

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted? The Role of Professional Elites in Strengthening Professional Control Vis-à-Vis Clients

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Abstract

This article studies how professional elites, as exemplified by *first teachers* (FTs)—a new prominent position for teachers in Sweden—respond to clashes between market and professional logics, and how this affects professional control vis-à-vis clients. Based on a collaborative ethnography, findings suggest that the professional elites use different responses to the clashes between the logics. Professional control can be strengthened by FTs *co-opting* the market logic strategically in the interest of the profession. However, FTs sometimes also succumb to cliental influence, becoming co-opted themselves by the market logic, which weakens professional control. Tentatively, context needs to be highlighted in order to understand why different responses are used, and in this identity work and relationships to managers seem essential to create a foundation for FTs to respond in ways that increase professional control vis-à-vis clients.

Keywords

Professional elites, stratification, clients, cliental influence, co-optation, professional control

Introduction

This article explores how professional elites respond to clashes between market and professional logics and how this affects professional control vis-à-vis clients, in the context of Swedish schools. Societal developments with the growth of bureaucratic and market logics in the public sector, challenge the position and power of traditional professions (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Carvalho & Correia, 2018; Gleeson & Knights, 2006; Noordegraaf, 2020)

In Swedish schools, the teaching profession has been strongly affected by several marketization reforms. In the 1990s, an independent school choice reform was implemented, whereby each pupil now represents a sum of money, which the school loses if the pupil chooses another school. A “customer’s choice model” has been introduced and parents and pupils are increasingly referred to as *clients* (Blomqvist, 2004; Fredriksson, 2009, Helgøy & Homme, 2007; Nordgren, 2008). The Swedish school system is now described as one of the world’s most liberalized (Blomqvist, 2004; Schriber, 2015). Alongside a growing cliental role for pupils and parents, the status of teachers in Sweden has been depicted as diminished and there are wide discussions of de-professionalization (Alvehus, Eklund & Kastberg, 2019a; Fredriksson, 2009; Frostenson, 2012; Stenlås, 2009).

Whereas, thus, some authors describe a weakening of professionalism in which professional autonomy is curtailed (Anderson & Cohen, 2015; Evetts, 2009; Hanlon, 1999; Power, 2003; Stenlås, 2009), others highlight a more active role for professionals (Alvehus, Eklund & Kastberg, 2020; Noordegraaf, 2015). Recently, scholars have reinvested interest in stratification as a means to regain professional control when professions are threatened by an altered environment (Alvehus et al., 2019a; Alvehus, Eklund & Kastberg 2019b; Alvehus et al., 2020; Currie, Lockett, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2012; Waring, 2014; Waring & Bishop, 2013). Originally, Freidson (1984; 1985) described how the medical profession was stratified where some professionals inhabited elite roles whereas others remained closer to the core work. The elites could keep professional control within the profession by acting as professional representatives at managerial levels (ibid). However, there is a risk that stratification hinders professional unity and creates intra-professional conflict (Adams, 2020; McDonald, Checkland, Harrison, & Coleman, 2009). This can be connected to elite professionals becoming consumed by, or in other words, *co-opted* by a managerial logic (Currie et al., 2012). Thus, practical effects of stratification on professions are ambiguous and need further scholarly attention (Alvehus et al., 2020).

Stratification has become a relevant concept to describe changes in the Swedish teaching profession (Alvehus et al., 2020). In 2013 a *first teacher* (FT) reform was introduced. The reform involves financial contributions from the state for municipalities to establish FT positions in schools. Teachers can apply and earn around 500 Euros (5000 Swedish krona) extra a month. The requirements for the position are broad, but state that FTs must have a

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

teacher's certificate, four years' experience of teaching, and work with school development of some sort (Swedish Code of Statutes, 2013, p. 70).

