The appeal to 'professionalism' as a disciplinary mechanism

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Abstract

The paper examines the deployment of 'professional' discourses in occupational domains not traditionally associated with the professions (eg management, clerical or sales staff are turned into 'providers of professional services'). It first proposes to analyse professionalism as a disciplinary logic which inscribes 'autonomous' professional practice within a network of accountability and governs professional conduct at a distance. It is argued that professional labour is autonomous labour where the conditions of autonomy have already been inscribed in particular forms of conduct embodied in the notion of 'professional competence'. The paper then suggests that the appeal to the discursive resources of professionalism in new occupational domains potentially acts as a disciplinary mechanism that serves to profess 'appropriate' work identities and conducts. The extension of the disciplinary logic of professionalism is illustrated with the turn to competencies to regulate managerial work in Teamco, a large privatised service company. However, the final section of the paper cautions against a deterministic analysis of the disciplinary logic of professionalism in regulating employees' conduct, and suggests that the constructed and contestable nature of professionalism makes it an inevitably imperfect form of government.

Introduction

It seems paradoxical that as the professions are being threatened by various trends of organisational, economic and political change (eg Crompton, 1990; Greenwood and Lachman 1996; Reed, 1996), the notion of 'professionalism' is creeping up in unexpected domains, lending support to Wilensky's (1964) prediction that professionalism would eventually embrace everyone with some claim to specialised knowledge or practice. It is not only management which is

supposed to 'professionalise' itself, but a cursory glance through service companies' adverts in the Yellow Pages or through the job pages in newspapers reveals that the most unlikely occupations are becoming candidates for professionalisation. Secretaries, restaurant staff, security personnel, furniture retailers (among others) are all allegedly offering 'professional services'.

This casual generalisation of the notion of professionalism could be seen as just another marketing device to seduce consumers; it could be argued that as the label is being transposed to more and more diverse domains, it loses its purchase and becomes an empty and meaningless category potentially including anyone. However, in this paper I take the position that there may be more happening when non-professional labour is being caught in the discourse of professionalism. The main argument of the paper is that the appeal to professionalism is not just an empty label deployed to lure consumers – although it may be that too – but acts as a disciplinary mechanism. The mobilisation of the discursive resources of professionalism potentially allows for control at a distance through the construction of 'apropriate' work identities and conducts.

The appeal to professionalism as a device of control needs to be understood in the context of a shift in the discourses and practices of work organisation. Without having to resort to the dualism invoked in many of the labels used to index some of these shifts (eg post bureaucratic, postmodern, enterprise, all allegedly opposed to bureaucracy), it is important to situate the arguments in the economic, cultural and technological context of a move towards flexible strategies of capitalist accumulation (eg Harvey, 1989). The introduction of flexible working practices associated with advanced capitalism creates a discretionary gap which needs to be regulated through new 'softwares of control' (Townley, 1989). The paper argues that the appeal to professionalism is one of the strategies that is deployed to control the increasing margin of indeterminacy or flexibility in work.

Before illustrating the disciplinary effects of the extension of the discourse of professionalism to new occupational domains, it is first necessary to establish how the logic of professionalism can produce discipline. Central to the argument of the paper is the analysis of professionalism as a disciplinary regime of autonomous professional labour. The first part of the paper draws upon the Foucauldian notion of governmentality, and in particular liberal government (eg Foucault, 1979; Burchell et al, 1991), to argue that professionalism acts as a mode of government of autonomous

labour; the autonomy of professional practice is predicated upon its government 'at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990) through the articulation of 'professional competence'. The second part of the paper analyses the extension of professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism to new occupational domains; it argues that the appeal to professionalism can be seen as one way, among others, to regulate the autonomous conduct of employees through the articulation of competence. The extension of professionalism is illustrated with the use of competencies to govern managerial labour in Teamco, a large privatised service company.

