

How some professionals succeed in becoming more equal than others. Organized professionalism, career opportunities, and public debate.

Marja Gastelaars and Ellen van Wijk¹

Abstract: In this paper we align with Cohen et al. (2005) and investigate how representatives of a number of professional groups make use of the three frames of reference they presented. Moreover, we propose to take their argument one step further and investigate how professionals manage to justify a comparatively 'elevated' organizational status, making use of these frames. The first of these frames points at traditional 'professional privilege'; in our version, its impact is also related to the organizational relevance of the associated professional practices. The second frame we shall label 'organizational' instead of 'entrepreneurial', because, to us, it enacts professional career opportunities through a reciprocal dependency of organizations and professionals. The third frame focuses on the organizational relevance of 'public responsibility' and is intrinsically connected with some professionals' vulnerability to public debate.

Key Words: professional career, professional expertise, professional prestige, professional responsibility

¹ Dr Marja Gastelaars and Dr Ellen van Wijk are associated with the Utrecht School of Governance, Utrecht University, Bijlhouwerstraat 6, 3511ZC Utrecht, The Netherlands. Corresponding address M.M.Gastelaars@uu.nl

How some professionals succeed in becoming more equal than others. Organized professionalism, career opportunities, and public debate.

[Author A] and [Author B]

Abstract: In this paper we align with Cohen et al. (2005) and investigate how representatives of a number of professional groups make use of the three frames of reference they presented. Moreover, we propose to take their argument one step further and investigate how professionals manage to justify a comparatively ‘elevated’ organizational status, making use of these frames. The first of these frames points at traditional ‘professional privilege’; in our version, its impact is also related to the organizational relevance of the associated professional practices. The second frame we shall label ‘organizational’ instead of ‘entrepreneurial’, because, to us, it enacts professional career opportunities through a reciprocal dependency of organizations and professionals. The third frame focuses on the organizational relevance of ‘public responsibility’ and is intrinsically connected with some professionals’ vulnerability to public debate.

Key Words: professional career, professional expertise, professional prestige, professional responsibility

1. Introduction

In this paper we align with a contribution presented to this journal by Cohen et al. (2005) about the variety of discourses that are presented, these days, by architects to justify their professional activities. We shall demonstrate how representatives of other professional groups make use of similar frames. In our turn, however, we shall also argue, that they particularly use these frames to justify a comparatively ‘elevated’ organizational status. Moreover, and unlike Cohen et al., we shall argue that these discourses are only relevant insofar as they are also confirmed by the other side, i.e., by their organizations. Organizations – or rather: their management – may provide reasons of their own to entertain these justifications.

So if, like Cohen et al. (2005: 782-5) we relate to discourses involved with traditional professionalism, we shall not only relate how this discourse appears to confirm the exclusive repertoires of some professionals, we shall also try to show how its relevance may also depend on their organizations’ affirmation. In a similar manner we shall elaborate on Cohen et al.’s entrepreneurial perspective (2005:785-88). In this case we shall even argue that this discourse, in particular, should be seen as an essentially ‘organizational’ discourse. It relies on the mutual dependence of professionals and their organizations; organizational opportunities for individual professionals are expressly related to a specific kind of expertise. And, last but not least, we shall also relate to Cohen et al.’s so-called public perspective (2005: 788-91). We shall relate it to the organizational relevance of an essentially personalized professional responsibility.

We shall make use of some ethnographic fieldwork on a number of professional practices of the apparently ‘elevated’ kind that has been published over the past few years, to prove our point. We take Cohen et al.’s work on architects as a starting point (Cohen et al. 2005). The next data set is produced by the fieldwork performed by [author B] on behalf of a study on the so-called creative professionals in the advertising industry ([Author B] 2006). Some other very detailed ethnographic publications, on IT experts (Barley and Kunda 2004), and on medical specialists working in hospitals (Kruijthoff 2005) shall also serve as data sources. To us, these pieces of ethnographic research have in common that they all rely on observations of the ‘organized’ day to day practices of these professionals, and also on the accounts their research subjects provided during their fieldwork. Moreover, we think that we can safely assume that these authors’ interpretations were guided, at least to an extent, by these self-presentations (Cf. also [Author A] 2009 (2)). As a consequence, we think that we

can be justified to treat each of these ethnographic studies as ‘exemplary’ for the professional orientations they represent.

We assume that all of these research subjects can be considered ‘professionals’ in that they are the ‘owners’ of an essentially personalized – or ‘embodied’ - set of competences and skills that together constitutes a repertoire that can be relevant to an organization (Cf. [Author A 2009: 93ff]). This implies that we are definitely not inclined to reduce these professional identities to a ‘theoretical core’(Cf. Scott 2008: 224) or to any other of the ‘institutionalized’ characteristics that are so often associated with professionalism - an established ‘training level’ or a profession’s ‘accreditation’ (Cf. Wilensky 1964). We assume that organizations hiring professionals are not dealing with abstract ‘sets of qualifications’, either. In fact, we take an essentially practical stance, here, and assume that a professional repertoire cannot be separated from the individual professional’s ‘embodied’ capacity to perform.

