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Relations between Professions and Organizations: More Fully Considering the Role of the Client

Abstract: In much of the literature exploring the relations between professions and organizations, the relationship tends to be depicted as, or otherwise assumed to be in opposition. What this depiction conceals is a more complex and sometimes symbiotic relationship that can exist between professions and organizations. Still lacking in this more nuanced perspective, however, is an explicit acknowledgement of the influential role that clients of professions and organizations play in this relationship. In this paper we make the case for a more explicit and dynamic conceptualisation of the relationship between professions, organizations and clients based on a review of the classic and contemporary literature. Part of our goal is to more adequately address the inter-relationship between professionals and organizations by unpacking organizations, by highlighting the unique position of professions within organizations, and the different influences that clients can have on the orientation of professions within organizations.

Keywords: professions; organizations; clients; relationships

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In much of the literature exploring professions'[1] work within organizations, the relationship tends to be depicted as, or otherwise assumed to be in opposition. Specifically, a profession's autonomy and status as a profession are considered limited when employed within an organization (Etzioni 1969, Evetts 2004, Roberts & Donahue 2000, Wilensky 1964). This is true of much of the classic literature on the professions and is a theme that was renewed in the late 1970s by neo-Marxist scholars of the labour process in their descriptions of de-professionalization and proletarianization (e.g., Barley & Tolbert 1991). What this position conceals is a more complex and often symbiotic relationship that exists between professions and organizations. For example, some professions evolve out of organizations (Larson 1977) and many organizations require the services of professionals to carry out their mandate (Waters 1989). Professions can also help organizations respond to and/or adapt to institutional change (DiMaggio & Powell 1991). The case for this more symbiotic relationship between professions and organization is not new as several studies – both classic (Hall 1968) and contemporary (Barley & Tolbert 1991, Montgomery 1997) – have noted this to be the case, but many of these insights have tended to be eclipsed by the more antagonistic perspective in the literature.

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[1] We refer to professions as a privileged category of workers with special social arrangements that are not available to the general population (Waters 1989).

Still lacking in this more nuanced position, however, is an explicit acknowledgement and discussion of the role that clients of professions and organizations play in this relationship. This is true of both the professions and the organizations literatures. This is surprising in light of the potential contribution that a critical examination of clients could provide to our overall understanding of the work of professions within organizations, of organizations that employ professions, and how each responds to broader institutional change. Better understanding the role clients play is particularly critical in assessing the work of professions within service organizations where clients are directly involved in their mandate.

In this paper we make the case for a more explicit consideration of clients in the dynamic relationship between professions and organizations in a continually shifting institutional context. We present a review of the classic and contemporary literature, highlighting in particular the experiences of professions working within organizations within the health care field in a range of national contexts including Canada, the U.S. and France. We first 'unpack' organizations by highlighting the unique position of professions within organizations, and then capture some of the different influences clients can have on both professions and organizations. We begin, first, with the treatment of the relations between professions and organizations in the professions and organizations literatures respectively.

Relations between Professions and Organizations: Collegiality and Bureaucracy

The basis for studies of the relations between professions and organizations is the differentiation between *collegiality* and *bureaucracy*, which some argue emanate from a Durkheimian and Weberian tradition respectively (Evetts 2004). Waters (1989) for example, argues that in ideal-typical terms collegiality is a different social form than bureaucracy. Specifically, he states that, "[w]hereas bureaucracy is hierarchical and rule governed and specifies individual accountability for members, collegiality is internally egalitarian and consensus governed and specifies individual autonomy for members." Similarly, Sitkin and Sutcliff (1991) delineate professional related norms relating to values of a service kind such as quality client care, from organizational norms which include organizational efficiency and cost constraints. This is consistent with Evetts' (2004) distinction of occupational and organizational professionalism. Brint (1994) makes a similar distinction between occupational and administrative principles that can be *represented* by professions and organizations respectively. But this position not only differentiates these interests, there is a strong tendency to depict them in oppositional terms.

Professions and Organizations in Conflict?

The prime source of the inevitable conflict between professions (which are considered synonymous in this literature with collegiality) and organizations (considered synonymous with bureaucracy) are their contradictory objectives, principles of authority, decision-making processes and loyalty (Roberts & Donahue 2000, Scott 1966, Wilensky 1964). As Roberts and Donahue (2000) summarize, "First, bureaucracy expects its members to promote and represent the interest of the organization; the professional expects the interests of the client to be supreme… Second, bureaucracy sees authority residing in legal contracts that are backed by

formal sanctions… By contrast, professionals tend to think of authority as being rooted in expertise of the person holding the position rather than in the power of the status itself… Finally, when disagreement over procedure and policy occurs, bureaucracy expects the organizational management to address or solve the disagreement and to make decisions; the professional looks to professional colleagues for guidance" (p. 368). Waters (1989) further describes that "the post-Weberian discovery was that there were members of bureaucratic organizations who were committed to norms [that] … could contradict bureaucratic norms and that these contradictions could bring about conflict between professional and nonprofessional participants and disaffection on the part of the professionals." (p. 947). Evetts (2004) also argues that occupational and organizational professionalism are in competition and indeed occupational professionalism is considered to be under threat by the logic of rational-legal modes of organizing work.