Professionalism as government of autonomous conduct

Post-functionalist studies of the professions have tended to see the professions as centres of power subjecting the public and other occupations to their dominating rules (eg Freidson, 1970; Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977; Witz, 1992). These studies have analysed the various strategies of social closure or exclusion the professions commonly deploy to claim exclusive ownership of particular areas of expertise and to raise the status and prestige of their practice (eg Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995; Witz, 1992). An important theme here is the autonomy and self-regulation the professions have enjoyed in setting the standards governing their training, practice and conduct (eg Harrison and Schultz, 1989; Keat, 1991a; Samuel Weber, 1987).

While I do not wish to challenge the validity of such analysis and have myself proposed to see the professions as seeking to establish their autonomy and authority through the construction of various boundaries around themselves (Fournier, forthcoming), I want here to concentrate on the conditions upon which this autonomy is predicated, and argue that professional labour is autonomous labour where the conditions of autonomy have already been inscribed in particular forms of conduct articulated in the notion of 'professional competence'.

Foucault's (1978) notion of government, a term used to refer to 'the conduct of conduct' (Gordon, 1991), is useful here. Government functions through structuring and constituting the domain of possibility for action and subjectivity. Gordon (1991) suggests that the art of modern government is about delineating the 'thinkable'. However government is not just an abstract philosophy, or an ideology but is about practice – '. . . the ways in which the

world is made intelligible and *practicable*' (Rose, 1993: 289, emphasis added). Rationality of government provides a disciplinary regime through the production of subject positions and the definition of moral conduct. This Foucauldian notion of government has inspired a whole tradition of work on the various institutions, mechanisms, techniques and groups through which conduct is regulated (eg Burchell et al, 1991; Miller and Rose, 1990; Special issue of *Economy and Society* on Liberalism, Neo-liberalism and Governmentality, 1993). The present paper draws upon one theme in this extensive literature: the role of expertise and the professions in the liberal art of government.

The enrolment of the professions in liberal government

Liberalism for Fourcault is not just a political ideology but a particular rationality for governing everyday conduct. What is distinctive about liberalism is its attempt to reconcile freedom (of individuals, of the market) and control (Burchell, 1993). Thus liberalism can be contrasted to earlier forms of governmental rationality, such as the police state, in that it is critical of sovereign power. The main rationale of liberalism (in its various forms) is to govern through freedom:

> In both cases [early liberalism and neo-liberalism] the principles of government requires of the governed that they freely conduct themselves in a rational way . . . (Burchell, 1993: 271).

An important characteristic of the art of modern government is that it disciplines through the constitution of free-willed subjects. Liberal government works positively through the making up of subjectivity, it operates at the intersection of techniques of domination and techniques of the self (Burchell, 1993). For Foucault, government is:

> . . . a contact point where techniques of domination – or power – and techniques of the self interact, where technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and conversely, . . . where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion. (Foucault, 1980, quoted in Burchell, 1993: 268).

Liberalism involves a network of diverse techniques and practices through which the governed are constituted as autonomous subjects and are encouraged to exercise their freedom in appropriate ways.

Central to the constitution of 'appropriate selves' is expertise. Liberal government is 'government . . . in the name of truth' (Gordon, 1991: 8). Individuals are governed not through a monolithic and all-powerful State but through systems of 'truth' (Rose, 1993), through the proliferation of expert practical knowledge (eg psychology, medicine, law, accounting) that serves to constitute human beings as autonomous subjects with a responsibility (or even an interest) to conduct their life in appropriate ways. The truth claims of expertise are central to liberal rationality of government in that truth can govern events and individual conduct 'at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990 – drawing upon Latour's, 1987, 'action at a distance') rather than through the exercise of domination over oppressed subjects:

> . . . 'governmentality' has come to depend in crucial respects upon the intellectual technologies, practical activities and social authority associated with expertise . . . the self-regulating capacities of subjects, shaped and normalized through expertise, are key resources for governing in a liberal-democratic way. (Miller and Rose, 1990: 1)

Whilst expertise and professions are not synonymous,[1] expertise acquires its authority, partly, through professionalisation (Rose, 1993). It is through their 'professionalisation', through their inscription into systems of expert knowledge, that individuals become the targets of liberal government (Burchell, 1991; Foucault, 1978). The professions are central to liberalism, to the microphysics of power (Foucault, 1973) through which the governed are constituted as autonomous subjects regulating their own conduct (Miller and Rose, 1990).