But having said this, this essentially practical preoccupation does not keep us from focussing, here, on the external resources – societal and otherwise – that these professionals rely on, whenever they justify their claims to a comparatively elevated organizational status. So, in section 2 we shall elaborate how it cannot be denied that some of these professionals still appear to claim such a status, on the basis of their exclusive access to a set of competences which is protected by their specific professional group. Our material even suggests that this discourse applies not only to medical doctors and other traditional disciplines, but to some of the newer professions, as well. In section 3, we shall show, however, how some other professionals may be much more focussed on the opportunities their organizations provide. They even may derive their elevated status from the indispensability to their organizations, of their expertise. We shall also show, however, how most of these professionals are expected to master some entirely new professional repertoires to successfully ‘manage’ complex organizational settings, as well.

And, finally, in section 4, we shall elaborate on how those professionals whose work has always been expressly related to the public domain, have always been quite vulnerable to public debate, but how this specifically ‘public’ frame of reference now has become quite relevant to many other professionals, as well. In our concluding section we shall discuss how these various discourses affect the organizational position of professionals in more general terms.

2. Real professionals: the organizational relevance of professional autonomy

It is generally acknowledged that the ‘classic’ professions – the traditional list usually includes the medical field and the legal professions, but also notaries, accountancy, officers in the armed services, engineers – managed to consolidate their positions within society in the course of the 19th century (Freidson 1970, 1986, and 2001). The collective arrangements they created to establish themselves represented the right of individual professionals to be recognised as ‘real’, as opposed to ‘moonlighters’ and ‘charlatans’, but of course, the process as a whole can also be framed as the purposeful consolidation of a preferential social status (Freidson 1970; see also Scott 2008: 220).

The sociologist Wilensky (1964) has described this formal professionalization process in terms of a number of stages which are recognised as exemplary, to this day, by those professional groups who are trying to consolidate their societal position (Abbott 1984: 10 ff.; Freidson 1986 and 2001). In this context, the government’s formal acknowledgement of a professional discipline, and also of its formal education processes and its formal professional association, stands out as a decisive factor. This way, professionals expressly appeared to have organized their societal status by demarcating their profession’s specific repertoires.

These repertoires are also assumed to be ‘personalized’, in the sense that they usually require long term ‘expert’ training processes to be ‘incorporated’ by individual practitioners (Cf. also Flyvbjerg 2001). Clear cut examples of this kind of personally consolidated expertise are presented by surgeons and other medical specialists (Cf. also Kruijthof 2005) but by other professional groups as well.

Nowadays, this notion of a personalized repertoire in need of some external protection appears to also apply to those professionals who seem to rely on some kind of ‘personal’ talent. For instance the professional arrangements related to the architects studied by Cohen et al., appear to still be there to protect their incumbents’ creative capacities: ‘Architecture is distinctive for its intrinsic creative dimension’(Cohen et al. 2005: 778). This reasoning also applies to the creative professionals in the advertising industry ([Author B] 2006). In this particular case, the formalized education processes particularly appears to be there, to establish the uniquely ‘personal’ aspect of this professional repertoire, and that this is also justified by the organizations.

For instance, a managing director of an advertising company confirms that not just any school will do for the training of his creative professionals: ‘It is possible to teach them the technical aspects at a graphical college, but in order to become a true graphic designer one has to go to the school of art.’ ([Author B] 2006: 98 quote) According to the professionals themselves, the school of art even tends to redress the effects of any other type of schooling: ‘In the first year [at the school of art] you are taught to let go of old habits. And if you had been trained at a graphical college, before, which is very goal-oriented by nature, it is hard to let go of all you have learned.’ ([Author B] 2006: 100 quote) Moreover, the professional institutions to which this formalized ‘professional education’ gives access, in due course, seem to be exclusively there, to confirm the reputation of individual representatives of the profession. [Author B’s] empirical data about these creative professionals show, for instance, how the professionals themselves seem to be mainly interested in the aesthetic standards applied to their products by their peers.

They clearly appreciated the reputation that could be gained with the prizes their professional community presents to its individual members – in this study these prizes are called the Lamps. Most of them would duly admit, of course, that the relevance of these prizes should not be exaggerated: ‘The winning of an award should not become the end terms of the product: I’m gonna create something that shall be awarded with a Lamp”.’ ([Author B] 2006: 92 quote). But it may not be accidental, that one of the bureaus – called Effect in the study - explicitly chose to profile itself with the slogan: ‘Enemy of the ordinary’ and that it even appeared to succeed, given the response of some of its creative employees: ‘We were eager to work for Effect’; ‘Effect was our ‘Mecca’; ‘They won everything that could be won’ ([Author B] 2006: 103) A similar preoccupation with intra-professional awards can be found with the architects Cohen et al. studied (Cohen et al. 2005: 778). With many other professions, however, the professional organization now appears to particularly serve as a framework to protect individual professionals from the ‘public responsibilities’ that can be generated by their work. We shall return to this issue in section 4.

Even more important for our current argument, however, is the manner in which this type of professionals deals with its organizational involvement. These ‘real’ and ‘established’ professionals invariably appear to frame this in terms of an absolute need for autonomy, as opposed to any kind of organizational domestication. Their preferential type of organization is usually presented as the ‘free association’ of a limited number of partners who all belong to one single profession (see also Barley and Kunda 2004: 295; Scott 2008). This state of affairs has long been mirrored in organizational literature as well, with Mintzberg’s ‘professional bureaucracy’ (1984) and Wallace’s well-known distinction between professional and non professional organizations (Wallace 1995: 229) as prominent examples.

Whenever these professionals are in fact ‘delivered’ to an organization that is not of this distinctly professional kind, a similar attitude creates a continuum where, on one extreme, the ‘real and established’ professionals ‘own’ their repertoires, themselves, and consider themselves to be ‘autonomous’, i.e., ‘independent’ from the organizations they work with. Any other situation can be framed as essentially ‘less professional’, in the sense that one may then experience organizational domestication. However, it should also be taken into account that, whenever professionals have to deal with organizations in real life, these ‘real’ professionals do usually also expect that they will also be allowed a sufficient degree of professional discretion. An impression of the possible orientations that can be produced along these two dimensions provided by ‘ownership’ and ‘situated discretion’, respectively, is presented in figure 1.

Insert figure 1

Again, when viewed from the perspective of the ‘real’ professionals, themselves, the various quadrants appear to simply involve ‘more’ or ‘less’ organizational pressures *vis à vis* the performing professionals. They may even appear to be based on the tacit assumption that an absolute definition of professional ‘autonomy’ should be seen as the preferential state for any professional. The lower right hand version – domestication – can then be seen as the effect of the outright denial, not only of the ‘ownership’ of one’s repertoires but also of any degree of situated discretion.

The second of these two dimensions. However, may also allow for some nuances that might not be equally obvious to these ‘real’ and ‘established’ professionals. That is where the other two quadrants of figure 1 come in. One could for instance visualize, here, a version of organizational involvement provided by those professional who essentially perform quite elementary tasks but who may nevertheless be in need of some situated discretion ([Author A] 1997). They are not visible in the data presented here but examples of this version are invariably presented by investigators of the local police. Another orientation that may be relevant in this respect is presented in the top right hand quadrant of figure 1. We call it ‘formally responsible’ professionals, after [Author A] (1997). The assumption, here, is that some professionals may in fact perform quite autonomously, indeed, as far as the ownership of their repertoires is concerned. At the same time, however, they are, as far as their discretion is concerned, expected to strictly adhere to their organization’s rules and regulations.

Again, examples of this version are not found in the cases we investigated but they may be found with those professionals who essentially represent a socially authoritative system (Cf. Scott’s ‘normative agents’(Scott 2008: 225)). Examples may be provided by accountants and by the judges in our courts of law (Cf. Van der Kam 2001). Of course, these professionals might also claim, themselves, that they should be granted sufficient professional discretion – judges, for instance, tend to accentuate the relevance of their ‘personalized motivations’ in relation to the verdicts they present, and may also be granted this professional leeway (Van der Kam 2001). The point we are trying to make here, however, is that the acceptance, by professionals and their organizations alike, of ‘professional autonomy’ as a relevant frame of reference, produces a specific kind of ‘elevated’ positions for specific professionals. Most other positions are framed in related terms.

3. Warm bodies and organization men: the organizational indispensability of professional expertise

Most professionals are actually working with organizations, by now (see also Scott 2008: 230) although this does not necessarily imply that this affects their status. However, the relatively recent appreciation of this organizational involvement of professionals is also accompanied by the emergence of a vast body of 'new' professionals. They are often related to the so-called new economy and are expressly expected, accordingly, to promote the creativity and innovation of the organizations they work with. Examples are provided by the so-called creative professionals in the advertising industry ([Author B.] 2006) and by the representatives of architecture and design (Cohen et al. 2005) we discussed earlier. The innovative 'knowledge workers' in IT and in some other technical fields should be mentioned here, as well (Barley and Kunda 2004). Florida actually framed all of these professional experts as a part of his so-called new Creative Class: 'I define the core of the Creative Class to include people in science and engineering, architecture and design, education, arts, music and entertainment, whose economic function is to create new ideas, new technology and/or new creative content' (Florida 2002: 8; see also Scott 2008: 228).

In fact, this profile has a history of its own, as well. For instance, it fits in very well with what Bledstein has described as the meritocratic professional tradition which came into being in the early 20th century US (Bledstein 1976: 87–90). In this tradition, professionals are seen as deserving individuals who specifically profile themselves as the owners of a useful set of knowledge and skills. In fact, Barley and Kunda labelled their itinerant IT experts as the exemplary representatives of this American Dream (Barley and Kunda 2004: 221). Many of these 'new' professionals are in fact commercially organized but that is not the point we wish to stress here. Here we would rather focus on the fact that they usually derive their comparatively 'elevated' status from specifically organizational sources. They may for instance derive it from the indispensability of their expert repertoires to the organizations where they do their work.

Accordingly, it is quite often assumed that these organizations are simply 'in need' of these professionals. For instance, the 'itinerant experts' which were the focus of the study performed by Barley and Kunda (2004) are often expressly expected to 'bring in' new knowledge to the organizations they work for (Barley and Kunda 2004: 67 and also 192-7) and they, themselves, are also quite aware that the ownership of the 'the right skill set' confirms their market value (Barley and Kunda 2004: 197). Moreover, they experience these skills as essentially personalized, also: 'As a contractor you have to rely on your own skills' (quoted by Barley and Kunda, 2004: 248). According to Barley and Kunda, they even put considerable effort into building and maintaining their 'human capital' (Barley and Kunda 2004: 244-63; 271).

However, this same story should also be told the other way around. It remains a 'tacit' assumption in Barley and Kunda's work, but these IT specialists are very much 'in need' of organizations to be able to perform at all, for instance because their work is intrinsically connected with the kind of IT infrastructures that large organizations, in particular, have on offer. Many other technical specialists – they include the otherwise much more traditional civil and military engineers – are also in need of such large organizations. We found a similar kind of organizational dependence with surgeons needing operating theatres to perform (Kruijthof 2005) and with those creative professionals who are involved in TV commercials which require large multidisciplinary teams ([Author B] 2006: 112) The dependence between these professionals and their organizations appears to be quite mutual, indeed.

The data show that another consequence of this organizational involvement should be mentioned here as well. Professionals who are thus dependent on organizations may also find themselves in need of repertoires that are essentially different from the ones they have been trained to perform, in the first place. To survive the complex the large scale work floors they may be associated with, even the most elevated of professionals must be able to cooperate

successfully with all relevant others present (Scott 2008: 229). This is not only true for creative professionals working in large teams. Kruijthof also observed that, in spite of an otherwise very traditional approach towards professionalism, the individual medical specialists who were working in the hospitals she studied, appeared to be well aware of the many day-to-day cooperative efforts that were required, to effectively participate in the very complex local processes on and around one's local work floors (Kruijthof 2005: 278). Some of these professionals might even consider a managerial career.

These organizational contexts, then, produce quite different perspectives to these professionals, in terms of their organizational elevation. These perspectives are summarized in Figure 2.

Insert figure 2

Again, the first dimension that constitutes this figure relates to the ownership of the relevant professional repertoires. In this case, this ownership specifically involves the mutual 'indispensability', of a specific professional input to the organization and the other way around. The second dimension, however, focuses on the specific organizational strategies that may be pursued by those professionals who in fact pursue a comparatively elevated organizational status. On the one hand, they may rely on the organization's specific career opportunities, and make room, both for managerial careers and for an entrepreneurial orientation. On the other hand, some of them may still rely on an exclusive organizational status that is specifically allotted to their exceptional expertise.

The top left quadrant of this figure shows the 'managerial' variety of a successful organizational participation, where the professionals have gotten used to negotiating the power effects that, to them, have become an essential aspect of their organizational involvement. In [Author B]'s study professionals who managed to do so were labelled 'organization men' ([Author B] 2006: 143-4). These organization men wanted more control over their professional practices - 'I don't want anyone telling me what to do any more. No, I want to be equal.' ([Author B] 2006: 106) - which in their perception is best obtained by becoming a managing partner - 'It might be nice to set out your own policy in an agency.' ([Author B] 2006:108) The American political scientist, Brint, also confirms that some top professionals, even of the traditional kind, are actually inclined, to nestle themselves in the 'centres of institutional and organizational power' (Brint 1994: 206).

But, first of all, as has been observed, both by Kruijthof and by [Author B], those professionals whose 'organizational involvement' should move beyond an exclusive focus on their own interests, are often in need of some expertise enabling them to effectively cope with any power effects that may be present. In Kruijthof's study, for instance, those medical specialists who were moving 'upwards' in the organization appeared to be moving from a concept of control that was exclusively focused on their local situation to a concept of control that was focused on the organization (Kruijthof 2005:283). Some authors even expressly rely on notions like 'keeping your cool' to describe the professional attitude that appears to be required to adequately manage such essentially 'power-ridden' situations. Barley and Kunda, for instance, observed that the itinerant experts they studied tended to be more 'professional' than many others present, exactly this respect, in that they 'don't take personal sides in conflict' (Barley and Kunda, 2004: 200).

The specific repertoires of these organizationally aspiring professionals may, in fact, be quite comparable with those of another kind of 'new' professionals that is not visible in the material presented here but can be exemplified by consultants and managers (Buchanan and Boddy 1992; Watson 1994). They also command an essentially personalized repertoire which is focussed on the management of power effects and relies, above all, on a trained capacity to

'intuitively' evaluate complicated settings and to act accordingly (Flyvbjerg 2001). To Barley and Kunda, the 'guru' versions of their itinerant experts command such process expertise (Barley and Kunda 2004: 67).