So, not only is the argument that professional and organizational imperatives are in conflict, but that organizational imperatives typically dominate. Reflective of this, a great deal of the professions literature has focused on the impact of organizations on professionals and professional work. Johnson (1972), for example, highlights that the 'bureaucratization of professionals' occurs through the creation of professionally-owned and managed bureaucracies, through the direct employment of professionals within organizations, and as a consequence of state mediation through the creation of state-controlled service agencies. Most research has focused on the employment of professionals (see Etzioni 1969 for example) which some have conceptualized as *proletarianization* (Derber 1982, Murphy 1990, Oppenheimer 1973). Related to this discussion, others such as Leicht and Fennel (1997) point out how "the control of professional work is no longer necessarily vested in peers, or even in the administrative elite of the profession [but rather] hierarchical control over professional work is often vested in professional managers of the employing organization" (p. 217).

Some work has begun to unpack how professionals resist these efforts (Derber & Schwartz 1991, Sitkin & Sutcliffe 1991). Sitkin & Sutcliffe (1991), for example, argue that assuming that "bureaucratically embedded professionals are eventually co-opted by the organization may be far too brittle an interpretation of reality" (cited in Barley & Tolbert 1991 p. 9). Derber and Schwartz (1991) revisit their own proletarianization thesis by uncovering how professionals create *internal knowledge-based hierarchies* within corporations which essentially make them junior partners of their employers. Thus, while professionals are subjected to proletarianization, this internal hierarchy protects them against the type of full-scale proletarianization their industrial colleagues experience and enables professionals to exist within organizations as a subdominant class of privileged employees.

Thus there are clearly different influences exerted upon and by professions and organizations, but it is an empirical question as to whether by definition these are in conflict – as indeed some argue this is not necessarily the case (e.g., Barley & Tolbert 1991). Even some of the authors who depict professions and organizations as being inherently in conflict, emphasize the two typically and increasingly *coexist* in our society and share some common features (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, Leicht and Fennel 1997). Indeed as Waters (1989) states "both are rational organizational forms that rely on the employment of technical expertise to realize specific goals." Further, it is also an empirical question as to whether we can

unproblematically equate professions (the social entity) with collegiality (the social concept) and similarly, organizations with bureaucracy.

Interdependence

Earlier, Hall (1968) argued that although professional autonomy is most strongly related to bureaucratization in an inverse manner, other professional characteristics are not as inversely related. He writes that, "conflict is not inherent, [and] in some cases an equilibrium may exists between the levels of professionalization and bureaucratization in the sense that a particular level of professionalization may require a certain level of bureaucratization to maintain social control" (p. 104). What is unfortunate is that most people who have cited Hall have focused on the inverse relationship between bureaucracy and professional autonomy aspect of his argument, and have not heeded his other comments that an equilibrium or more complex symbiotic relationship can and does exist.

There are a few exceptions. DiMaggio and Powell (1991) in reference to Hall (1968) write: "The increased professionalization of workers whose futures are inextricably bound up with the fortunes of the organizations that employ them has rendered obsolescent (if not obsolete) the dichotomy between organizational commitment and professional allegiance" (p. 71). Others argue that the work of professionals within organizations does not necessarily lead to conflict and dysfunctional relationships for either organizations or professionals. Barr and Steinberg (1980), for example, argue in reference to physician autonomy in American Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs) that although structural mechanisms would suggest possible limits to autonomy, in practice, this does not occur. They write "that through physician participation in organizational mechanisms, the potential clash between bureaucratic requirements and the professional norm of autonomy may be reduced" (p. 355-6).

The relationship can even be considered to have mutually derived benefits for both professions and organizations (see Table 1 & Table 2). Larson (1977), for example, argues that "professions depend to a certain extent on large organizations … [and] are …bureaucratized to a greater or lesser extent." (p. 179). Other professions theorists, such as Fielding and Portwood (1980), also note how bureaucratized professions are guaranteed a clientele (though they later argued that this is in exchange for some limits on autonomy). Waters (1989) also notes how organizations have a "professional career structure embodying security of tenure" (p. 961). Nicely summarizing these benefits, Zucker (1991) states plainly that professionals choose to locate within organizations because of the resources and status that professionals can acquire in such settings.