The professions' inscription in the art of liberal government has some important implications for the regulation of professional conduct; in particular, the enrolment of the professions in the network of liberal government is predicated upon the professions subjecting themselves to the liberal rationality of government. The next section proposes to analyse the professions as not only part of the network of liberal government, but as also the target of liberal government.

The liberal government of professional conduct

Professional practice does not stand outside of the power/knowledge regime it serves to constitute and reproduce. Professional

knowledge does not only constitute the subjectivity of the 'other' or object of professional practice (eg as individuals wanting to be healthy, as parents concerned for the well-being their children, as legal subjects with rights), it also articulates professional subject positions, or the ways in which professionals should conduct themselves. Professionals are the target of professional rationality, they are both the governor and the governed. As Gordon (1991) argues, the activity of government is 'interdependent with the government of self, on the part of the *ruler* and the ruled alike' (Gordon, 1991: 12, emphasis added).

The inscription of the professions within the network of liberal government is conditional upon the professions conducting themselves in appropriate ways; that is, in ways that are recognised as legitimate and worthy of the 'professional label' both by the relevant profession itself, and by other constituents in that network (eg the clients, the state, the market). The professions are accountable, or responsible, to themselves and to their constituency:

> A liberal profession will, in this sense, be one which is constantly suspicious of its own authority, one which seeks to establish grounds of responsibility both within itself, as a profession, and to its constituency without seeking to govern either professionals or their clients in a straight forward directive, or 'sovereign' manner. (Osborne, 1993: 346).

The professions, as one of the carriers of the art of liberal government, seek to govern in the name of something outside of themselves (Foucault, 1989) – eg the public good, truth. Thus the professions have to establish their legitimacy in the eyes of those in the name of whom they govern (eg state, clients). As Lyotard (1984) suggests, while modern science sets itself apart from other knowledge systems by appealing to truth, it needs to establish the legitimacy of the 'truth' it proclaims in terms of other language games:

> . . . the language game of science desires its statements to be true but does not have the resources to legitimate their truth on its own. (Lyotard, 1984: 28)

Similarly, professional systems of knowledge need to establish the meaningfulness and legitimacy of their 'truths' in terms that can be apprehended by those whose lives are allegedly governed by these 'truths'. The professions rely for their existence and survival on

clients' dependence and trust. Although the professions play a powerful role in creating public dependency and trust,[2] this is never established once and for all but needs to be continuously negotiated. Furthermore, in order to build their legitimacy, the professions need to engage with the other cultural forces and discourses with which they are implicated. They need to forge connections, operate translations, between their own systems of knowledge and the discursive formations of other agents in the name of whom they claim to profess. The professions, just as any other forces enrolled in the diffusion and practice of liberal government, need to 'translate the objectives and values of others into [their] own terms' (Miller and Rose, 1990: 10). This suggests that the professions can never govern from a position of independence; as Hughes (1963) argues even the 'liberal professions' have never been 'independent' but have had to establish their reputation with their local clientele. This reputation may depend more upon conformity with local customs and beliefs than on professional criteria. Similarly, the power of accountants is dependent upon acquiescence in a wider structure of control (Armstrong, 1985), on perceived legitimacy which in turn is conditional upon the public trust in the profession's 'independence' or 'objectivity'. As Sikka and Willmott (1995) vividly demonstrate, this 'aura of independence' is never established once and for all but is continuously contested and re-negotiated. Thus the professions need to establish and continuously work at maintaining their legitimacy in terms that map over with the norms and values of other actors in the network of liberal government (eg other professions, clients, state, media).