In the ethnographic material presented here, it can also be observed, how these 'elevated' managers are often also required to somehow 'distance themselves' from the day to day professional practices of their former colleagues. As a consequence, it has been observed in the case of the creative professionals ([Author B] 2006) and with those medical doctors who aspired to managerial careers, as well (Kruijthof 2005) that they, themselves, are often very much inclined, to consider this upward move a sure sign of their professional decline. Moreover, and as the bottom half of this column suggests, there may also be the quite confrontational 'critical narcissism' of those professional colleagues who do not necessarily aspire to participate in management, but do not really endorse it, either, to be managed by their former colleagues (Cf. Collinson 1992: 216).

The right hand side of figure 2, however, is based on the rather abundant empirical evidence that shows that there are still quite a few professionals available, nowadays, who want to be called 'autonomous' as to the ownership of their repertoires, and this also includes their professional discretion, as of old. They may even successfully claim that they can not really be expected to re-negotiate these professional assets. Examples are, for instance, provided by those creative professionals [Author B] (2006: 142) has called the Creative Geniuses, in her study. These creative professionals see the organisation where they are currently employed as an enabler of the further development of their personal professional expertise. Employment is perceived as temporary, their ties with the organisation will be cut as soon as this personal development stops or whenever a lack of creative freedom becomes apparent. According to [Author B] they may then even consider becoming Self-employed (ibid.: 142-3). Examples of this were also found with the architects studied by Cohen et al., insofar as they also considered themselves as creatively innovative (2005: 778, and 782 ff). The associated 'departure mode' was also presented by the itinerant experts who were studied by Barley and Kunda (2004), insofar as they, themselves, presented their current state of 'independence' as an escape from the 'politics' they associated with organizational life (Barley and Kunda, 2004: 56-62).

But again, it should be established here, that the organization, itself, may play an active part in the establishment of this 'elevated' kind of professional 'aloofness'. In fact, we might safely assume by now that it can only be feasible if and when organizations actually recognize their dependence on these exceptional professionals, themselves, and are inclined, accordingly, to provide them with some extra spaces. For instance, Maister claims in his well-known study on the professional service firm that some space should be created for the quite exclusive category of consultants he calls the Brains, but that this exceptional treatment can only be justified insofar as these exceptional professionals manage to affirm their Firm's professional status (Maister 1993: 9). The critical narcissism presented in the bottom quadrant of this right hand column, then, may not only be motivated by a specific sense of loss of professionals being deprived of such exceptional assets, but by an entirely different set of considerations as well: the fear that, in due course, one may even be encouraged to take leave of the organization, according to a rule that preaches 'up or out in five years' (Maister 1993: 253).

Some of these formerly public professionals who are moving 'out', however, may in fact develop an entrepreneurial orientation of the kind that is presented in the top left quadrant of figure 2. As Brint has shown for the USA, it may very well be true for a number of the more traditional professions – among them medical specialists, lawyers and accountants – that some of their representatives may have discovered, by now, how they could actually use their established positions as a starting point 'to channel their interests in relation to market

opportunities' (Brint 1994: 205–6) and create businesses of their own. This is confirmed by the material that we present, here. Quite a few of the architects Cohen et al. reported on, have always had such a business orientation (Cohen et al. 2005: 785-8). In Barley and Kunda's study, we can observe how their 'itinerant experts' should rather be likened to this type of entrepreneurial professionals, than to the independent Self-employed.

Barley and Kunda, for instance, point out that those professionals who do start a business of their own are to also be able to 'organize' themselves in a rather thorough manner. This 'organizational' orientation forces them to develop some practical repertoires that take them far beyond their original expert education. They have to be able to provide for a financial infrastructure to their own business. They have to take care of their own marketing, as well. Moreover, these itinerant experts should be able maintain a considerable network of their own, as a resource for future projects. Barley and Kunda expressly identify this need to build and maintain one's own 'social capital' – which is not to be confused with the 'human capital' we discussed earlier – as an indispensable part of the 'identity' of these itinerant professionals (Barley and Kunda 2004: 284). The itinerant experts themselves call it 'part of everyday life' (ibid: 279). And, finally, a substantial part of Barley and Kunda's book is dedicated to the various strategies these experts have developed, to successfully negotiate new contracts with prospective clients (Barley and Kunda 2004: 158 ff). Essentially, these experts cannot avoid becoming quite 'organized', themselves.

4. Responsible professionals: the organizational relevance of societal controversy

Of course, some professionals have always been public in the sense that they, themselves, expect to take part in the public debate. There are even quite a few professionals who are actually 'specialized' in this activity. They perform in the media as 'independent' journalists or political commentators. And, although many professionals – public servants, judges, notaries and accountants in particular – are expressly reminded not to compromise their professional independence by this kind of public participation, there are many other professionals who take part in the public debate as 'independent' expert voices. Among them there are numerous (social) scientists and representatives of various medical fields. And, finally, there have always been quite a few professionals, who openly associate with specific social issues, and act as political activists or as social critics themselves.

But, taking part in the public debate about controversial issues as an independent or partisan professional is quite a long way from 'becoming controversial', oneself. And yet, it is often reasoned by now, that, in our democratic societies, most professionals could also be held 'personally accountable' for the effects of their interventions. Moreover, it is often also assumed that these professionals are not only to account for their 'individual responsibility' to their professional peers, in the 'exclusive' professional settings they were used to. It may be due to the often quite 'personalizing' effects of contemporary media, but, by now, a specific kind of personalized public responsibility – that is not only directed towards external stakeholders but also to the public at large - seems to have been added to the public predicament of the professionals ([Author A] 2009: 164-5).

