

(Re)organizing Professional Work: the Power of the process

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In recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of studies focusing on professionals, professional work and professional services, not only in Anglo-Saxon countries, but also in continental Europe and other parts of the world. This both reflects and feeds attempts to develop new forms of professionalism and professional organization in both the private and the public sector. In particular the last 20 years or so have witnessed some radical changes to the structure and labour process of a number of professions whilst professionals themselves have been agents of broader patterns of economic and institutional change participating to the re-regulation of key institutions and practices within the political economy. However, scholarly work on the professions currently suffers from a number of shortcomings.

Theoretical approaches and research on the professions are often unconnected. Attempts to understand the professions as social groups or occupations, for example, make little reference to studies of the organizational aspects of professionalism. Insights on professional education, to name another example, are unconnected to understandings of managerial changes inside service organizations. Similarly, research focusing on the innovative capacity of professions and more broadly on the management of professional organizations has not always paid sufficient attention to the institutional underpinnings of professional work. Labour process analysts have, so far, been as guilty of this as many others. To the extent that they have analysed professional services at all, they have tended to make the professional labour process the exclusive concern and they have focused on one professional service at a time.

Key assumptions made about the professions can be accused of having certain 'mythical' aspects. There is a tendency, for example, to draw upon classic notions such as autonomy, control and power (coming from classical studies on professionalism and/or traditional labour process analyses). Yet these notions are rather sterile and outdated when applied to changing professional work in contemporary organisations. Indeed, much of the literature is characterised by a strong sense of nostalgia and a bias either against organizations and managers (who undermine professional freedom), or against irresponsible professionals who have too much autonomy.

In this stream we would like to encourage submissions of and to discuss papers that adopt different approaches. Specifically our aim is to draw connections between different theoretical perspectives and bodies of thought in order to stimulate an enhanced and more nuanced empirically grounded understanding of present-day professional work, and the restructuring of professional work within the broader political economy, as well as papers reflective on the understandings we have about how we analyze professional work.

We especially favour papers that focus on *processes* of change in the professions over time. By this we do not mean we simply wish to see more papers that discover (or discover more about) the professional labour process in different services, but papers which uncover new processes and make links with labour process ideas or other existing knowledge across theoretical and disciplinary boundaries. The main aim is to encourage papers which analyze how professional work is changing, and how professional relations, practices, power structures and boundaries are in the process of being reconfigured and for what reasons. By focusing on processes, the analysis of professional work and its implications for practices might itself become more adequate and influential.

Research themes

More specifically, papers might focus on the following research themes:

- Developments in the labour process of professional firms and organizations
- The organizational re-stratification of professional work
- Accountability and control in/around professional work
- New boundaries in organizational and professional domains
- Relations between professionals and managers
- Changing ideologies and discourses of professional practice
- Conflicting professional loyalties and identities
- Professional teams and cooperation
- Professional education and implications for professional work
- Client and media pressures on professional work
- The role of professionals and professional organizations in broader economic practices and processes

The Conference:

The Annual International Labour Process Conference is a leading conference on work and employment. It brings together academics and policy makers from the sociology of work and employment, labour studies, business and management, human resource management, industrial relations, organization studies and a range of other disciplines. Selections of conference papers are published in edited books, with twenty now published. Abstracts for the stream should be between 350-500 words and can be either theoretical and/or empirical. Abstract contents should enable the referees to determine what issue, development or problem is being investigated, how it is investigated, what the findings are and what contribution is being made to knowledge and understanding in the field.

ILPC2010 Conference Organizers:

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For questions about the conference please contact: ilpc2011@ilpc.org.uk. Further information can be found at: <http://www.ilpc.org.uk/Portals/56/ilpc2011-docs/ilpc2011-callforpapers.pdf>
Please submit abstracts to www.ilpc.org.uk by October 31st, 2010