This labour of legitimation requires the establishment of mechanisms through which professional practice is aligned with (or translated into) the concerns, norms and values of other actors. The prime mechanism of legitimation is the articulation of 'competence' (Osborne, 1993). Competence embodies the government of truth and inscribes professional conduct within a network of accountability to clients and to the profession itself. Through the delineation of competence, the professions are made accountable to their constituency for the proper use and production of 'truth'.

However, there is an interesting twist in the criteria which are used to define and assess the 'competence' of professional practitioners. Although competence embodies the government of truth, it is not indexed merely in terms of the extent to which the practitioner has mastered truth (ie the knowledge of the practitioner), but in terms of appropriate conduct. Osborne (1993), drawing upon

Foucault (1973), argues that the notion of competence serves to control medical practice by regulating *who* is to become practitioner:

> In defining the closed character of the medical profession, one managed to avoid both the old corporative model and that control over medical acts themselves which was so repugnant to economic liberalism. The principle of choice and its control were based on the notion of competence, that is, on a set of possibilities that characterise the very person of the doctor: knowledge, experience, and that 'recognised probity' referred to by Cabanis. *The medical act is worth what he who has performed it is worth . . .* (Foucault, 1973: 80, quoted in Osborne, 1993: 348, emphasis added).

As the above quote suggests, being a professional is not merely about absorbing a body of scientific knowledge but is also about conducting and constituting oneself in an appropriate manner, a point long recognised by symbolic interactionist studies of socialisation (eg Becker et al., 1961), and illustrated more recently in the context of accounting (Grey, 1998) and advertising (Alvesson, 1994).

As Foucault's quote above indicates, the inscription of competence in personal conduct, in the person of the practitioner, allows for the government of professional practice 'at a distance' (Miller and Rose, 1990). Through the notion of competence, truth and knowledge are translated into a code of appropriate conduct which serves to construct the subjectivity of the professional practitioner. Truth governs not by controlling directly the acts (or even the knowledge) of the professional practitioner but by making sure that the practitioner is the sort of person who can be trusted with truth. Thus an important characteristic of professional competence is its reliance on technologies of the self (eg through careful selection and strong doses of socialisation) rather than merely on technologies of domination.[3]

Professionalism as disciplinary logic

I now wish to summarise, and expand upon, the arguments developed so far by proposing to analyse the notion of professionalism as a disciplinary logic. What I have argued so far is that the professions need to inscribe themselves (their expertise and practice)

within a chain establishing connections between clients, truth, competence, and conduct of the practitioner; this chain is itself inscribed within the network of liberal government. However, the arguments need to be expanded to take into account the multiple agents and forces which form the network of liberal government. In what some have described as neo-liberalism (eg Burchell, 1993; Osborne, 1993) or advanced liberalism (Rose, 1993), expertise and the professions are answerable to agents other than the client (eg the sovereign customer, the market) in terms of criteria other than merely truth. Rose (1993) for example argues that the forms of rationality of liberal government have changed fundamentally over the last fifty years from what could be termed 'welfare liberalism' to 'advanced liberalism'. Whilst expertise and the professions are central to both forms, advanced liberalism involves a change in the rules by which the professions can establish their legitimacy. Advanced liberalism inscribes the professions in the market through a series of techniques such as marketability, budget control and audit (Rose, 1993; Power, 1997); it broadens the network of accountability within which the professions are inscribed to include market criteria (Scarborough, 1996). This potential diversity in the ways the professions can establish their legitimacy and be made 'accountable' is important for it highlights the constructed and political nature of the professions.[4] As will be argued in the last section of the paper, it is precisely this diversity that makes the meaning of professionalism highly contestable and malleable, and that loosens the grip of the disciplinary logic of professionalism. The negotiable nature of professionalism can be illustrated with the various ways in which the professions have re-constructed themselves in the face of managerialism. Whilst some professions such as accountants have successfully renegotiated the terms of their 'professional practice' along the lines of commercialism and enterprise (Hanlon, 1996), others such as medical doctors are seeking to protect their 'professionalism' by distancing themselves from managerialism (Parker and Dent, 1996).

I use the term disciplinary logic to refer to the network of accountability within which the professions have to inscribe their practice and expertise in order to establish and maintain their place in liberal government. This disciplinary logic operates through forging connections between various actors (eg the state, the client, the sovereign customer), criteria of legitimacy (eg truth, efficiency, public good), professional competence and personal conduct, as illustrated in Figure 1.
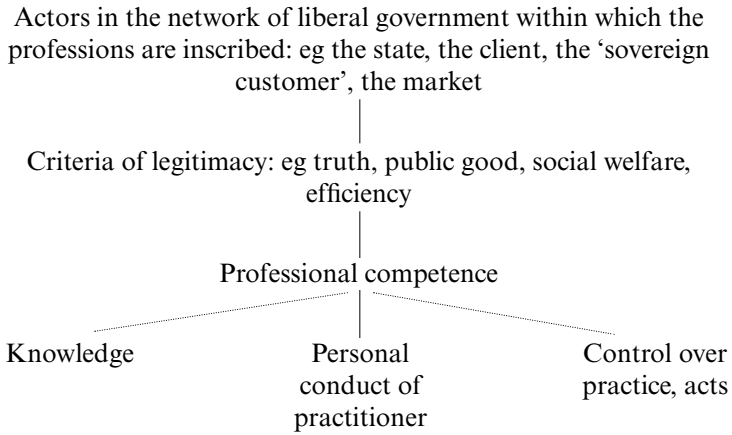
Actors in the network of liberal government within which the professions are inscribed: eg the state, the client, the 'sovereign customer', the market

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Criteria of legitimacy: eg truth, public good, social welfare, efficiency

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Professional competence

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Knowledge · · · · · Personal · · · · · Control over
conduct of practice, acts
practitioner

Figure 1 Professionalism as disciplinary logic[5]

Cant and Sharma's (1995) study of the professionalisation of homeopaths provides a good illustration of the operation of this disciplinary logic. In order to become recognised as a profession and to maintain a distinctive space in the health market, homeopathy had to establish its legitimacy in the eyes of the public, the state, and the orthodox medical profession. However, in this process of legitimation, homeopathy had to account for its practice in terms of the scientific paradigm of orthodox medicine. For example, it had to prove its effectiveness through experimental design seeking to isolate the effect of specific treatments upon certain physical conditions, a method which was in direct contradiction with the 'holistic approach' that homeopathy favoured. This subordination to orthodox medicine was also indexed by the relabelling of homeopathy from 'alternative medicine' to 'complementary medicine'. Many lay homeopaths resented the disciplinary effects of professionalisation:

> I want to get homeopathy out of its new stereotype and having something more exciting, so much is being missed out, they have dumped the training we got from Thomas Maugham [the homeopathy 'guru' in the UK]. They have shifted and tried to seek respectability which is not an ideal I would share. They want a pat on the back and to be accepted in the club, I want nothing to do with that because it destroys your ideals. (Lay homeopath, quoted in Cant and Sharma, 1995: 752).

This quote nicely illustrates the disciplinary logic of professionalism in drawing out the connections that homeopaths had to establish to become a profession, as well as the contested nature of professionalism. Thus to be 'accepted in the club' (presumably of orthodox medicine), homeopathy had to establish its 'respectability' (legitimacy) within medical and clients' discourses of health, at the price of compromising its own ideals. The survival of homeopathy as an independent and distinctive approach to health (ie its autonomy) was conditioned upon its inscription at the intersection of other discursive logics in terms of which it became accountable to clients, the state, and the orthodox medical profession.