But again, this profile is not as new as it would seem. One of the intriguing aspects of professionalism has always been the societal appreciation of those professionals who were involved in specifically valuable activities. As the anthropologist Clifford Geertz argued in a now classical contribution, the high esteem – but also the controversy – that some professionals usually appear to draw towards themselves, may essentially be due to the fact that every society shall always have to consider its dependence on people who seem to provide an appropriate solution to a number of insurmountable problems (Geertz 1973:100).

To prove his point, Geertz points to our fear of illness and death ('suffering'), the experience of injustice (which he calls an 'intractable ethical paradox'), and also the fact that there will always be things that will cause some 'bafflement' to most of us because we are not able to comprehend them (Geertz 1973: 100). To this we could presently add the convincing management of environmental issues, of financial crises and/ or terrorist threats.

These generally recognized predicaments still give rise to an 'outstanding' position of the associated professionals. Moreover, and Geertz indicates this as well, the societal relevance of the associated professionals is not so much framed by the effectiveness of the solutions they have on offer. It is essentially framed by the 'ideological indispensability' of their interventions. Moreover, even at the present point in time it could very well be argued that the medical professions, the professions related to law, and those professionals who occupy themselves with religion or, more recently, with scientific investigations, rely, at least to an extent, on these rather 'intangible' sources of prestige.

On the one hand, 'society' literally 'entrusts' these professional groups with some of the responsibilities it cannot deal with, itself. The representatives of these groups are literally 'set free' by society, and they are usually are paid as well, to perform these valued tasks in a manner they, themselves, see fit. On the other hand, it is also quite openly assumed that these 'trusted' professionals can expect to face considerable public scorn, should they fail to provide the attitude that goes with this elevated status. For example, to begin with the sociologist Émile Durkheim (1957: 12-13), quite a few people have pointed out that such professionals are often expected to distinguish themselves through a specific kind of unselfishness in the exercise of their duties. Although they, themselves, might invariably insist that they 'make health, or safety, or knowledge, or good government, or good law but no money' (Larson 1977: 58 quote) there may always be some public doubt available, as well, as to the sincerity of these claims.

As far as the traditional professionals were concerned, the formal professional arrangements we discussed in the second section were to take care of these issues. These arrangements did not only concern the demarcation of the 'true' professionals and, consequently, the protection of 'their' repertoires. From their very start these arrangements were also there to perform the internal disciplining of these professions' practitioners. A professional code of conduct was not only there to ensure that these professionals could decide among themselves whether or not someone met the profession's requirements, it also was there to ensure that the colleagues must be willing to take action whenever one of their own kind was accused of making mistakes. At present, however, it has quite often been observed, as well, that professional groups are inclined to use such 'internal codes of conduct' to simply 'protect' themselves against an external world that is experienced as essentially 'intrusive' (Freidson 1970). This observation, combined with the fact that professional failure may sometimes even affect external parties on a very large scale, has resulted in a quite general movement in which the performance of the associated responsibility is not confined, any more, to the 'professional community'. It should be treated as an essentially public affair.

This professional predicament allows us to assume that, at present, professionals and their organizations have become much more vulnerable than ever to public debate. Moreover, we can also safely assume that professional responsibilities may even have turned into an issue that transcends the capacity of most of the traditional professional communities. Moreover, it may very well be true that these issues of public responsibility are not confined, any more, to the public sector. In the private sector, they are, for instance, put on the agenda in terms of a specific rhetoric of responsibility, in which organizations (and their professionals) are reminded of the relevance to their commercial bottom lines, of People issues – relating to the conditions affecting clients and workers alike - and Planet issues –

relating to environmental sustainability – as complementary to the more common considerations of Profit.

Again, we have tried to summarize the various professional perspectives that can be constructed on the basis of this reasoning, in figure 3.

Insert Figure 3

Once more, the dimension constituted by the ownership of the repertoire has remained intact, although now it expressly relates to the personalized ownership of an essentially professional responsibility. This time, however, it is accompanied by an entirely new dimension which is specifically informed by the extent to which the associated professional practices are also involved with certain risks: it is indicated as the degree of vulnerability and/ or political sensitivity of these practices.

As far as the organizations in and around the public domain are concerned, the professional ‘vulnerabilities’ that are associated with these practices, are often related to the risks involved with their day to day negotiations with individual clients (see [Author A] 2009: 115). For our present purposes we include the private sectors, as well, and we do not confine our reasoning to the service industries. These sectors have generated their own kind of ‘responsibility issues’, by now. Our material, however, only involves some professional service industries but, as a matter of fact, it confirms, that even the creative professionals working for the advertising industry are now expressly encouraged to act ‘responsibly’ to the audiences they address. The Dutch creative industry, for instance, has developed a code that not only involved the professional community itself but also a number of other stakeholders involved in the business. It advocates ‘responsible advertising [...] in the interest of the consumers and of our advertising clients’ ([Author B.] 2006).