When one looks historically as well, one comes to realize like Larson (1977) that some professions are *generated* by organizations in part through the expansion of the bureaucratic apparatus of the state, and that "the majority of practitioners in all professions are connected with bureaucratic organizations as employees, as providers of services, as users of equipment or facilities, or as creditors…" (see also Kirkpatrick & Ackroyd, 2003). Muzio et al (2011) describe a unique form of 'corporate' professionalization in the case a number of 'new' knowledge-based occupations: management consultancy, project management and executive head-hunters. Larson argues further that, "[p]rofessional socialization begins … in a bureaucratized institution" (p. 200), usually the university or academy. Some organizations, particularly those affiliated with the state, can also be seen as

important agents in professional regulation and the development of professional identities more generally (Muzio & Kirkpatrick 2011). Indeed, professional associations and professional education can connect professionalism and organizations (Noordegraaf 2011).

Table 1 Some of the Benefits Derived By Professionals From Organizations

- Professional education & socialization are provided by bureaucratized institutions (Larson 1977)
- Organizations provide a guaranteed clientele to professionals (Fielding & Portwood 1980)
- Organizations provide professions with a career, security and tenure (Waters 1989)
- Organizations enable professions increased access to resources and status (Zucker 1991)
- Organizations can be sites for professionals development and regulation (Muzio & Kirkpatrick 2011); indeed, professional projects entail the process of institutionalization (Suddaby & Viale 2011)

What some of these comments reveal is the importance of taking into consideration the *types* of professions when one is attempting to truly capture the realm of relations that can exist between professions and organizations. Barley & Tolbert (1991) address this issue explicitly when they contrast professionals who move into organizations from private practice with those that develop out of organizations. They argue specifically that one cannot generalize about the relationship between organizations and professions from only studying the former group. Other influential factors external to the organization are the profession's association that can be drawn upon for support. Leicht & Fennel (2001) write that "[o]ccupations backed by strong professional associations and clearly defined domains of professional expertise are able to deflect the effects of organizational change toward others who lack the ability to make these appeals" (p. 115-116).

The benefits of professional labour for organizations may be less contested than the issue of the benefits for professions, but they include several factors. Zucker (1991) argues that because professional forms of organizing primarily concern issues of effectiveness, professional institutions may, therefore, moderate the inherent weaknesses of bureaucratic organizations that tend to focus their concerns on efficiency: "In particular, the employment of professionals allows an organization access to networks for evaluating the performance of tasks that are too complex and specialized for administration evaluation" (as cited in Barley & Tolbert 1991, p. 7). Oliver (1997) also looks at the ways that professions and organizations cooperate to their mutual benefit such as in the production of knowledge based products and the provision of knowledge-based services. Some agency theorists argue that the professions are an efficient response to the principal-agent problem when information complexity is at issue (i.e. when the principal does not have the capacity of assessing the performance of the agent (Broadbent & Laughlin 1997, Dietrich & Roberts 1997; Eisenhardt 1989). By extension, and considering organizations as the principal, the incorporation of professions within organizational structure would serve to alleviate this information imbalance as well as provide some guarantor of qualification such that

the problem of 'adverse selection' would be mitigated (Eisenhardt 1989, p. 61). Organizations also rely on professions for expertise in the cases when expertise cannot be broken down (i.e. routinized) within the organizations' division of labour (Abbott, 1991). Finally, professions can be a source of clientele for organizations.

Table 2 Some of the Benefits Derived By Organizations from Professionals:

- professions moderate the inherent weaknesses of organizations (Zucker 1991), that is, professions provide organizations with evaluative skills especially where information complexity is high (Broadbent & Laughlin 1997, Dietrich & Roberts 1997; Eisenhardt 1989)
- professions provide organizations access to external networks (Oliver 1997, Zucker 1991)
- professions are instrumental in the development of knowledge-based products and services that organizations deliver (Oliver 1997)
- professions can also help to bring clients into the organization, e.g., the case of physicians and hospitals (Gagan 1988)

Also, one must not neglect the impact of professions on organizations. As Wilensky (1964) noted, as "the culture of bureaucracy invades the professions; the culture of professionalism invades organizations" (p. 494). Another important insight from Hall's (1968) early work, that the nature of professional groups in an organization affects the organizational structure, has also been largely ignored in much subsequent research. He specifies that the influence of the profession is derived from "the workers (professionals) *import*[ing] standards into the organization to which the organization must adjust" (p. 103, emphasis in original). Within the organizations literature, professions factor into neo-institutional theory through what DiMaggio and Powell (1991) refer to as "institutional isomorphism" – a process compelling organizations within an institutional field toward the adoption of similar practices and structures over time as they compete for political power and legitimacy. One of the normative pressures brought to bear on organizations is from their professional workers, whose peer allegiances and oversight through professional networks and educational programs extend beyond the organizational field exerting pressure for organizational change. Leicht and Fennell (2001) build on this by identifying how "[e]mployers of professionals must contend with institutional norms about professional careers when they tap into the labour market for professionals."(p. 216). Waters (1989) similarly states that "professionals … play a significant part in normative specification." (p. 948). This in turn concurs with Zucker's (1991) argument that organizations can lose many of their prerogatives under modern, professionalized governance structures, many of which exist outside the boundaries of the organizations. Barley & Tolbert (1991) refer to this process as the *occupationalization of organizations* which they describe as involving "vesting authority over particular organizations functions or domains in established or fledgling occupational groups" (p. 7). They offer the following example: "In hospitals, doctors have traditionally demanded primary authority over organizational policies directly involving patient care" (p. 7) (see also Scott et al. 2000 and Kirkpatrick et al 2011 for a discussion of the competition over the managerial jurisdiction by doctors and nurses).