So far the paper has discussed professionalism as a disciplinary mechanism that governs conduct in the 'professions'. The next section examines the deployment of the discipline of professionalism in occupational domains not traditionally associated with the professions,[6] where the mobilisation of professional discourse can serve to regulate the 'autonomous' conduct of employees through the articulation of competence.

The extension of the disciplinary logic of professionalism

In this section, it is argued that the disciplinary logic of professionalism is deployed to new organisational domains to profess 'appropriate' forms of conduct when employees' behaviour cannot be regulated (at least so economically) through direct control. Constituting employees as 'professionals' involves more than just a process of re-labelling, it also involves the delineation of 'appropriate work identities' and potentially allows for control at a distance by inscribing the disciplinary logic of professionalism within the person of the employees so labelled. The following discussion first situates the appeal to professionalism within the context of advanced capitalism; it then illustrates the operation of the disciplinary logic of professionalism with the example of the introduction of competencies and the vocabulary of professionalism in Teamco, a large privatised service company.

Advanced capitalism and new 'softwares of control'

The problem of control and consent of the labour process has always been a dilemma for capitalist production (eg Burawoy, 1979); however, the way in which this dilemma is managed is subject to his-

torical and cultural shifts, as economic, political and social conditions change, and as new bodies of knowledge are brought to bear on the organisation of production (Miller and Rose, 1995). Here I want to concentrate on the shifts associated with the discourse of flexible regimes of accumulation or advanced capitalism (Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1991; Willmott, 1993; Zukin, 1991), and in particular on the attempt (popularised in contemporary management literature; eg Kanter, 1990; Peters and Waterman, 1982) to resolve the control/consent dilemma by mobilising individual employees' 'autonomy' through the alignment of their self-governing and self-actualising propensity with the competitive advancement of organisations (Miller and Rose, 1990). The globalisation of competition and the proliferation of information technology are commonly invoked in the organisation and management literature as 'factors' contributing to the increased uncertainty and pace of change associated with advanced modernity[7] (eg Drucker, 1989; Harvey, 1989). This increased turbulence in the environment calls for, or at least legitimises, new ways of organising capitalist production. In particular, in management writing and practices, the rhetoric of increased competition and new technology has been deployed to demonise bureaucratic principles and to call for more flexible forms of organisation (eg Drucker, 1989; Kanter, 1990; Peters and Waterman, 1982; Peters, 1987), supposedly more responsive to the forces of competition and the increasingly selective customer (a point developed below), and for some at least potentially offering a new promise of alignment between democracy and economic advancement (eg Clegg, 1990; Piore and Sabel, 1984). Flexible forms of organising (based on principles such as decentralisation, delayering, market related forms of accountability and evaluation) are said to involve new ways of governing employees; in particular, organisations are urged to mobilise employees' potential for innovation and self-actualisation by relaxing rigid bureaucratic mechanisms of control and according employees more autonomy. This increased margin of autonomy however creates a 'discretionary gaps' that calls for 'new softwares of control' (Townley, 1989). New softwares of control work through the responsibilisation of autonomy, they serve to constitute employees as autonomous or 'empowered' agents and to delineate the space within which employees are to exercise their newly found power and autonomy. New softwares of control potentially allow for the reconciliation of control and consent by moving away from bureaucratic methods placing an emphasis on productive behaviour towards 'info-normative' methods (Frenkel et al., 1995)

placing an emphasis on the total behaviour, attitudes and self-understanding of the individual employees.