One extreme is presented, once again, by the top left hand quadrant of figure 3. It concerns the explicitly ‘personalized’ responsibility that seems to be relevant for those professionals who can rightfully be held individually accountable for the external effects of what they are doing. This includes the more ‘invasive’ versions of the professional services, particularly in the medical realm – although surprisingly little evidence of this was found in our data on medical specialists (Kruijthof 2005). It may also include the practices of people working in traffic control – in the air, in the railways, on the water - or in other essentially unpredictable contexts. This quadrant may even include the activities of some relational experts such as therapists, or even process experts such as managers and consultants, insofar as the actual consequences of their actions may be framed as their ‘personal responsibility’ as well. The lower left hand quadrant, then, points at those professionals we met earlier (in section 2) and who may simply perform quite elementary tasks but who do also need some spaces for their situated discretion ([Author A] 2009) and can be expected to share the practical responsibility for ‘mistakes’ and even for ‘outright failures’ with relevant others in their local communities of practice (Wenger 1997). But, to say the least, the scant evidence on these issues that we have found in our empirical material does suggest that the practical consideration of such professional responsibility appears to be under debate.

So we might as well turn to the right hand half of the figure. The top right hand quadrant, for instance, points at those professionals who keep relying on the more traditional resources for professional prestige. Here, in particular, the issue of public responsibility appears to be absent. For instance, most of the knowledge workers and creative professionals we studied are hardly ever held individually responsible for the consequences of their actions. As Barley and Kunda’s study of the itinerant experts in the IT world demonstrates, they can even be described convincingly, without any reference to a political context. The fact that these professionals mostly appear to work behind the screens – both from a client and from a

societal perspective – and that their work does not appear to entail substantial risks to relevant others, may explain this ([Author A] 2009: 54-5). The same may very well be true for most architects, although buildings are essentially visible, by definition, and may actually cause a lot of public debate.

But even those architects who expressly consider their work as ‘deeply embedded in political contexts’ (Cohen et al. 2005: 789) and who consider it ‘the goal of architecture [...] to enhance the quality of people’s lives’ as well (ibid: 788), may not often be held personally accountable for their achievements. And what to think about Kruijthof’s book on medical specialists working in Dutch hospitals, where we found surprisingly little evidence, relating these doctors to any kind of ‘societal responsibility’? One explanation may be provided by the fact that Kruijthof, herself, was particularly focussed on these doctors’ day to day negotiations in and around their hospitals organizations. Another explanation may be that all of these professionals are inclined to behave as traditional professionals, in this respect, and that the relevant others around them still allow them to do so. It appears that they still tend to keep such issues to themselves.

In the lower right hand quadrant in Figure 3 we find representatives of a perspective that can also be called very traditional, and which is not very often presented in our empirical cases. Not too surprisingly, however, this perspective is often presented in precisely this form, in critical studies about industrial relations. These ‘professionals’ can often simply rely on a very straightforward version of ‘internal organizational accountability’, because of the essentially domesticated nature of their work.

5. Conclusion: about being ‘professional’, and ‘part of an organization’, and ‘socially responsible’ at the same time.

Maybe we should point out, here, once again, that to us ‘being professional’ has to do with the ownership of essentially personalized repertoires. We are discussing people, here, who in various ways can be seen as ‘physically indispensable’ to their organizations. However, we should also conclude, by now, that some of these professionals may still successfully claim a comparatively elevated organizational status, which appears to also be recognized by most relevant others around them. And, finally, we think that the three different frames of reference that we have presented in this paper present relevant resources to those professionals who do – they are the ‘real and established professionalism’ that is primarily related to the exclusive access to an essentially personalized professional repertoire; the ‘organizational frame’ including a number of specific ‘career opportunities’ that relies on the reciprocal indispensability between organizations and professionals; and – albeit to a lesser extent - the ‘public exposure’ and associated ‘professional responsibilities’ that may increase the political sensitivity of some professional repertoires.

When we try to establish the impact of these frames, we must first of all, agree with Cohen et al (2005), in that ‘real-time’ professionals may be very much inclined to ‘opportunistically’ negotiate all three of the perspectives presented here. Moreover, we can now also tune in with their suggestion that this does not only apply to the architects they studied. Their expectation that they are relevant to many other professional groups of the ‘elevated’ kind, is also confirmed by our material. However, we can also argue, now, that, depending on their repertoires and also on their organizational dependencies, professional groups may vary widely from each other in the ways that they can legitimately rely on either one of these strategies. And that this is particularly true, where their organizational ‘elevation’ is concerned.

Till now, for instance, we could observe that, notwithstanding the many organizational changes they currently face, most of medical specialists observed by Kruijthoff (2005) essentially framed themselves, not to mention their organizational positions, in terms of a traditional and quite 'inner-directed' professional perspective. Moreover, we do not think that it should be attributed to the theoretical narrow-mindedness of Barley and Kunda (2004), at all, that the itinerant IT-experts they investigated were mainly focused on organizational frames of reference.

We could also observe that although to some professionals it may actually be obvious that their societal responsibility must be an indispensable part of their day to day professional practice – they may for instance include judges - they were not found in the material presented. However, it can also be observed that even those professionals who might otherwise opt for more 'traditional' or 'organizational' orientations – they include the architects in Cohen's contribution (2005) but the creative professionals observed by [author B] (2006) as well - may not exactly be inclined to leave the notion of 'public responsibility' go unnoticed. However, we can also establish that the actual impact of this kind of rhetoric in terms of the individual consequences that can be attached to such 'public responsibilities', may be quite limited, indeed.

References

- Abbott, Andrew (1988) *The System of Professions. An essay on the division of expert labor*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Barley, Stephen R., and Gideon Kunda (2004), *Gurus, Hired Guns and Warm Bodies. Itinerant experts in a Knowledge Economy*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press 2004
- Buchanan, David and Boddy, David (1992) *The Expertise of the Change Agent. Public performance and backstage activity*, New York, London, et cetera.: Prentice Hall.
- Bledstein, Basil (1976) *The Culture of Professionalism*, New York: Norton & Co.
- Brint, Steven (1994) *In an Age of Experts. The changing role of professionals in politics and public life*, Princeton and Chicester: Princeton University Press.
- Cohen, Laurie, Adrian Wilkinson, John Arnold, Rachael Finn (2005), "'Remember I'm the Bloody Architect!'" Architects, organizations and discourses of profession' *Work, Employment and Society* 19 (4), 775-796.
- Collinson, David L.(1992) *Managing the Shopfloor. Subjectivity, masculinity and the workplace culture*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter.
- Durkheim, Emile (1957 trans. 1992) *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, New York: Routledge.
- Florida, Richard (2002) *The Rise of the Creative Class and How it is Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life*, New York: Basic Books.
- Flyvbjerg, Bent (2001) *Making Social Science Matter. Why social inquiry fails and how it can succeed again*, Cambridge, New York, etc.: Cambridge University Press.
- Freidson, Elliot (1970) *Profession of Medicine*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Freidson, Elliot (1986) *Professional Powers. A study of the institutionalization of formal knowledge*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Freidson, Elliot (2001) *Professionalism: The Third Logic*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Gastelaars, Marja, (1997) *'Human Services' in Veelvoud*. Amsterdam SWP
- Gastelaars, Marja (2009) *The Public Services under Reconstruction. Client Experiences, Professional Practices, Managerial Control*. London and New York: Routledge 2009

- Gastelaars, Marja (2009(2)) 'Opening up one's everyday negotiations to inspection: the internal politics of embedded ethnographic research', pp 46- 56 in *International Journal of Public Sector Management* 22 (1)
- Geertz, Clifford (1973) *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Fontana Press.
- Korczynsky, Marek (2002)
- Kruijthof, Karen (2005), *Doctors' Orders. Specialists Day-to-Day work and their jurisdictional claims in Dutch hospitals*. PhD Erasmus University, Rotterdam
- Larson, Magali Sarfatti (1977) *The Rise of Professionalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press
- Maister, David H. (1993) *Managing the Professional Service Firm*, New York: Free Press.
- Scott, W. Richard (2008) 'Lords of the Dance: Professionals as Institutional Agents.' *Organization Studies* 2008 (29) 219 - 238
- Van der Kam, Elske (2001), *Kwaliteit gewogen. Verschillende perspectieven op kwaliteit van civiele rechtspleging*. Utrecht: Boom Juridische Uitgevers
- Van Wijk, Ellen (2006), *Ruim baan voor creatief talent. Bindingen van creatieve professionals in communicatie-adviesbureaus*. Utrecht: Universiteit Utrecht. (proefschrift)
- Wallace, J. (1995) 'Organizational and Professional Commitment in Professional and Non-Professional Organizations', *Administrative Science Quarterly* 40 (2): 228-55
- Watson, Tony (1994) *In Search of Management. Culture, chaos and control in managerial work*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Weick, Karl E. (2001) *Making Sense of the Organization*, Oxford and Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Wenger, Etienne (1997) *Communities of Practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wilensky, Harold L. (1964) 'The Professionalization of Everyone?' in *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. LXX no. 2: 137-158.

Fig. 1 The organizational relevance of professional autonomy (after [Author A] 1997)

		situated discretion	
		+	-
ownership repertoire	+	Autonomous	Formally responsible
	-	Discretionary	Fully domesticated (de-professionalized)

Figure 2 The professional relevance of organizational involvement

		managerial orientation	
		+	-
ownership repertoires	+	1. Becoming an organization (wo)man (or start your own business)	2. Going up (or out) in strictly professional terms
	-	3. Critical narcissism from the bottom up (dislike of being managed by others)	4. Critical narcissism from the bottom up (dislike of losing out in professional terms)

Fig. 3 The organizational relevance of external responsibility (after [Author A] 2009)

	vulnerable/ politically sensitive activities	
	+	-
ownership repertoires + -	1. Externally responsible	2. Traditionally autonomous
	3. Locally reflexive	4. Domesticated by the organization (and not professional)