The main objective with the reform is to increase pupil performance by strengthening the teaching profession, since teachers are targeted as an important factor when it comes to improving pupils' results. The reform has grown on a yearly basis, making the FT position established throughout the Swedish school system and encompassing many school subjects. Research on FTs has described an ongoing stratification with the creation of elite roles for teachers (Alvehus et al., 2019b; c.f. Freidson, 1984; Freidson, 1985). Before the reform, the teaching profession was flat since career opportunities for teachers were restricted to becoming principals. The FT reform created possibilities for teachers to make a career within their profession. Just as other studies on stratification show how elites often have organizational responsibilities (Freidson, 1984; Freidson, 1985; Waring, 2014), studies on FTs illustrate how these teachers engage in school development work and become affiliated with managers. However, importantly, the FTs continue to identify themselves as teachers and be closely connected to the core work (Alvehus et al., 2019a; Alvehus et al., 2019b; Alvehus et al., 2020). Whereas they participate in managerial work within the frames of the FT position, the research indicates that FTs do not succumb fully to the managerial logic. On the contrary, these studies show that FTs largely are perceived of as legitimate by their colleagues since the FTs enhance the professional position by representing teachers at managerial levels while still not threatening the individual autonomy of the non FTs. Thus, the core work of teachers has not necessarily been challenged by the FT position (Alvehus et al., 2019b; Alvehus et al., 2020).

The elite position does not only include closer intertwinement with managerial spheres, but also tighter connections to clients. FTs come in contact with cliental matters in different constellations than other teachers. For example, FTs discuss cliental issues in managerial boards, and they participate in regular meetings between FTs, parents and managers where clients assert influence. This means that FTs not only face cliental demands within the frames of the traditional professional-cliental relationship, but also in managerial settings. Thus, FTs have a special stance in the organizations and potentially an important role in reconciling not only managerial and professional spheres but also the cliental one, i.e. they might balance both managerial, market and professional logics (See Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Waring, 2014).

Whereas elites are described to be at the forefront of handling all types of logics, research on professional elites, including that on FTs, has foremost centred around the balancing of managerial and professional logics and how professional control could be strengthened towards management (Alvehus et al., 2020; Freidson, 1984; Freidson, 1985; Waring, 2014). However, professionals are challenged just as much in relation to clients (Andersson & Cohen, 2015; Carvalho & Correia, 2018; Freidson, 2001), and this is specifically relevant in the context of Swedish schools. It is thus far unclear if elites can strengthen professions also

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

in relation to increasingly influential clients. The general aim here is therefore to increase our understanding of the role of professional elites in strengthening professional control, by specifically addressing the question: *How do professional elites respond to clashes between professional and market logics and how does this affect professional control vis-à-vis clients?*

The contributions of this article are two-fold. Firstly, the article adds to the literature on professional elites by focusing on an institutional conflict that has not been sufficiently studied in the literature on stratification. Secondly, the article sheds light on the professional-client relationship and how professions could be strengthened in this, matters which seldom have been the main focus of empirical investigation (Bourgeault, Hirschhorn & Sainsaulieu, 2011).

Theoretical framework

The market logic versus the professional logic

To understand how increasing client influence challenges professional control, it is beneficial to look at the concept of logics. Freidson (2001: 6-7) describes the professional system as built up of bureaucratic, professional and market logics, and defines logic as “a systematic way of thinking that can embrace and order most of the issues with which they deal”. These logics ultimately define who control the conditions and the content of professional work. The professional logic is built upon trust in the professions to have the capacity to organize and define what should be produced. This calls for widespread autonomy of the professions to control both the content and context of professional work (Alvehus et al., 2019b; Freidson, 1994). In professional organizations, professionals have a unique position, since they, through education, have gained access to abstract knowledge, not accessible to those outside the profession (Freidson, 2001).

In the market logic, power is shifted towards clients to decide on what should be produced and the terms of production, i.e., clients are influential over the context and content of professional work. This leads to competition between organizations in which there is a need to offer service and attract clients. Tensions arise since client influence infringes on professional control (Bourgeault et al., 2011; Freidson, 2001). Thus, clashes between market and professional logics can be analytically derived when there are unclarity considering who should ultimately be in control. What is important to bear in mind is that the professional-client relationship has always been a central feature of the professional core work (Freidson, 2001) and is in a sense part of the professional logic. However, increasingly demanding clients who exert influence at the expense of professional control, are more aligned with a market logic. The distinction between the logics becomes clear when zooming in on logics at a relational level and tensions around control (Freidson, 1994; Freidson, 2001).

Stratification and the role of professional elites in handling competing logics

Whereas the institutional environment can apparently create conflicts, professionals need not be regarded as passive victims. The stratification thesis of Freidson (1984; 1985) includes an active and reactive role for professionals. Elites often have a helicopter view in the organizations, and how the elites respond to logics has effects on the institutional environment (Kraatz & Moore, 2002; Lawrence Leca, & Zilber, 2013; Waring, 2014). For example, when facing a managerial logic, elites can fully embrace a managerial identity, leaving professional values behind (Kurunmäki, 2004; Waring & Bishop 2013). Professional elites can also function as *hybrids*, since they handle both professional and managerial spheres, and they can develop hybridized identities, which leads to a hybridized professionalism (Blomgren & Waks, 2015; McGivern, Currie, Ferlie, Fitzgerald, & Waring, 2015). An organizing dimension can be seen as part of contemporary professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007; Noordegraaf, 2015) which is made visible in the literature on elites. Through this perspective, a strengthening of professional control could occur by increasing professional influence over other realms than the purely professional one, bringing logics together while enhancing control over the content and context of professional work (Alvehus et al., 2019b, Alvehus et al., 2020; Freidson, 1984; Freidson, 1985).

However, the literature on stratification has not extensively been occupied with how individual responses of elites are connected to effects on the institutional environment. Therefore, we need to widen the perspective from the stratification thesis and include a theorization on individual responses to logics.

Analytical perspectives: Individual responses to competing logics

Pache and Santos (2013) describe responses to conflicting logics as consisting of *defiance*, *ignorance*, *compliance*, *combination* and *compartmentalization*. According to the authors, the response towards which individuals lean depends on the degree of adherence to the logic and the level of hybridity in the organizations. Defiance often occurs when a new logic is introduced, and involves actors rejecting the logic, which leads to a distance between the new logic and the familiar one. Ignorance is a form of non-response where actors are unaware of the elements of a logic, and compliance entails actors fully identifying with a logic. When actors are familiar with two different logics, and where hybridity is high (where the logics are equally dominant) Pache and Santos (2013) mean that a compartmentalization of logics is most likely, i.e., to keep them separated and comply with them to various extent in different contexts (see also Gautier & Santos, 2019). Where they have stronger connections to one of the competing logics, actors are more likely to combine them, accepting the less familiar logic but working hard to preserve the logic with which they identify most (see also Minbaeva, Muratbekova-Touron, & Nayir, 2015).

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

Taking combination, a step further, another strategy is *co-optation*. Andersson and Liff (2018) show how managers and professionals integrate logics by co-opting elements from each other's dominant logics and making them part of their own logics. This is done strategically to incorporate those parts of the competing logics that fit with their familiar logics. Thus, co-optation does not mean making logics exist side by side, but it entails an altering of the logics, and a full hybridization. Co-optation in this sense appears more reconciling than in other perspectives where professionals are described as co-opted and totally consumed by a managerial logic (Currie et al., 2012; Waring & Bishop, 2013). The latter scenario is more associated with a polarization of logics since there is a gap between professionals embracing the managerial logic and other professionals.

Thus, there is a variety of responses that can be used by elites when faced with competing logics, in this case clashes between market and professional logics. Responses could result in enhanced *polarization or hybridization* of the professional and market logics. Hybridization could potentially strengthen professional control if the professional position is enhanced and the market logic used strategically in the interest of the profession. Polarization of logics (c.f. Jacobs, 2005) seems counter-productive in this regard, since it reinforces a classic divide between the professional logic and others, not extending the professional position within organizations.

Method

This study builds on a larger collaborative ethnography exploring the implications of the FT reform. In a collaborative ethnography, researchers produce an ethnography together. Cross-case analysis is enabled by the research group collecting material at various sites (Barley, 1996). Three municipalities were included: a metropolitan municipality, a medium-sized municipality and a small-town municipality. Municipalities and schools were selected to contribute to both the breadth and depth of the study. Seven public schools from all levels of the school system participated. Different research techniques were used including interviews, observations and shadowings. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted 90–120 minutes. Questions were asked about the first teacher role in general but also about how cliental influence was perceived and handled. The latter was often introduced by a general question around how the FTs would describe the role of parents and children today, and this led to in-depth discussions. All interviews took place at the schools and were consensually audio recorded. In selecting interviewees, the aim was to achieve fair representation in terms of gender and years of working experience. Contact information with FTs was provided by the principals. For the purpose of this article, I have used interview

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

transcripts with FTs and field notes taken within the frames of the larger collaborative ethnography. Table 1 gives an overview of the data used in this paper¹.

Case No.	Number of interviews, shadowings and observations		
	First Teachers (no. of interviews)	Shadowing (no. of weeks)	Observations (no.)
1	5	3	9
2	8	2	4
3	4	1	10
4	5	1	11
5	7	2	6
6	6	2	6
7	5	1	7
Summary	40	12	53

Table 1. Overview of data

The schools were followed over a period of approximately one and a half years, starting in the spring of 2015. FTs were shadowed for one to two weeks each and this involved accompanying the selected FTs in their daily work. In informal conversations during shadowings we asked questions following up on themes from interviews. Meanwhile, in follow-up interviews we could confirm themes and interpretations stemming from field notes. The FTs were informed that we would abort the observation at any time if they felt this was necessary. Whereas we as researchers want to blend in, it is important from an ethical point of view that both we and the ones who are observed are aware of our role. This awareness means that our presence in the field might have an effect on the informants, something that we always need to keep in mind (Silverman, 2011).

We selected meetings for targeted observation where the FT role was accentuated. This could be meetings with parents, school directorates, and other meetings between teachers and principals at the schools. In shadowing and observations extensive field notes were taken. We aimed at broadly capturing all that happened during the days of shadowing and what was discussed at meetings. As it is difficult to both observe and register simultaneously, we tried to find time during the day to expand the field notes. As Emerson, Fretz & Shaw (2011) highlight, whereas we as researchers try to be close the field by writing

¹ Material was collected together with Gustaf Kastberg and Johan Alvehus. For an overall view of material collected in the project, see Alvehus et al. (2019a)

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

fieldnotes while observing, there is always a selectiveness in this process which is guided by the aim of the study. Drawing on the benefits of a collaborative ethnography, the research group met to compare and discuss the field notes, to more clearly focus on issues emerging in the material. By using the techniques of shadowing and observation we could highlight more informal practices than are visible in interviews (Czarniawska, 2007).

The study followed ethical guidelines from the Swedish Research Council. We have been careful to explain to all informants the aim of the project. We were always open about taking field notes. To preserve the integrity of the participants we promised to anonymize names of informants, schools and municipalities. Data material collected in the project has in turn been stored with respect to the integrity of participants, which means that also the working material has been coded with figured names of municipalities, schools and informants.

Analysing the material

This article builds on FT interview transcripts (874 pages) and fieldnotes from the collaborative ethnography (220 pages). Whereas I have used data collected within a larger research project, the targeted coding with reference to the research question of this article was conducted solely by me. The coding was done in NVivo and was theoretically informed, guided by Freidson's (2001) notion of logics. Yet, data played a key part in spotting the clashes. In the extensive material, client influence emerged as a common theme, increasing the validity of the study in the sense that the method led to illustrating the phenomena of interest (Kvale, 1995). Thus, the clashes were discovered in an abductive manner (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014) stemming from both theoretical concepts and empirical findings.

In interview transcripts I identified when informants spoke about client influence in problematic terms and how it collided with values of professionalism. In the fieldnotes from the collaborative ethnography, I also searched for more informal and subtle expressions of this clash and situations where matters concerning client influence were discussed, for example where FTs were complaining about it. The meetings with parents and school directorate meetings serve as examples where different perspectives of the professional work could lead to conflict between professional and client interests. The method used generated different types of material since when writing fieldnotes, there sometimes is not time to write down statements verbatim. In these cases, we have tried to summarize observations with the ambition of being as accurate as possible. This means that quotations of the informants will vary in this article depending on the context, for example if they are taken from verbatim interview transcripts or fieldnotes of the collaborative ethnography.

After having identified the clashes, I started exploring individual responses to competing logics, drawing on the work of Pache & Santos (2013) and Andersson & Liff (2018). In developing the coding on this, it became clear that a prevalent phenomenon was not very

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

well represented in existing theoretical categories. This was coded as *succumbence*. Thus, clashes were uncovered in a dialogue between theoretical pre-understanding, empirical findings, and theoretical refinement. When further analysing the outcomes of the responses in terms of how they affected professional control, this involved lifting one's gaze and connecting them to a theoretical discussion, leaving the craft of node development in NVivo. I identified the following clashes through this analytical process: *clashes regarding perceptions of the teacher role, clashes around control over grading, clashes concerning the content of development work and meetings as fora where logics clash*. In the Findings section each of these clashes will be presented.

Findings

Clashes regarding perceptions of the teacher role

Increasing cliental influence was creating ambiguities about what the teacher role was to entail. Some FTs described how parents and pupils expected teachers to be more and more service- minded. This induced clashes for those clinging to a more traditional teacher role based on trust towards the profession (c.f. Freidson, 2001):

They (the parents) gladly want to have opinions about my job now/.../nowadays they want their children to have special treatment, and that the manner of which to do things that they think is good, well that is how we will go about it. And then they do not trust me to do my job. (FT, interview, school 4)

The increased influence of parents was described as infringing on professional control:

Everyone is to have full insight into everything, by the parents. That they should have the right to intervene when it comes to how you plan your teaching hours, how the school should handle this part of the education. I do not think that they have anything to do with that, really. I do not care how my dentist does their job. They must trust that we are doing a good job. That is not the case today. (FT, interview, school 3)

This perception of the teacher role is characterized by defiance of the market logic where cliental demands appear distant. However, there were also FTs who mentioned more demanding clients as beneficial in making teachers perform better. When asked about parents questioning the teachers, one FT responded:

I feel that it makes sense too. That you have to improve yourself!" (FT, interview, school 2)

It was common for FTs to state that cliental influence was of importance and that parents *should* be involved in improving education. As one FT expressed, when asked about the role of parents:

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

They are very involved, and I think it is fun that they are. They should be involved! But it has become such an incredibly fuzzy boundary in some way, what is it we are supposed to do? I had a meeting the other day and there are so many demands on the school all the time. (FT, interview, school 3)

This stance illustrates the combination of logics since there is a recognition of the importance of cliental influence to improve teachers' performance, but at the same time there is an insight that cliental demands cannot exist at the expense of professional values. This could be the start of identity work to co-opt elements of the market logic into the professional identity (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018).

Clashes around control over grading

One of the core tasks of all teachers is to set grades. This is something that affects pupils profoundly, thus it is of great interest to parents. Some FTs spoke of pressure to give pupils good grades since the results are shown in the statistics and are important for the schools to compare favourably in the competition with other schools. Furthermore, increased pressure from parents was described as problematic:

We have a mother who we are dealing with now whose son did not pass Swedish. The mum was very upset about that. And he has been away a lot, generally passive, has not handed in things. So, there was no foundation for the teacher to give him an OK grade. And then the mother is on the rampage. (FT, interview, school 6)

Another FT described how a pupil had passed a grade as the result of pressure from parents:

There are no resources. For this. Somewhere an error has been made, but it is also a result of you being very obnoxious as a parent. Then you can make sure that your child makes it through with fairly good grades. (FT, interview, school 7)

However, whereas FTs experienced this kind of pressure, they also spoke of how they stood up for themselves and defended the grades that they had decided on. Thus, whereas some FTs defied the market logic and were eager to mention the problems arising from this type of pressure, there were also examples of FTs trying to combine the logics, preserving the core of their professionalism while accepting the existence of cliental influence (c.f. Pache & Santos, 2013). At one observed school directorate meeting, the principal had been in contact with an angry parent who wanted their child's grade to be improved. One of the FTs calmly explained to the principal how he should talk to this parent and why the grade had been set. She stated that "We as teachers have the mandate to set grades." (FT, meeting protocol, school 4) She thus used her professional knowledge to meet cliental demands, while at the same time not harshly defying the market logic.

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

FTs also showed signs of at least a will to co-opt the market logic. This FT had fully embraced the existence of a market logic but had ideas on what needed to be done to incorporate it into professionalism:

I want to stand up for giving them a good education, but for a market to function there has to be good customer competence too, they need to demand the right things. (FT, interview, school 5)

Whether FTs actively defied the market logic or tried to balance the logics differed. It seems that where FTs felt supported by principals, they were keener to make the logics function together. Meanwhile, where FTs were invited to managerial realms, they could use their position to handle this clash in constructive ways, balancing the market logic with the professional one.

