services and education sectors the autonomy and status of these professions has been influenced mainly by relations with the state. In contrast, professions working primarily in the private sector, such as law and accounting, are shaped much more by market institutions and pressures.[11] However, a recurring issue with both high levels of state intervention and free market provision of services is a loss of public trust. This loss in the integrity of professions is either because they are disciplined by priorities set by the state or because they pursue market opportunities rather than client interests.

There has been a paradigm shift towards a new regulatory regime for many professions. High levels of integrity and the resulting trust were assumed implicitly in earlier times. But with new governance and regulatory arrangements professionals have to demonstrate why trust in them is justified. An example is the publication of performance data, for example, in the health sector where medical auditing prevails. This involves a realignment of the comparative weight given to institutional logics of professionalism and managerialism.[12]

Figure 2: Governance Models of Professions: Balancing Trust and State Control



Source: Adapted from Rowe and Calnan, (2006:381)

[11] Mike Dent et al, *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism* (Routledge, 2016) 12.
[12] Mike Dent et al, *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism*.

Trust in the Emerging Professions

There is a paradox in that as occupations aspiring to the professions continue to grow in scale and multiply in number, there are increasing public doubts concerning the integrity and trustworthiness of the established professions. The difference between similar doubts regarding occupations and the concerns levelled at professionals is that the professions are founded on trust – the principle that they will act in the interests of their clients with diligence and impartiality.

Yet successive surveys demonstrate falling trust in the professions. For example, a recent survey (Table 1) in Australia by Essential Report indicated bankers and lawyers are facing precipitous falls in public trust (only exceeded by the reputation of journalists, real estate agents and politicians).[13] The medical profession appears to be holding on to their reputation, however only a minority of people express 'a lot of trust' in doctors.[14]

Whatever methodological deficiencies there are in public surveys, and considering that the general public is better educated and more sceptical than in the past, there remains cause for concern regarding the reputation of the professions. While the demands for accountability are partly intended to restore public trust in the professions, the evidence revealed through greater accountability can itself raise concerns. Indeed, some of the past confidence in the professions may have rested on the lack of knowledge on the part of trusting clients. However, it does appear that both the established professions and the aspiring occupations have substantial work to do to maintain public trust in their competence and integrity.

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[13] Essential Vision, *Essential Report: Trust in Professions* (16 June 2015) <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/trust-in-professions> (accessed on 31 July 2017).
[14] Essential Vision, *Essential Report: Trust in Professions*.

Table 1: Public Trust in the Professions

	Total a lot /some trust		A lot of trust	Some trust	A little trust	No trust	Don't know
Doctors	81%		39%	42%	14%	2%	4%
Engineers	68%		23%	45%	20%	3%	10%
Accountants	49%		8%	41%	34%	9%	8%
Lawyers	34%		5%	29%	37%	21%	8%
Bankers	29%		2%	27%	41%	25%	6%
Journalists	27%		2%	25%	41%	26%	6%
Real estate agents	12%		1%	11%	38%	44%	7%
Politicians	11%		1%	10%	33%	49%	6%

Source: Essential Vision, *Essential Report: Trust in Professions* (16 June 2015) <http://www.essentialvision.com.au/trust-in-professions> (accessed on 31 July 2017).

The Character of the New Professions

It is widely accepted that the traditional professions such as medicine and law have been joined by many new professions. But while the new professions have some characteristics of the established professions, they often appear different in character and sometimes in purpose. Dent et al examine the complex realities of what occupations identified as new professions are:

> The evidence and debates currently point to the newer expert occupations being identified as professions alongside the older ones, but not as professions as we have previously known them. To explain, Reed[15] for example, has identified financial and business consultants, project/R&D engineers and computer/IT analysts as examples of this expert group, which he refers to as entrepreneurial professions.[16] This is, in part, because their control strategy is a market-based one. Others include Muzio and colleagues prefer the term expert occupations to apply to this group of occupations characterised as having 'no mandatory (professional) membership or official credentials'.[17] Meanwhile the older professions, particularly law and accountancy, have not remained unchanged, for they too have adapted to the conditions of late modernity[18] increasingly becoming international, global businesses.[19]

[15] Michael Reed, 'Expert Power and Control in Late Modernity: An Empirical Review and Theoretical Synthesis' (1996) 17 *Organisational Studies* 563, 586.
[16] Michael Reed, 'Expert Power and Control in Late Modernity'.
[17] Daniel Muzio, Stephen Ackroyd and Jean-Francois Chanlat, 'Introduction: Lawyers, Doctors and Business Consultants', *Redirections in the Study of Expert Labour: Established Professions and New Expert Occupations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 1, 5.
[18] Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Polity Press, 1990); Michael Reed, 'Expert Power and Control in Late Modernity: An Empirical Review and Theoretical Synthesis' (1996) 17 Organizational Studies 573.
[19] Mike Dent et al, *The Routledge Companion to the Professions and Professionalism*, 9.

The Frontiers of the Emerging Professions

In a new technology driven age of entrepreneurship it is also the case that professionals can use their expert knowledge as entrepreneurs. They can do this engaged in innovation in technology, products and markets, particularly in the information technology and services sector. Examining one list of emerging professionals compiled by the University of California, the title of 'analyst' appears in five out of the 10 occupations and 'software developers' is at the top of the list (Table 2). Mary Walshok, the Associate Vice Chancellor of public programs and Dean of UC San Diego Extension, said:

> As Marc Andreessen recently opined, 'Software is eating the world.' That fact is true in almost every top emerging career whether it be health care or marketing or financial analysis. It's not enough to just know the fundamentals; you have to use technology to provide new insights.

This view should be taken in the context that California is the epicentre of the digital transformation of the global economy; however, it is likely that throughout the world this increasing shift towards the digitalisation of many professions and occupations is taking place.

Table 2: Emerging Careers in the United States

1. Software developers, applications
2. Accountants and auditors
3. Computer systems analysts
4. Medical and health service managers
5. Sales representatives, wholesale and manufacturing, technical and scientific products
6. Management analysts
7. Market research analysts and marketing specialists
8. Financial analysts
9. Information security analysts
10. Civil engineers.

Source: PR Newswire, 'UC San Diego Extension Reveals Emerging Careers for 2016' (22 March 2016) <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/uc-san-diego-extension-reveals-emerging-careers-for-2016-300239414.html>.

The challenge will be as these data and technology driven occupations proliferate in the economy whether they are able to the characteristics of accountability and ethics to their evident skill in the technical aspects of their work.

Summary

This part examines the process of becoming a profession and the tensions in balancing autonomy and accountability.

The differences in the institutional logics of professionalism and managerialism are considered and the implications for trust in the professions.

The changing character of the new professions is examined and how the new professions are developing.

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This subject overview has been written with the support of the following partners: