



# Understanding professionals and their workplaces: The mission of the *Journal of Professions and Organization*

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## ABSTRACT

In this essay we describe the growing importance of professions and the organizations in which they work, and we trace some trends in relevant scholarly research on this topic. We start by noting a dearth of recent publications in leading management and organization journals that address the field of professional organizations and include findings that may inform a better understanding of these contexts. We thus explain why we need this dedicated, specialist journal to provide a home for research in these areas. After providing some background to the ideas and actions that led to the founding of the *Journal of Professions and Organization*, aspects of the journal's mission, philosophy, and policies are presented. Finally we outline several areas in which we hope to foster research that, in sum, will add to our understanding of professions, professionals, their work and organization.

**KEYWORDS:** professionals; professions; organization; journal.

## HOW WE GOT HERE

Professionals and the organizations in which they work play an increasingly important role in contemporary knowledge-intensive societies, bringing their expert knowledge and skills to bear in a widening variety of economic and social settings. They are important economic actors in their own right, yet also have significant roles in framing, setting standards, arbitrating, regulating, and supporting wider business exchanges. Besides their growing direct economic significance, professionals exercise what is arguably an even more important role as lubricants of commerce as they provide the supportive infrastructure which facilitates transnational trade and

supports processes of wealth generation, accumulation, and realization. Professionals also have great social significance, playing critical roles in the education, health, and justice fields. In fact, the emergence and dominance of professionals is one of the characteristics that distinguish contemporary society from its historical predecessors. Although there were certainly doctors, lawyers, accountants, and engineers in prior millennia, it is only in recent generations that they have become widespread (Perkin 1989) whilst entire new forms of expertise such as advertising, management consultancy, and executive search professionals have developed and consolidated in the last century. As such, the professions replaced

farming, manufacturing and trade as likely occupations for young people planning their future careers; while professionalization has joined mechanization, urbanization, deregulation, as one of the ubiquitous socio-economic trends of our times; and thus professions and their organizations have become increasingly important institutions in our lives.

Parallel to the growing significance and the changes in professions and professionals, scholarly research dealing with the organizations in which professionals work—be they professional service firms (PSFs), professional organizations, or public service organizations—grew in prominence during the second half of the 20th century. This work began with understanding core issues that defined the nature of these organizations, including themes like autonomy, external control, collegiality, commitment to the client/patient, and professional dominance (Brock, Powell, and Hinings 1999). Mainly emerging from sociology into the field of organizational theory (via scholars like Scott, Hall, and Montagna), inroads were also made into the management field, leading to popular contributions such as Mintzberg's (1979, 1983) seminal formulation of the 'Professional Bureaucracy'. Stronger foundations and scholarly legitimacy were added by important articles that followed in the *Academy of Management Journal* (e.g. Greenwood, Deephouse, and Li 2007), *Journal of Management Studies* (Hinings, Brown, and Greenwood 1991), and *Organization Studies* (e.g. Ackroyd 1996; Cooper et al. 1996; Greenwood and Lachman 1996; Reed 1996). Books by Alvesson (1995), Löwendahl, (1997), and Maister (1993) were also influential, as was the edited book *Restructuring the Professional Organization* (Brock, Powell, and Hinings 1999).

As academic fields mature, it is natural for them also to fragment (Wiemann, Pingree, and Hawkins 1988). As such, research on professionals and their organizations has tended to diverge and specialize over the decades into studies of specific segments, theories, phenomena, and managerial issues. Although many excellent papers containing data and concepts from professional organizations have appeared in top journals, one is hard-pressed to find many that address the field as a whole and/or engage with its core issues—like autonomy, partnership, and collegiality—by which these organizations

became defined. Comparative studies (among professions/occupations) are extremely rare. Normative work is especially lacking, thus leaving us far from understanding how organizational issues are related to effectiveness in these contexts.

We gained direct evidence of this in 2012 while working on various projects that provided us an overview of the status of research on professional organizations. We collected a stack of relevant, recent (since 2000) articles from top management and organization journals, each paper either mentioning a relevant organization aspect or type—for example 'professional partnership' (Greenwood and Empson 2003), 'professional organization' (Pinnington and Morris 2003), or 'professional service firm' (Hitt et al. 2006)—or specific professional organization—for example 'accounting' (Suddaby, Gendron, and Lam 2009), 'hospitals' (Dent et al. 2004), or 'law firm' (Briscoe and Tsai 2011). Each paper was then analysed, noting the nature of its contribution. Four broad categories of contributions emerged from this analysis. These categories are intended to be in the sequence from most (A) to least (D) generalizable contributions to and/or significant implications for the understanding of professionals and their organizations. Descriptions of the categories and some examples of articles appear in Table 1.

While the range of research may seem positive, more in-depth analysis of the literature reveals several shortcomings. During a period of increasing number, size, variety, and significance of professional organizations in our societies, scholarly research does not seem to be keeping up (Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008; Scott 2008). Occasionally papers do appear that remind us about this gap between the complexity of the field and what we understand—the exchange between von Nordenflycht (2010, 2011) and Zardkoohi et al. (2011) on defining professional and knowledge-intensive firms is a rare example. However, our recent reviews of the field do leave the impression of a lack of coherent and systematic building of our understanding of professional organizing. Although theoretical advances do appear from time to time (Fournier 1999; Evetts 2006; Scott 2008; Boussebaa, Morgan, and Sturdy 2012; Muzio, Brock, and Suddaby 2013), the recent focus seems to be more at the

**Table 1. Descriptions and examples of categories of research in (but not necessarily on) professional organizations**

	Description	Examples
A	Research primarily addressing the professional organizations area; papers are fully focused on either the professional organization field or a broad issue relevant thereto	Ackroyd and Muzio (2007); Brock (2006); Malhotra and Morris (2009); von Nordenflycht (2010)
B	Research in and on professional organizations, dealing with issues relevant to the field; papers are focused on issue considered central to the field	Greenwood and Empson (2003) on partnership; Greenwood et al. (2007) on ownership and performance; and Smets, Morris, and Greenwood (2012) on causes of changes in professional practice
C	Research in professional organizations, contributing to our knowledge of the field; papers are focused on general managerial or organizational issues, but draw some conclusions that are significant to the field	Brivot (2011) on knowledge management; Hitt et al. (2006) on internationalization; Broschak (2004) on client relationships; Malos and Campion (2000) on human resource strategy in PSFs; and Suddaby and Greenwood (2005) on rhetorical strategies
D	Research on some organizational/managerial issue, using a sample of professional organizations; papers may start with an issue concerning professional organization and/or used data from these contexts, yet their papers conclude with little or no implications professionals and their organizations. These papers tend to present their conclusions/implications within a specific contexts (like accounting or health), specific issues (like change or globalization), and/or to make broader theoretical contributions—most notably recent developments in neo-institutional theory or critical management studies	Briscoe and Tsai (2011) on overcoming inertial forces; Brock, Yaffe, and Dembovsky (2006) on global strategy; Dent et al. (2004) on archetypal transition; Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) on institutional entrepreneurship; Lawrence, Malhotra, and Morris (2012) on power and organizational change; Reay and Hinings (2005, 2009) on institutional logics; Sherer and Lee's (2002) paper on institutional change; Smets and Jarzabkowski (2013) on institutional complexity; and Wagner, Hoisl, and Thoma (2013) on knowledge flows

micro (organizational behaviour) or field levels rather than on organizations. And although several interesting qualitative (even ethnographic) studies are being published, quantitative empirical studies using large data bases and/or data from more than one occupation are few and far between.<sup>1</sup> Evidence of this is presented by Muzio, Brock, and Suddaby (2013) where it was reported that less than a quarter of the 85 submissions to the *JMS* Issue on 'Professions and Institutional Change' used quantitative empirical analysis; and of these, not one paper contained data from more than one occupation. In short, it seems clear to us that aspects of this field

are not being adequately addressed by existing scholarship.

During our examination of papers published over a decade that represent countless hours of the authors' time immersed in professional organizations, with the potential to contribute to our understanding of these contexts, one does get a sense that something is being lost. For example, we contacted an author of an excellent paper in an excellent journal to ask how it happened that a paper with great potential to contribute to our knowledge of PSFs did not go on to do that. The author responded (via e-mail) as follows: 'To be honest, I wrote a

section of the discussion that talked about contributions to professional service firms, and it got left on the cutting room floor'. In other words, the potential for a contribution was there, but the journal's editorial team was not interested in publishing it. On reflection, this phenomenon is not surprising. Generalist managerial and organizational journals are interested primarily in advancing managerial and organizational theory, and neither their readers nor their editorial team can be expected to have a strong interest in any specific context. In fact, this is a natural tendency in academics and research, leading to the serial development of specialist fields. Just as not all scientists are interested in biology and not all historians focus on America—leading over a century ago to the establishment of (then) specialized journals in these areas—so, not all organizational and management researchers are interested in the professionals and professional organizations.

Further, the vast majority of leading journals in the organization/management area—such as *AMJ*, *JMS*, *Organization Studies* or *Organization Science*—are extensions of major academic associations; and by design, are broad and must cater diverse academic communities. These journals, however, tend to be more conservative as producers of 'normal science' and tend to lack the mandate and flexibility to be loci of innovation in terms of domain, methodology, and mode of enquiry. Specialized conferences and special issues of generalist journals are used to bring about new ideas or to challenge the received wisdom. These attempts, however, are costly in terms of available research resources and are therefore relatively sporadic. A more focused and independent journal allows the editors to take more risks with new scholarly ideas, unique methodologies, and theoretical viewpoints. We thus believe that a new, specialist/independent journal like *JPO* will stimulate and consolidate research in the increasingly significant field of professional occupations and organizations.

The above analyses indicated that there is a clear potential for such a new journal. Against the background of growing importance of professional organizations in our societies and economies, there is a manifest lack of adequate empirical and theoretical advances in these contexts. In other words, there are clear indications that research on professional

organizations is not keeping up with their growing significance. Thus, with a desire to remedy these shortcomings, we began to investigate the feasibility of establishing a specialist journal in this area that would act as a catalyst for research focused on professional work, occupations, and organizations *per se*.

We consulted with colleagues active in this field, made presentations at relevant events, and developed the case for our journal. We then formed the editorial team and held initial conversations with Oxford University Press which proved fruitful. This leads to the development of a formal proposal and after various rounds of review and due diligence, *JPO* was born. The various rounds of consultations and revision led us to clarify what we wanted this journal to be—along four interlinking dimensions:

- scope—*JPO* will be an interdisciplinary journal, dealing with professions (and other knowledge-intensive occupations), their work and organization;
- quality—*JPO* will encourage and facilitate the publication of highest quality research (reflected in the journal rankings);
- diversity—*JPO* will be willing to embrace any academic discipline, theoretical frame, and any methodological approach on the road to advancing our understanding of professions, their work and organization (as reflected in the diversity of its editorial board);
- community—*JPO* will be focussed on building a global and interdisciplinary community of scholars, working together to promote research on professionals and their organizations.

The above pithy concepts were expanded for various purposes and audiences. Extracts from a typical call for papers appear in Fig. 1. Reflecting its 'community' orientation, *JPO*'s editorial policies were formulated in an effort to be particularly author-friendly. Thus, we are committed to a fast, electronically managed, editorial process by which all authors will receive constructive and developmental comments on their paper. The editors aim to provide a first decision within 9 weeks of submission.

**JPO aims to be the premier outlet for research on organizational issues concerning professionals, including their work, management and their broader social and economic role.** The main focus will be on the organizational level. However, we maintain a broad interest in professionals, the professions, professionalization, professional practice and relevant work-place issues. We are particularly receptive to interdisciplinary perspectives and contributions, with strong interests in all professional organizations, professional service firms (PSFs), and public sector professional service organizations (PSOs). While recognizing the importance of traditional professions, we welcome work on new professions, occupations claiming some professional status, and on knowledge workers more generally.

This journal will be a catalyst for top quality scholarly research concerning professionals and their organizations. There are important and fascinating ongoing theoretical as well as organizational and managerial developments in this field. Current theoretical advances are building on institutional theory, and the sociology of organizations and markets. This journal will be a leading venue for these theoretical advances as they apply to professional organizations (both PSFs and PSOs). Further, there will be a strong emphasis on developments in managerial practices and organizational forms relevant to these contexts. Another objective is concerned with better understanding the crucial role of professional organizations and occupations in the wider economic and social order.

A critical objective of this journal is to leverage the network of international scholars in sociology, management, psychology, and even business history in order to advance research in the broader field of expert or knowledge-based work. This broad perspective will enable us to bring together scholars from very diverse subfields including organizations, medicine, law, engineering, and consulting and to allow us to engage in multidisciplinary discourses and foster interdisciplinary research collaborations. This makes our journal quite unique and puts us at the forefront of the development towards more integrative and multidisciplinary research in this specialty field. To this effect we particularly welcome papers which seek ...

**Figure 1.** Parts of a *JPO* call for papers.

### THE WAY FORWARD

The essence of *JPO*'s mission is to foster research on professionals, their work and organization. On the road to achieving this we explicitly seek, but are not limited to, papers that address these five interconnected subject areas.

#### Organizational models and structures

Not long ago it was relatively simple to understand the distinctiveness of a professional organization. By the 1960s sociologists had defined the main characteristics of the archetypal professional organization (Scott 1965; Hall 1968; Montagna 1968; Bucher and Stelling 1969) with low vertical and horizontal differentiation, power resting in the hands of professional experts, managers confined to support roles, and the overriding assumption that organizational and professional values were inherently incompatible (Blau and Scott 1962). Mintzberg (1979) subsequently wrote the classic delineation of the professional bureaucracy within the management literature; and this led to the Greenwood, Deephouse,

and Li (2007) professional partnership (or P2) model, where the professionals were at once the operators, managers, and owners of the firm.

Following a broad range of exogenous developments, including globalization, the impact of neo-liberal policies, and increasingly sophisticated technological solutions, some of the same scholars have suggested that a new more managerial archetype has been superimposed over traditional professional cultures, structures, and processes. The argument is that in increasingly competitive markets the traditional professional partnership has had to accept more corporate and managerial modes of operation in its search for increased efficiency (Cooper et al. 1996; Brock, Powell, and Hinings 1999). In this context, governmental intervention is particularly important as it has often facilitated change from one dominant logic to another—for example, from medical professionalism to business-like healthcare (Reay and Hinings 2005). Similarly, the increasing possibilities of technology have allowed the development of alternative organizational modes

centred on network forms and virtual structures (Susskind 2008). Thus, Teece (2003) discusses how a global consulting firm moved away from partnership towards objective business metrics, performance measurement, and individual reward.

As expert talent becomes more important to problem-solving, decision-making, and dispute resolution new organizational forms are emerging to cater to the needs of not only the experts and their clients, but also those of their public-sector regulators. Traditional hierarchical structures are likely to decline, to be replaced by more decentralized quasi self-organized organizations...with performance measurement down to the individual level (Teece 2003: 914).

Reihlen and Mone (2012) describe the evolution of the professional model away from some of its original foundations—like professional autonomy and occupational control—towards what they call a ‘trans-professional model’ featuring reflective knowledge production and decentralized control. Fenton and Pettigrew (2000) describe an architectural firm’s gradual yet dramatic organizational changes: an initiative called ‘Reformation’ created divisions and an explicit hierarchy to replace the traditional fluid structure. Further internal changes were implemented ‘to separate policy from operational decision-making and create market and skills networks to integrate the groups’ (Fenton and Pettigrew 2000: 48).

Recently, other scholars have questioned the extent of change in professional firms (Pinnington and Morris 2003; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008) and the ability of existing theories, such as archetype theory, to account for what change has occurred (Kirkpatrick and Ackroyd 2003; Ackroyd and Muzio 2007). It seems that, rather than a convergence onto a more managerial archetype, the professional services field is increasingly fragmented around multiple business models and organizational solutions reflecting, inter alia, the intricacies of different strategies (process versus bespoke work), services (commodity and boutique), cultures (national, occupational, and firm specific), jurisdictions (regional, national or transnational), and market-places. Others (Noordegraaf 2007; Adler, Kwon,

and Heckscher 2008; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008; Kurunmaki, Miller, and O’Leary 2008) have suggested how professional organizations are hybrids combining different logics such as managerialism, commercialism, and of course professionalism. A study of the health care system in Alberta by Reay and Hinings (2009) shows competing logics can coexist within professional contexts. Indeed, the success of professional organizations may indeed rest on their ambidextrous ability to draw on and combine structures and practices from different logics (Adler, Kwon, and Heckscher 2008). *JPO* is interested in organizational innovations relevant to professionals, and is committed to publish research in which existing organizational structures are reassessed and alternative organizational structures are introduced.

#### Micro-organizational issues: herding cats is not what it used to be

The traditional collegiality, independence, and external affiliation of professionals present various challenges to extant managerial approaches—to such an extent that the phrase ‘herding cats’ became popular in describing the alleged near impossibility of effectively leading and managing in these environments. Professional contexts were characterized by quite distinctive structures and a clear set of roles based on seniority: ‘There were partners and there were associates’ (Sherer 1995: 673). Career systems were ‘up-or-out’ encompassing the binary mechanism of either promotion up to partner or exit out of the firm. A more informal way of describing this traditional hierarchy was: *finders*, *minders*, and *grinders*. Thus, the role of partners was to secure work from clients (often called ‘rainmaking’); the role of senior associates (and junior partners) was to manage projects and teams; and the role of associates was to do the routine work.

Enter the contemporary era of deregulation and globalization and suddenly many old norms, adages, and practices no longer apply. In this context, firms have been increasingly turning to their own division of labour as a source of profitability. Thus, analyses inspired by labour-process theory (Hanlon 1999; Ackroyd and Muzio 2007) reveal how firms have been restructuring their careers systems, stretching

their divisions of labour, and leveraging their workforces (Maister 1993) to improve financial performance. This has been accompanied by the increasing formalization, standardization, and coordination of workplace systems and relationships (Cooper et al. 1996). The partnership model itself, both as an ownership structure and approach to management, is in flux, becoming decreasingly collegial and increasingly managerial as well a transient as indicated by de-equitizations and lateral hires (Angel 2007; Empson, Cleaver, and Allen 2013). In this context, Brock and Yaffe (2008) question the appropriateness of the partnership as a governance structure for increasingly global professional organizations by suggesting how increasing distances (physical and cultural) result in operational and strategic complications. This criticism is of course increasingly pertinent, given new legislation which allows professional firms in some jurisdictions to adopt more corporate ownership structures. Relatedly, Galanter and Henderson (2008) show how under the pressures of increasing scale and diversity management policies, traditional up or out systems (Galanter and Palay 1991) have become more elastic through the creation of non-partnership roles and tracks, the increasing use of temporary positions and atypical employment contracts and the spread of outsourcing and off-shoring practices (Sako 2013). In this context, more attention needs to be placed on the changing realities of work place systems, managerial practices, and career structures within professional services firms and how this impacts on the performance of these organizations as well as on the lived experiences and working conditions of their labour forces.

The nature of management itself within professional contexts also requires further attention. The esoteric, relational and intangible nature of professional work, together with the collegial and autonomous orientations of professionals, has historically been seen as a barrier to the implementation of rationalistic forms of control (Barley and Kunda 1992) based on processes of standardization, formalization, and direct supervision. In this context, management has tended to be consultative rather than executive whilst leadership distributed if not altogether absent (Empson, Cleaver, and Allen 2013). Indeed, the reliance on formal committees, informal

consultations, and partnership wide votes as governance mechanisms underscores the collegiality which has characterized these environments (Faulconbridge and Muzio 2008). At the more micro-level, management has tended to focus on normative forms of control. This relies on dynamics of empowerment and on the development of HRM techniques, such as recruitment and selection, mentoring schemes and socialization programs, designed to elicit trust, loyalty, and motivation (Covaleski et al. 1998; Anderson-Gough, Grey, and Robson 1999). At the most extreme, this comprises sophisticated forms of identity work (Alvesson and Willmott 2002) as professionals seek to intervene on the basis of individual subjectivities and align these with corporate priorities such as cost effectiveness, customer focus, and commercial awareness (Grey 1994, 1998). In this context, appeals to professionalism are sometimes deployed as disciplinary tools to generate goal commitment and allow the exercise of control at a distance. *JPO* will emphasize research on micro-organizational issues affecting the management of professional workforces including leadership practices and styles, changing career structures and employment patterns, the development of new control and accountability regimes as well as the processes, mechanisms, and outcomes of identity work.

### Diversity, inclusion, and the professions

Professions have always been connected in sociological studies to dynamics of social stratification and gender segregation (Witz 1992; MacDonald 1995). This is because as recognized in an oft-quoted remark, occupational closure regimes 'maximise rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles' (Parkin 1974: 3). As a result closure is an inherently gendered, classed, and racialized process. As professional work has shifted towards employed settings, these social characteristics have gained increasing importance as organizational issues. Thus, broad literatures are evolving, for example, in the areas of gender (Ibarra 1992; Hagan and Kay 1995; Kay and Hagan 1998; Blair-Loy 2001; Sommerlad 2002; Bolton and Muzio 2008; Kay and Gorman 2008) and race (Higgins 2000; Dinovitzer and Garth 2007; Payne-Pikus, Hagan and Nelson 2010). These

projects indicate how the organizational models and labour strategies of professional services firms tend, sometimes unwittingly, to trigger processes of vertical stratification and horizontal segmentation, where women and other minority groups are relegated to more subordinate and transient roles or to less lucrative areas of practice. Furthermore, and perhaps more importantly key concepts such as merit, quality, commitment, and even professional appearance (Sommerlad and Sanderson 1998; Heinz et al. 2005; Haynes 2007, 2012; Tomlinson et al. 2013) are predicated around the norms of white middle class men, which opens up the space to processes of in group favouritism (Gorman and Kmec 2008), homosocial reproduction (Kanter 1977) or homology (Hanlon 2004). These are amplified by the informality that pervades organizational structures and working relations within professional context and affects professionals in terms of the allocation of clients and projects, access to mentorship opportunities, and internal promotions, and triggers mirroring effects which allow dominant elites to reproduce themselves (Bolton and Muzio 2008). As remarked by Wilkins and Gulati (1996) the ‘tournaments’ of professionals which have regulated access, performance and success in professional contexts are staged in gendered and classed arenas.

Against this backdrop more research is needed on how certain professional practices and cultures affect different demographic groups and the impact that this has on the performance of professional work settings. Furthermore, whilst most research in this area has tended to prioritize structure, it is important to recover the agency of professionals, their colleagues, and their clients vis-a-vis their employers in these processes (Tomlinson et al. 2013). Of particular interest here is the emerging stream of work on diversity management within professional contexts (Wilkins 2007; Ashley 2010; Ashcraft et al. 2012; Ashley and Empson 2013). What are firms doing in this area? How effective are their interventions? What interventions are most successful and in what circumstances? How do the diversity actions of organizations interact with broader dynamics in the wider political economy? How can the inclusivity of diversity management policies be reconciled with the exclusivity that elite firms celebrate in their recruitment and marketing practices?

Similarly, more attention should be placed on professionals themselves; after all we are talking of resourceful, reflexive, and sophisticated individuals here. Thus, *JPO* is interested in research dealing with the career strategies and behaviours of professionals and how they seek to manage the structural barriers and unequal opportunities they may encounter (Fernando and Cohen 2013; Tomlinson et al. 2013; Briscoe and Von Nordenflycht 2014). In this context, we especially encourage research that examines the extent to which these challenge or reproduce existing structures within professional organizations and occupations.

#### New/emerging professions and organization: towards new models of professionalization?

The traditional ‘collegial’ professions (Ackroyd and Muzio 2007) have historically been considered the standard form for the organization and delivery of expertise in modern societies (Reed 1996). These professions are characterized by a high degree of autonomy, collegiality, and self-regulation, whereby professionals through their occupational associations control the definition, organization, and evaluation of their own work (Cooper and Robson 2006; Suddaby, Greenwood, and Wilderom 2008). Occupational closure regimes enable professions to regulate the supply of labour into their own jurisdictions. Finally, the professionals control if not own their means of production. Yet, there are question marks if this model of professionalism is still, or indeed was ever, accurate. Thus for Evetts (2003), traditional professionalism may have only been relevant for a limited number of occupations (law and medicine), in a certain number of countries (Anglo-Saxon ones), in a specific historical epoch (early to mid-19th century). Indeed, Burrage and Torstendahl (1990) had already identified a distinctive Continental route to professionalism, based on state sponsorship and patronage.

These debates are all more pertinent, given the rise over the last few decades of a number of very successful knowledge-intensive occupations, such as management consultancy, it/systems analysts, advertising, financial intermediaries, and so on, which have not adopted traditional professionalization strategies (Alvesson 1995; Blackler 1995; Reed



1996). Rather these professions have relied on alternative strategies of marketization, engaging closely with clients, developing continuously new products, and 'locking in and stimulating the seemingly inexhaustible demand for new specialties' (Fincham 2006: 23). Conversely, distinctively managerial specialisms, such as HR, diversity managers, operations managers, or purchasing/procurement officers, have developed within the corporation itself (Dacin, Goodstein, and Scott 2002). These areas of expertise have tended to link their occupational projects to their ability to close off key enclaves in the organizational structures they inhabit, monopolize technical tasks and corporate functions and ultimately add value to their employers (Armstrong 1985; Reed 1996). Thus by the late 1990s a distinctive 'knowledge worker thesis' had been postulated, whereby new knowledge and technical based occupations were considered as unwilling or unable to professionalize; instead these were seen as adopting new and more entrepreneurial, managerial and informational forms of organization.

More recently, research has focussed on a range of new professionalization projects within emerging knowledge domains. These projects display hybrid characteristics as they blend traditional concerns with occupational closure, credentialism, and self-regulation with an increasing recognition of the importance of large organizations as sites of professional regulation and identity formation (Cooper and Robson 2006); as such they have been defined as examples of corporate professionalism (Kipping, Kirkpatrick, and Muzio 2006; Kipping 2011; Thomas and Thomas 2013; Paton, Hodgson, and Muzio 2013). Drawing on social identity theory and institutional theory, Montgomery and Oliver (2007) develop a process model whereby combined inward- and outward-directed networking activities construct the social boundaries marking exclusive membership and proprietary domain. Yet the characteristics, internal and external dynamics, and consequences of these new occupational projects and how they relate to established forms of professionalism or new models of knowledge work are not properly understood.

As part of ongoing attempts to 'revisit theories of professionalism, which did not fully anticipate the shift of professional work to the context of large

organizations' (Suddaby, Cooper, and Greenwood 2007: 357), *JPO* is committed to foster debate around new forms professionalism and patterns of professionalization, including occupational projects that are emerging, are in transition or may have failed. In particular we are interested in research exploring the intersection between professional workers, departments, occupations, and organizations, as the reworking of these relationships is at the heart of the transformation of contemporary forms of expertise (Barley and Tolbert 1991; Lounsbury and Ventresca 2003; Muzio and Kirkpatrick 2011).

### Societal issues: professions and professional organization in the broader political economy

The societal role and impact of professions and professional organizations is our final core theme. As summarized by Scott (2008: 219) in a seminal contribution 'the professions in modern society have assumed leading roles in the creation and tending of institutions. They are the preeminent institutional agents of our time'. This institutional function includes their crucial role as gatekeepers who guarantee the integrity and functional operation of core societal and economic institutions (Coffee 2006) such as capital markets and organizational governance regimes. Indeed, signalling their institutional importance, their failure as gatekeepers had significant repercussions on the stability of our economic and financial system. Professionals, through their distinct cognitive, normative and regulative capabilities, play a more active role as 'lords of the dance' who help choreograph the broad restructuring of contemporary political-economic systems. This of course includes well-documented attempts by sociologists of the professions (Larson 1977; Abbott 1988) to develop and gain control over their own occupational jurisdictions but more broadly the actions of professionals, as part of their occupational projects, have wider repercussions on surrounding institutions.

Whilst Scott (2008; see also Suddaby and Viale 2011 and Muzio et al. 2013) provides us with an analytical framework to study professional agency, most of this work to date has taken place outside the various subspecialties of management and

organizational studies. Thus, critical accountants tell us how accountancy firms, as part of their attempts to develop markets for their expertise, play an active role in the construction of new global governance regimes (Arnold 2005) or the reorganization of national qualification systems (Suddaby, Cooper, and Greenwood 2007); business historians reveal the role of professionals like management consultants, in spreading managerial fads and fashions (Kipping 1999; McKenna 2006); whilst socio-legal scholars reveal the role of lawyers in building, developing, and spreading new institutions such as the international arbitration system (Dezalay and Garth 1998), bankruptcy regimes (Halliday and Carruthers 2009) or alternative dispute resolution procedures (Edelman, Erlanger, and Lande 1993). Yet these studies are too often phenomenon-driven, in-depth case studies, which do not seek to abstract and theorize the mechanisms and techniques through which professions participate in and facilitate processes of institutional change. Thus, the institutional role of professionals and their organizations remains under-examined and under-theorized (Muzio et al. 2013).

Accordingly, *JPO* proposes to be a venue for multi-disciplinary debates around the agency of professionals and how this affects broader societal and economic institutions. Within this broader agenda, an increasing body of work (Fourcade 2006; Suddaby, Cooper, and Greenwood 2007; Beaverstock, Faulconbridge, and Hall 2010; Ramirez 2010; Faulconbridge and Muzio 2012; Seabrooke 2014) emphasizes the emergence of transnational professional projects, jurisdictions, and governance regimes. In this context, the relationship between professional associations, multinational corporations, international organizations (such as the EU, WTO, and OECD), and the nation state is in rapid transition. This is a theme close to our interests. Furthermore, since most professional organizations originate from developed and largely Anglo-Saxon economies, we are particularly interested in building bridges between research on professional organizations and the growing post-colonial literature (Frenkel 2008), as professional organization plays an active role in spreading western logics and therefore is part of processes of imperialist domination (Boussebaa, Morgan, and Sturdy 2012).

Understanding these processes, their effects on globalization and economic development, and how they may be changing in light of the rise of developing economies is a key priority for *JPO*.

#### And beyond. . .

Inasmuch as *JPO* is positioning itself as the home for research on expert workers and their workplaces, drawing a watertight border around our domain is infeasible in a world where expertise continually develops and approaches to managing and organizing constantly advance. While our prophetic powers are limited, burgeoning debates in general management and organization literatures indicate several areas where we can expect increasing research on professional contexts. One of these areas is that of ethics and corporate social responsibility. Early sociological theories (MacDonald 1995) identified a public interest orientation as a distinguishing feature of professional occupations. Brint (1994) notes how professionals have historically emphasized their community orientation, through rhetorics of trusteeship which celebrate their ability to fulfil key societal roles. An example is certainly the ‘gatekeeper’ role exercised by professionals in contemporary societies (Coffee 2006), yet there are far too many cases of professionals’ failure to adhere to ethical guidelines (Ashbaugh, LaFond, and Mayhew 2003; Gunz and Gunz 2008; O’Mahoney 2011; Gabbioneta et al. 2013, Gabbioneta, Prakash, and Greenwood 2014). *JPO* should become a forum for investigating the organizational aspects of these failures and proposed solutions.

Other under-researched areas are those bringing an organizational view of in-house professionals, professional alumni networks, and the spillover effects of professional organizational artefacts to other organizations in general. While the professions have always been a source of talent for businesses in general (e.g. Hamori, Bonet, and Cappelli 2011; Suddaby and Viale 2011), not enough is known about the organizational-level issues heralded by this flow in other contexts (Muzio et al. 2013). Here, better understanding the impact of professionals and professionalization in domains such as culture (DiMaggio 1991), policy (Noordegraaf 2013), and charity (Hwang and

Powell 2009) seems particularly important and therefore relevant to *JPO*'s mission.

Finally, we need to recognize the decreasing monopoly of Western concepts, samples, and theories of professional organization. Yet we seldom see studies of African, Asian or South American professionals and their workplaces in our journals. While monikers like 'transitional/developing economies' do not by themselves necessarily make a study interesting and worth reading, we do hope that *JPO* will soon publish articles that bring insights from professional work beyond our commonplace locations. By so doing we will learn not only about organizing and management in these contexts but also better comprehend the future of the professional in the world as a whole.

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#### NOTE

1. A recent study by Malhotra and Morris (2009) drawing on data from three professions—law, accounting, and engineering—is a rare exception.

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