Clashes concerning the content of development work

In managerial settings in the schools, FTs were often involved in different types of development work. Central in this are reports made by the School Inspectorate, an authority in Sweden with the responsibility to audit schools. These reports are accessible to the public and are a basis on which to compare schools. Schools are, among other things, measured on how well they adapt to client influence. The results displayed in the surveys and following reports by the Inspectorate affected the direction of the development work in ways that sometimes clashed with the professional logic. Sometimes FTs experienced that these reports were built on too little information:

I have been part of two examinations when the School Inspectorate has been here when I have been a representative and the last one was, I think, completely horrible. Some pupils say something and suddenly we get massive criticism about something we know is about two or three pupils who are very dissatisfied with their education/.../if there is anyone who thinks that way, it is a dissatisfaction and then we have to address it. (FT, interview, school 7)

FTs sometimes experienced how development work came from above and was guided too much by values associated with the market logic, for example looking good in the statistics to attract pupils. In some observed meetings discussions illustrated a dissatisfaction with management, and a gap between managers and teachers. One FT reported in an interview:

During this year it has felt like the School Inspectorate has ruled this whole school. (FT, interview, school 7)

In these situations, the FTs were not in a position to defy the market logic. Rather, they felt controlled by managers in a more passive manner. Thus, there was rather a *succumbence* to the market logic at managerial level.

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

However, there were also examples of development work more aligned with values of professionalism. FTs could actively stand up and question the principals when deemed necessary, in line with the response of combination. For example, at one meeting the principal had put forward that teacher conferences should be about pupils and not education. One FT objected and said that education cannot be separated from the pupils and that these conferences needed more time than the principal ought to take time from elsewhere (Principal and FT, meeting protocol, school 3).

The response of co-optation was also used. For example, at one observed meeting FTs were informed that, against the background of a conducted survey, the school needed to focus on pupils' influence. One FT came up with the idea that they could connect this to the question of grading techniques, in order to make it appealing to the rest of the teachers (FT, meeting protocol, school 4). Another example was a meeting where an FT had collected input on *how* the wider teacher collegium wanted to work with pupils' influence in the school's development work (FT, meeting protocol, school 4). Thus, development work to adapt to client demands was incorporated into all teachers' professional work. These examples can be characterized as co-optation, since the FTs not only combined a distant market logic whilst preserving professionalism but used elements of the market logic more actively to incorporate it into professional work (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018; Pache & Santos, 2013).

Meetings as fora where logics clash

In the schools there were regular meetings with parents –about once a month – where principals and sometimes FTs participated. These were fora for parents to exert influence. However, the meetings also gave the FTs a chance to respond to the parents. Some FTs felt that their position had given them confidence. An illustrative example was at one meeting where a parent expressed that parents must have confidence in teachers as a profession, but at the same time, teachers want the parents' point of view and therefore need to adjust to it (Parent, meeting protocol, school 3). One FT then questioned this person and said: "The focus should not primarily be to evaluate us as teachers." (FT, meeting protocol, school 3) Moreover, the FTs could use their knowledge of different rules and documents to back them up. An example of this was a meeting where FTs discussed an upcoming division of classes. The FTs planned for a meeting with parents since they were aware that parents would be upset. One of the FTs said during this meeting that she had written a defence with references to different paragraphs (FT, meeting protocol, school 6). Thus, the FTs found ways to co-opt elements of the market logic into their professionalism (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018). This is a sign of the very essence of professionalism changing, since FTs meet parents in different constellations than other professionals and use these meetings to exhibit their new professionalism (c.f. Noordegraaf, 2015).

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

Another type of meeting where client demands were addressed, and sometimes led to clashes with the professional logic, were school directorate meetings in which FTs often participated. At one of these meetings, an FT spoke up against the use of results of a parent survey, since the response rate was low (FT, meeting protocol, school 4). Thus, some FTs used these meetings to combine logics, inhabiting a role of representatives of their colleagues and preserving the professional logic (c.f. Alvehus et al., 2020; Pache & Santos, 2013).

FTs did not compartmentalize the logics in meetings, i.e., they did not leave their role as teachers behind when they entered managerial spheres. Rather, they tried to make the logics function together, either by co-opting elements of the market logic, or by combining the logics, preserving values of professionalism (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018; Pache & Santos, 2013).

For meetings to function like this, FTs need to be invited to managerial spheres, which was not always the case. FTs were not throughout equally active at managerial level and when asked about their perceptions of managerial work, some claimed that there was little room for any influence on behalf of the teachers. For example, one FT explained how meetings with managers and teachers were purely informational (FT, shadowing protocol, school 7). The role of the principal is thus essential in creating space in managerial settings for the FTs to flourish and increase professional control (c.f. Alvehus et al., 2020). Most commonly the principals were supportive of the teachers, in the cases studied. As one FT responded when asked about the principal's role in meeting parents:

He is great at it. He takes full responsibility for everything and he supports us teachers/.../ So, it feels nice. (FT, interview, school 3)

Discussion

Thus far I have presented my findings on how FTs responded to clashes between professional and market logics. Now it is time to lift our gaze, to conclude how the responses affect professional control vis-à-vis clients. The main arguments here are that different responses display various potentials in strengthening professional control and that contextual differences need to be considered in order to understand why the responses are used. By zooming into this, we can increase our knowledge of the role of professional elites in strengthening professional control in the professional-client relationship.

In the theoretical section it was concluded that a strong profession ideally controls both the content and the context of professional work (Freidson, 1994; Freidson, 2001), which requires ownership of more spheres than the professional one (Alvehus et al., 2019b; Noordegraaf, 2015, Noordegraaf, 2020) Whereas, encouragingly, recent studies have shown that stratification could be a means to strengthen professional control vis-à-vis managers, (Alvehus et al, 2019a; Alvehus et al., 2019b; Alvehus et al. 2020), this article indicates that in

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

practice professional elites can reconcile market and professional logics and strengthen the professional position towards clients.

However, in order for the elites to strengthen professional control vis-à-vis clients, they need to respond to clashing logics in ways that bring the logics closer rather than isolating them. Whereas previous studies have shown that clinging to images of “pure professionalism” (Noordegraaf, 2007) in which professionalism is free of managerial influences is unrealistic (Alvehus et al., 2020; Noordegraaf, 2015, 2020), in the same vein, shielding professionalism from the market logic seems retrogressive and counterproductive. Thus, the response of defiance does not strengthen the profession since it leads to a polarization of logics and fortifies the image of professionals as victims of their surroundings. This can rather be interpreted as a weakening of the professions. Meanwhile, the response of succumbence takes this development even further, and consolidates professionals as incapable receivers of threats in the institutional environment. Succumbing to cliental influence can be illustrated by the market logic co-opting the professionals rather than the other way around, a risk that has been indicated with reference to managerial influences in other studies (Kurunmäki, 2004; Waring & Bishop, 2013).

Instead, if we embrace that professionalism increasingly is becoming more connective to other spheres and actors of the organizations (Noordegraaf, 2020), one realistic way for professionals to safeguard control vis-à-vis clients is to hybridize market and professional logics in strategic ways (c.f. Alvehus et al., 2020). In this article, the responses of combination and co-optation show most potential in leading to this effect, since they involve active agency of the elites to blend logics together without renouncing the professional logic. Co-optation is taking this process furthest, since by “owning” elements of the market logic (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018) rather than combining them alongside the professional logic, the response leads to a reformation of the very essence of professionalism (c.f. Noordegraaf, 2015). By being strategic in this, FTs can be helped in their careers, making themselves a position at managerial levels, but at the same time the FTs can represent the interests of teachers. This does not mean adhering to *all* elements of the market logic, which was defined here as succumbence and a more passive co-optation *by* the market logic. Rather FTs can shield some aspects at the core of professional work, such as grading, which many FTs also attempted to do. Thus, elements of the market logic can be co-opted as suitable to the profession (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018). Professional elites can then strengthen professional control, not in a highly traditional sense but in line with perspectives defining professionalism as something new and evolving (c.f. Alvehus et al., 2020; Freidson, 1984; Noordegraaf, 2015, Noordegraaf, 2020; Waring, 2014).

Table 2 sums up the effects of the different responses on the logics and on the profession.

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

Effects	Responses			
	<i>Succumbence</i>	<i>Defiance</i>	<i>Combination</i>	<i>Co-option</i>
<i>Relationships between the logics</i>	Polarization	Polarization	Hybridization	Hybridization
<i>Professional control</i>	Weakening	Weakening	Strengthening	Strengthening

Table 2: *Responses and their effects*

The variety of responses and effects show that introducing elite roles does not automatically lead to a strengthening of professional control vis-à-vis clients. By uplifting context, we can zoom in on the conditions guiding the use of different responses (c.f. Alvehus et al., 2020). Seemingly, for FTs to use their agency to hybridize logics, they must be willing to embark on identity work to include different logics in their professional identities (c.f. Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; McGivern et al., 2015). The strategy of co-optation requires active agency where the market logic is incorporated into the professional one, which entails an altering of professional identity. Seemingly, not all FTs were open to this, but some more actively engaged in defying the market logic. This is in line with other studies highlighting the importance of active individual identity work when exposed to competing logics (Bévort & Suddaby, 2016; Reay, Trish, Goodrick, Waldorff, & Casebeer, 2017).

From the findings of this article, individual identity work is not independent of the relations of the FTs to their wider organization (c.f. Waring, 2014). Interestingly, it seems that where professionals and managers were close and managerial and professional spheres not kept separate, FTs more easily balanced professional and market logics. Tentatively, bringing managerial and professional spheres and logics together involves an openness to include the market logic in the professional identity. In contexts where management was perceived of as a threat, FTs seemed more defensive of their professionalism, trying to preserve it by more harshly resisting influences from other logics. Whereas Pache & Santos (2013) claimed that the level of hybridity between two logics is an important factor guiding responses to two conflicting logics, from the findings in this article, it seems that the level of hybridity between managerial and professional logics is central when it comes to how a third logic, the market one, is perceived of and handled.

Whereas previous studies have highlighted the importance of elites' relationships to colleagues (Alvehus et al., 2020; Freidson, 1984; McDonald et al., 2009; McGivern et al., 2015; Waring, 2014) and the risk of elites shattering professions in terms of creating intra-professional conflict (Adams, 2020; Alvehus et al., 2020), in this article the relationship between managers and the elite gains a prominent position. Cliental influence is a common problem for all professionals and a threat against which they can unite, thus the handling of it is done in a substantive context (cf. McDonald et al., 2009). Rather than focusing on

To Co-Opt or To Be Co-Opted?

intraprofessional relations, when it comes to handling clients it seems important with a unified organization where managers side with the profession. This should not be taken for granted, since there were differences in the level of support that the FTs experienced. Thus, the identity work of FTs and the support of managers seem co-dependent and essential in determining whether FTs will play the role of co-opting the market logic or themselves being co-opted by it (c.f. Andersson & Liff, 2018; Waring & Bishop, 2013).

Concluding remarks

This article adds to the literature on the professional-client relationship and to that on professional elites, both in which there has been a lack of in-depth empirical studies making client influence and clashes between market and professional logics the main focuses rather than peripheral dimensions. This article shows that professional elites can strengthen professional control vis-à-vis clients foremost by the elites using the response of co-optation to hybridize professional and market logics. However, it seems that there are differences in the conditions guiding the FTs' responses and that in some contexts FTs risk succumbing to the market logic, becoming themselves co-opted by it.

Whereas this study started from a point of view where logics were seen as conflictual, the wide use of responses to hybridize logics, in line with other research, indicate that we might have to increasingly embrace a pre-understanding of logics as blended together (Alvehus et al., 2020; Andersson & Liff, 2018) and of clients as co-constructors of organizations (Alvesson, 2001; Anderson-Gough, Grey & Robson, 2000; Sturdy & Wright, 2011; Torfing & Triantafillou, 2016) rather than the "enemy" of professions. Perhaps future research can adapt this more settling view of logics and develop new insights on what the institutional environment consists of in professional organizations, as well as on how it is handled.

It is important to bear in mind that the focus on professional elites excludes the vast majority of professionals and only gives a limited picture. Future research could continue to empirically explore ordinary professionals' perceptions and handling of client influence, as there is a scarcity of studies doing so (Bourgeault et al., 2011). Arguably, those not in elite positions might struggle even more to incorporate different logics in their professional identities, or perhaps they do not feel the same pressure to do so, since they are less active than elites in different realms. These, however, remain questions for future empirical studies.

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