To sum up thus far, we (as others have) present a case for moving from a more conflict-based model of the relations between professions and organizations to a perspective that takes into consideration where some convergences and overlapping interests may lie. Such a perspective would take into account Johnson's (1972) argument for the bureaucratization of professions and conversely, Barley and Tolbert's (1991) case for the occupationalization of organizations. So again, we feel it important to divorce the more abstract influences of professionalism and bureaucracy from the more concrete entities of professions and organizations respectively. This enables bureaucratization to have an influence on professions and similarly for professionalism to have an influence on organizations.

The Influence of Institutional Change

Others who champion this more complex approach to professions and organizations also identify the importance of taking contextual or institutional change – such as increased competition, deregulation, the globalization of markets and new technology – into consideration (Leicht & Fennell 1997[2], Kirkpatrick & Ackroyd 2003). Leicht and Fennell (1997), for example, argue that organizations within which professional work is done are diverse and at the same time are themselves undergoing dramatic changes. Scott's work earlier (1993) also recognized that organizational forms are not fixed, and that relationships within organizations evolve to accommodate the needs of the internal stakeholders, as well as the external environmental pressures they experience. One particularly useful conceptualization proposed by Bacharach et al (1991) is a *see-saw* metaphor to describe the dynamic relationship between bureaucratic dominant and professional dominant norms of which the main driving force is environmental uncertainty. Specifically, the see-saw oscillates through time from 'professional dominance' to 'administrator dominance', with the mid-point being an 'equilibrium perspective' as the economy cycles through periods of munificence and scarcity. So as Chua and Clegg (1989) have argued, research in this area perhaps should be "reoriented so that both professions and organizations may be conceptualized as processual entities which are not only partly structured and partly in the process of 'becoming' … [and also] traversed by … societal contradictions and conflicts" (p. 105). Unfortunately, this important suggestion has not had a significant impact on subsequent discussions of the relations between professions and organizations in the most recent literature.

Unpacking Organizations

Just as it is important to tease apart the differences in the relations between organizations and professions by types of professions, so too is it important to unpack organizations a little more than has typically existed in the professions literature. Indeed, much of this literature tends to depict organizations as monoliths with little regard for how differences between organizational fields or between organizations within a field can vary dramatically in terms of their relations with

[2] With particular reference to the health care field, Leicht & Fennell (1997) argue that the "primary norms and emphasis of the sector have shifted from access and quality issues to containment and service reduction." Hebson, Grimshaw and Marchington (2003) detail similar trends of the impact of the recent push for public private partnerships on the changing traditional values or ethos of public sector organizations.

professions. Clearly, organizations differ both within and between sectors and evolve over time and there is an often neglected literature devoted toward understanding these changes. One of the ways that organizations have been 'unpacked' is in terms of their internal social relations. We begin with a brief description of these contributions which will be followed by a discussion of how particular types of organizations impact on professional-organizational relations.

Social Relations within Organizations

One way in which social relations within organizations has been conceptualized is as a *negotiated order*. This concept was first introduced by Strauss et al. (1963) in their analysis of the nature of the hospital as an organization. They argued specifically that hospital personnel develop various negotiative strategies in order to carry out the general mandate of the hospital to help the sick, but in such as way as to ensure a particular social order and by extension organizational cohesion (see Maines 1977). Bucher and Stelling (1969) expanded upon this thesis by highlighting how different types of organizations impact on the negotiation process, specifically that "negotiation[s] are more likely to be overt in professional organizations while being covert in industrial organizations." (Maines 1977, p. 248). Overall, Maines (1977) argues that these early negotiated order investigations make a case for viewing organizations as successively larger overarching contexts of negotiation. More recent organizational theorists such as Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd (2003) recognize the importance of the "negotiated nature of professional organizations" … and also "how those groups may have varying capabilities to exert control" and "will be limited by competition from other groups (or corporate agents) such as managers." (p. 741).

Similarly, French organizational theorists such as Crozier and Friedberg (1977) and Sainsaulieu (1977) have argued that the power within organizations emanates not so much from its formal hierarchical structure but rather to the informal social relations within it. Two main directions can be distinguished in this French literature. First of all, French sociology of organizations has been deeply marked by the influence of Crozier's theory about power relationships within organizations. Inspired by some of the classic literature, such as Dahl (1973), Crozier describes the game that 'actors' play within organizations. He distinguishes in particular four kinds of *resources* that organizational actors have – expertise, rule control, communication, gate-keeping – to mobilize change within organizations. These resources are linked to the particular situation as opposed to the overall function that actors play. This enables a greater diffusion of power inside an organization depending on the situation. In uncertain situations, organizational actors reveal new strategic capacities and a special interactive system of power is taking place.

Another conceptualization of informal relations within organizations is offered by Sainsaulieu (1977), a student of Crozier. Sainsaulieu adds a new dimension to the strategic analysis of organizations – *identities at work*. He described how workers within organizations had four kinds of identities in their relations to the others and within the organizational hierarchy – retired, negotiating, mobile, and community member.[3] With this in mind, sociological analyses can then be under-

[3] A retired identity comes from the people involved outside the work itself (for example, an immigrant worker intending to return to his or her family). A negotiated identify refers to people who are half focused on the collective and half on their individual occupational interests; skilled workers, for instance, negotiate with colleagues and managers while at the

taken to find the specific informal cultures within different organizations (1995). Unfortunately, few of these insights from the French organizations literature have influenced the broader sociology of organizations literature. Moreover, as Barley and Tolbert (1997) argue, despite the stated importance of how organizational structures are socially constructed, there has been very little recent research directly investigating the processes from which these structures emerge or in turn influence action.

Organizational Types

That organizations come in a variety of types is not a particularly novel idea. Scott (1965) distinguished between *autonomous* professional organizations on the one hand, and *heteronymous* professional organizations on the other. In contrast to autonomous organizations, heteronymous organizations are characterized by the subordinate position of professionals relative to the administration. Related to this, Hall (1968) noted how organizations vary rather widely in their degree of bureaucratization. This variation, he argued, "is not [necessarily] based on the distinction between professional departments and professional organizations, since some professional departments are less bureaucratic than some professional organizations, … [but rather, there is] a general tendency for the autonomous professional organization to be less bureaucratic than either the heteronymous organization or the professional department" (p.103).

Another distinction in organizational types is made with reference to external environmental pressures of the *market*. Majone (1984), for example, examines the distinction between profit and non-profit organizations and argues that

> [m]any professionals prefer to work in non-profit organizations (NOs) rather than in either for-profit or bureaucratic organizations. This preference suggests that NOs may be successful in reducing the tension between professional principles & institutional requirements. Professionals in for-profit organizations must submit to the control of a manager who is motivated to overrule them whenever their decisions conflict with the goal of profit maximization (p. 639).

Foreshadowing to our discussion of the role of the client, more explicitly examining their role – which in the case of for profit organizations is bifurcated to include shareholders – may better help to clarify the source of these tensions.

Professional *service* organizations have been identified as distinct amongst organizations in the early literature on professions and organizations (*c.f.*, Parsons 1961, Blau & Scott 1977/80).[4] Mintzberg (1979) also describes how professional bureaucracies are a unique organisational form where its standards, particularly in the case of professional self-regulation, lie largely outside its own structure. Blau and Scott (1977/80), similarly highlight the crucial difference between production

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same time defending their autonomy. In contrast, community members are totally involved in the group, like non skilled workers in large industries. The mobile profile involves using relations to build a career across organizations as opposed to maintaining their location (Sainsaulieu, 1977).

[4] Indeed, Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd (2003) criticize the attempts to generalize to other organizations: "professional organizations are conceived of as semi-autonomous entities dominated by professional interests and concerns … [b]ut it is questionable how far such ideas can be applied more generally" (p. 739).

and service organizations, in that only the latter are "confronted with problems of establishing social relations with the 'objects' of their endeavors and of having to motivate them in various ways" (p. 101). Earlier, Parsons (1961) noted a blurring of these boundaries, particularly in the case of professional services where

> the recipient of the service becomes an operative member of the service-providing organization. … [this] is particularly clear in the case of the hospital. In private practice the patient is unequivocally the 'employer'. But in a hospital practice the hospital organization employs a professional staff on behalf of the patients, as it were. This taking of the customer *into* the organization has implications for the nature of the organization (p. 39-40).

Unfortunately, Parsons does not discuss these implications.[5]

Thus, what becomes increasingly clear in unpacking organizations along product vs. service lines is the importance of the client. Indeed, Blau and Scott (1977/1980) describes service organizations as those in which the "client group is the prime beneficiary" (p. 103). What is unfortunate, however, is that the role of the client vis-à-vis the relations between professions and organizations is rarely examined explicitly, and when it is, the result is often problematic. For example, in the literature that posits a relationship of conflict between professions and organizations, it is argued that the source of the conflict for the profession is due to their desire to meet the client's interests (Evetts 2004). It is assumed, by extension, that the interests of the client are (always) consistent with the interests of the profession (*c.f.,* Sitkin & Sutcliffe 1991) and further that the interests of the client are not consistent with the interests of the organization. To begin to 'test' these assumptions and to better understand the influence of clients on the relations between professions and organizations, we turn to the treatment of clients first in the professions literature and then in the organizations literature. We follow this with a description of where authors have examined professions, organizations and clients together.

Clients: The Underconceptualized Link between Professions and Organizations

Professions and Clients

Just as we have argued against the assumption of a relation of conflict between professions and organization, we can also present a case against an assumption of the inherent consistency of interests between professions and clients. Indeed, there is a great deal of the professions literature devoted to how professions' interests are not necessarily consistent with that of their clients (Freidson 1970, Haug & Sussman 1969, Johnson 1972, Waitzkin, 1983). Freidson (1970), for example, argues that the relations between physicians and their patients, contrary to what Parsons (1951) suggests earlier, are *inherently contradictory*.

[5] As the quote from Parsons alludes to, hospitals figure as a prominent case of professional service organization. Perrow (1965), who also noted the importance of hospitals, argued that they "belong to that class of organizations which attempt as their primary goal the alteration of the state of human material" **(**from Lefton & Rosengren, 1966 p. 804-5). He also shows how contrasting definitions of the client impact upon the technologies employed in hospitals and of their structural properties as well.

Johnson's (1972) offers a typology of professional-clients relations that attempts to more fully capture the range of power both clients and professions possess. He begins first with the case of professions that are more powerful than clients, which he refers to as *collegiate control*. Under collegiate control, the professional defines both the needs of the client and the manner in which these needs will be met. By way of contrast, Johnson describes a situation of *patronage*, where the client defines his/her own needs and the manner in which they are to be met by the professional. In this case, it is the client who has greater power. The third form is *mediation*, where a third party mediates the relationship between practitioner and client, defining both needs and the manner in which the needs are met. Although Johnson describes the mediator as primarily being the state, it could in our case also refer to organizations. The state could also be seen as a different, organized and bureaucratic form of client.

Similar to Johnson's description of patronage, Leicht & Fennel (2001) refer to situations where professions are "captured" by clients: "Under *client capture*, the consumers of professional work gain the ability to control the activities, timing, and costs of professional work. In effect the 'consumer becomes sovereign'" (p. 106; emphasis added). They provide the example of lawyers as a group who faces threats from clients, particularly corporate clients. Fichman & Levinthal (1991) earlier recognized that professional relationships with clients are increasingly involving corporate as opposed to individual actors. In sharp contrast to the traditional view of professional power, they observe that such clients are likely to have as much or more power than the professional parties in this relationship. They do, however, also point out that the special knowledge controlled by a professional firm limits the client's ability to effectively monitor and evaluate the organization's performance. What is implicit in these discussions of a profession's relations with its clients is the importance of identifying which particular profession is under consideration and in which organizational field he or she works.

Organizations and Clients

Clients are also noted as having some countervailing powers vis-à-vis organizations, derived from economics or politics. For example, the *scarcity* of clients will affect the kinds of services organizations provide as well as the internal structure and goals of the organizations (Burns & Stalker 2003/1961). Eisenstadt (1961) argues that "the greater its [the organization's] dependence on its clientele in terms of their being able to go to a competing agency, the more it will have to develop techniques of communication and additional services to retain its clientele and the more it will be influenced by different types of demands by the clientele for services in spheres that are not directly relevant to its main goals." (p. 276). Surprisingly little reference is made to professions in this argument despite its consistency with what we have previously outlined with respect to the relations between professions and clients and the role that professions can play in attracting clients. For example, in the historical development of hospitals, physicians were instrumental in bringing in clients/patients, particularly middle class patients who benefited the hospital because they could pay for their services (Gagan 1998).

By way of contrast, others such as Etzioni (1964), consider the economic power of clients to be weak in light of the fact that individual consumers are rarely organized. He holds more hope for their political power, that is, the client's "ability to exert pressure on political authorities to intervene" (p. 103). But his conceptual-

ization of the client here is conflated with the broader notion of the public or of the citizenry, which is problematic. Viteritti (1990), for example, clearly distinguishes between an organizational *constituent* and an organizational *client.* He argues that although it is understood that organizations "must accommodate [to] the needs of their clients in order to survive, the concept of client did not necessarily involve the notion of *political accountability*" (p. 426; emphasis in original).[6] The political power of clients as constituents is something which could prove to be quite important to explore depending on the organizational field and the nature of the institutional change within that field. For example, in the case of health care, the notion of a citizen's right to health care – particularly in those countries with a government-sponsored system – could result in more pressure through public opinion or voting to sustain hospital-based professions' demands for clients (at least indirectly) vis-à-vis organizations than in other domains where access to services is not considered a right.

Also depending on the organizational field, clients can occupy what Lefton and Rosengren (1966) delineate as *social space* and *social time.* For example, they argue that "some organizations may have an interest in only a limited aspect of the client as a person – as in the case of a short-term general hospital – whereas other organizations may have a more extended interest in who the client is as a product of and participant in society – as in the case of a psychiatric out-patient clinic" (p. 805). Since the client is considered to be outside of the organization, a long-term, extensive social and spatial relationship can be difficult to manage without somehow making her/him a part of the organization (Hall 1972). This is particularly important, as these examples reveal, in the health care field.

Thus, the organizations literature that does address the role of clients tends to problematize the relationship between these two entities but with little reference to professions as a key player in this relationship. This oversight is, as noted, also mirrored in the professions literature. A three-way relationship of power/dependency/influence needs to be conceptualized in order to better understand the nature of organizations and professions as well as the nature of their relationship and (shared) vulnerability to external/environmental pressures.

Table 3 Different Dimensions of the Client to Consider in Conceptualizing the Relationship between Professions and Organizations:

- Clients can be individuals, either heterogeneous or homogenous;
- More homogenous clients have a greater potential to organization into associations, thereby yielding more power vis-à-vis professions or organizations;
- Clients can be internal to or outside of the organization;
- Clients can be corporations that wield even greater power;
- The state can also be a client and/or represent the interests of clients.

[6] Blau (1977/1980) similarly distinguished between clients and the broader public.

Professions, Organizations and Clients

A few scholars have either explicitly examined or have offered analyses that touch upon the interrelations between professions, organizations and clients. Wilensky (1964) for example, teases apart professional and client interests instead of unproblematically equating them. He does so by distinguishing between a profession's autonomy and service orientation, arguing that they can in some cases contradict each other. Where this is linked to organizations is when he argues that bureaucracy has a more negative impact on professional's service ideal than their professional autonomy. Why this might be the case, however, is not fully explored.

Professions implicitly figure into Etzioni's (1964) conceptualization of 'service' not just as an organizational ideology but also as an instrument of manipulation and control. For him, the service ideology implies that "those who serve the consumer accept this ideology, are rewarded for behavior conforming to its standards, and are deprived for deviating from it" (p. 99). He states further that problems arise when basic features of organizations make such service norms difficult to reinforce, resulting in an insensitivity to the consumer. He describes how "[s]ensitivity to the client seems to be greater in cases in which the relationship is more intimate, where the client is significant as an agent of rewards and deprivations" (p. 100). Here he points out that the idea of service is more concrete in the situation where clients are a physical reality, with physical contact with a professional.

Within the service work literature there increasingly is argued to be a 'customer-oriented bureaucracy'. Zucker (1991), for example, highlights how in non-governmental contexts at least, "a professional's role is not simply 'people processing' but also 'people pleasing' in that they must deliver a service that others want to buy" (p. 158-9). Korczynski (2004) similarly argues that professional service work is influenced both by the logic of rationalization and of customer-orientation. Along these lines, he maintains that "[w]ork tasks will be organized not just to gain efficient task completion but also to help create a relationship with customers, and control rests not only on (increasingly incomplete) bureaucratic process measurement but also on the operation of internalized customer-related norms" (p. 99). The problem arises for the professional when these logics contradict each other.

Tied into these discussions of the ideology or logic of service work, organizations are often depicted as a broader contextual influence on the relations between professionals and their clients. Evetts (2002) argues, for example, that when professionals make decisions and recommendations to clients, they are required to take *all* factors – organizational, economic, social, political and bureaucratic conditions and constraints – into account. As she states, "professional decisions will not be based *solely* on the needs of individual clients, but on clients' needs in the wider corporate, organizational and economic context" (p. 345; emphasis in original). This again points to the important distinction between concrete and abstract clients we discussed earlier. Extending this argument further, professions can be conceived of as acting intermediaries or "brokers" (Troyer, Mueller, & Osinsky, 2000) between organizations and their clients. Indeed, one might consider that the profession acts as a 'trust buffer' between the organization and the client (Williamson 1993).

But we could also conceptualize organizations as being a buffer between professions and clients. Zucker (1991), for example, comments on how organizations may mediate relations between professionals and clients. This may

be best exemplified in the case of health insurers or HMOs in the United States (in the role of organization) mediating the interaction between health care providers and patients. Sitkin and Sutcliffe (1991) also argue that organizations can act as buffers for professionals who work within them vis-à-vis clients "by lodging responsibility and control in the hierarchy itself" (p. 279).

Discussion

In sum, what we found when we looked to the literatures on professions and on organizations is that there has often been little cross fertilization of ideas between these two bodies to move the theory of the relations between these two social entities forward. Some of the early or "classic" literature makes explicit attempts to link professions and organizations, but subsequently, it looks as if the professions have almost completely dropped out of sight with respect to organizations, as have clients. Problems arise in that this early literature often gets ignored (e.g., Johnson 1972) or else cited incompletely or inaccurately (e.g., Hall 1965). Generally, the more recent literature does not explicitly develop theoretical frameworks about the relationship between professions and organizations (notably that take into account important distinctions in the professions literature that move us beyond the rather functionalist notions of professional norms and networks, etc), even where the professions have been empirically examined in the organizations literature. Note is taken in the (neo)institutionalism literature of the influence of professional socialization and networks on organizations, particularly since these networks span organizational boundaries. How these organizations affect or influence the professionals is not well documented, however, other than analyses of how organizations influence professional and managerial careers, and the two are often collapsed.

Bacharach et al (1991) argue explicitly that the early research on professions and organizations needs to be revisited and integrated into contemporary organizational theory – and we would argue into professions theory as well. There have been three key attempts to revive this link – the 1991 special issue of *The Sociology of Organizations*, the 1997 special section of *Sociological Inquiry*, and most recently the 2011 special issue of *Current Sociology* (Muzio & Kirkpatrick 2011) – but there have been surprisingly few citations of these earlier works and thus their efforts to reinvigorate this intersection do not appear to have been successful; So unfortunately the situation that Barley and Tolbert (1991) describe 20 years ago has not substantially changed:

> While debate over the consequences of the organizational employment of professionals has sometimes been intense, surprisingly little effort has been devoted to specifying the relations that actually exist between organizations and occupations. Organizational theorists, in particular, have almost completely ignored occupational phenomena… By comparison, occupational sociologists have shown somewhat greater interest in the intersection between occupations and organizations. … Consequently, recent volumes on professions and organizations largely reiterate or recast arguments that were prominent in the 1960s (p. 3).

Hopefully the most recent special issue will have more of an impact.

We would further add that developments in French organizations theory would be well incorporated into Anglo-American theorizing on the profess-sions and organizations, given their utility in unpacking the nature of social relations within organizations. In particular, mapping out the notions of 'situational resources' and 'work identities' onto the relations of organizations and professions may help move us beyond the all too typical dichotomized and conflictual picture.

We have tried to make the case here for a reinvigoration of the linkage between the professions and organizations literatures in the context of institutional change that more fully takes clients into consideration. A more explicit and complex understanding of this three way relationship would need to better acknowledge and appreciate the influences of the different resources and sources of power that clients, professions and organizations bring to the relationship, as well as the differential impact of location, work identities and situations, and contextual/-environmental influences. This more complex understanding acknowledges that there are cases where professionals and organizations have mutual interests, and that clients can influence both organizations and professions either directly or indirectly (i.e., exert influence on professions through organizations or on organ-izations through professions – the two forms of buffering highlighted above). In terms of location, clients and professions can move into and out of organizations. Furthermore, organizations can be the buffer between professions and clients as much as professions act as buffers between clients and organizations.

Conceptualizing the relations between clients, professions and organizations in this more explicit and complex manner enables us to pose interesting empirical questions.[7] For example,

- How can high status vs. low status professionals in a highly bureaucratized vs. less bureaucratized organization make use 'situational resources' – do different kinds of professionals do so differently, or differently than other workers within organizations?
- How do these situational resources and identities overlap with professional status, organizational mandates and/or the social concepts of bureaucracy and collegiality as forms of social control?
- How do different organizational forms affect the use of situational resources by different professional and client groups or the kinds of identities of these groups?
- How do work identities within organizations cross-mingle with professional identities?
- What kind of tasks that professionals do for clients are more likely to be bureaucratized, why, and how do various types of clients or client groups influence this decision and what are the limits of their power to affect change in this regard?
- What other elements of professional work do organizations buffer vis-à-vis clients?
- How do clients influence the development of new professions within organization?
- And many others.

[7] These expand upon those offered by Barley & Tolbert (1991) by adding the client dimension.

In a recent study, we have described how the structural influence of patients, which differs across particular divisions of an organization, affects the experience of professional work within that organization (Bourgeault et al, 2010). We specifically elaborate on a typology that depicts the structural influence of patients in terms of *open* and *closed communities* within different hospital units. A unit may be more or less open or closed to the influence of patients qualitatively in terms of who a health professional primarily interacts with, as well as quantitatively in terms of the number and flow of patients. The implications these distinctions have are that open communities in hospital units tend to be less stable because of the quantitative fluctuations in the numbers of patients and the qualitative nature of their interactions whereas more closed communities are more stable which in turn enables a stronger sense of collegiality. It is this kind of exploration that is possible by a more nuanced conceptualization of the relationship between professions and clients within organizations.

Although the client does not necessarily or always exist as an organizational identity, these often relations transpire in the organizational context. External influences on this context unfold from there – be it economic, political or social/-environmental. Although we have made a more explicit case for 'unpacking' organizations, it is important to understand the internal working of professions and clients as well – and indeed encourage greater theorizing from both bodies of literature – professions and organizations – in this vein.

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