The image of the customer and the emphasis on quality have been central motifs in the re-articulation of organisational control (eg du Gay and Salaman, 1992); as the example of Teamco will illustrate, the customer is invoked to legitimise programmes of organisational reforms in the face of increased competition. This allegedly new 'customer orientation' is mobilised to call for the emotionalisation and aesthetisation of work (Lash and Urry, 1994), deemed central for 'satisfying customers'. The increasingly discerning and demanding customer is supposedly no longer satisfied with scripted performances following rigid prescriptions. Employees have to be seen to act out of 'genuine concern' for the customer, they are 'empowered' to 'own' customers' problems and to display appropriate responses (eg by choosing their 'own' words among a range of 'positive' vocabulary, see Fineman and Sturdy, 1997). The emotionalisation and aesthetisation of work call for a move away from direct techniques of control towards the appropriation of control by employees themselves ('empowerment'):

> Quality is thus defined as usual, in terms of giving customers what they want, yet at the same time traditional methods of control are too overtly oppressive, too alienating and too inflexible to encourage employees to behave in the subtle ways which customers define as indicating quality service, many of which - subtleties of facial expression, nuances of verbal tone, or type of eye contact – are difficult to enforce through rules, particularly when the employee is out of sight of any supervisor. (du Gay and Salaman, 1992: 621).

It should be stressed at this point that I acknowledge the problematic nature of drawing upon the notion of 'new forms of control' and I do not wish to subscribe to a radical break thesis nor to a dualist analysis contrasting some 'new organisational forms' (eg post-bureaucratic, postmodern, enterprise) with bureaucratic forms. Organisational control in advanced capitalism work through diverse and heterogeneous techniques rather than through some uniform logic (Rose, 1993). Thus I am not suggesting a complete shift from bureaucratic to 'flexible' forms of control but see both continuities and discontinuities between the two forms; some people continue to be governed in a bureaucratic and coercive way (eg see Thompson and McHugh, 1995). Furthermore, some of these new softwares of

control rely on a complex interweaving between bureaucratic logic and the autonomisation of conduct. For example as will be illustrated with the case of Teamco, competencies operate through a combination of, on the one hand, standardisation and codification of conduct (indexed in a set of dimensions on which employees' performance is evaluated), and on the other hand, autonomisation of conduct (marked by a shift of emphasis from task related behaviours to broader dimensions related to employees' attitudes and self-understanding).

The appeal to professionalism is one of the new softwares of control, one of the techniques that governs at a distance. In this respect it needs to be seen alongside other similar techniques such as cultural management which invites employees to re-imagine themselves (eg du Gay, 1996; Willmott, 1993), information technology which serves to make visible on a screen the distant and 'autonomous' behaviour of employees (eg Sewell and Wilkinson, 1992), career management which serves to create a happy coincidence between individual and organisational development (eg Fournier 1998; Grey, 1994), and competencies which serves to constitute the 'competent person' along the model favoured by excellent organisations (eg du Gay et al, 1996). These different techniques are not necessarily independent but can map over one another; for example the next section will suggest that the 'Teamco professional' is constituted in terms of competencies that align professionalism with the culture of enterprise.

The appeal to professionalism serves to 'responsibilise' autonomy by delineating the 'competence' of the 'professional employee', by instilling 'professional like' norms and work ethics which govern not simply productive behaviour but more fundamentally employees' subjectivities. The analysis of the appeal to professionalism as a technique of control follows a tradition which sees power and control over the labour process as being secured through the constitution of subjectivity – or technologies of the self (eg Knights, 1990; Knights and Willmott, 1989; Willmott, 1990). We can here establish a parallel between the disciplinary logic of professionalism as a way of regulating the autonomous conduct of the professions, and the extension of professional discourse to new occupational domains to regulate the increased margin of indeterminacy created by the introduction of flexibility and emotionalisation of work. Just as the logic of professionalism serves to make professional practice accountable to those in the names of whom the professions govern, the appeal to professionalism in new occupational domains serves to regulate

autonomous conduct in the name of oneself (for who wants to be 'unprofessional'?)[8] and in the name of the client.

Constituting the professional employee through the articulation of competencies

This section illustrates the appeal to professionalism as a disciplinary logic by drawing upon material related to the introduction of competencies in Teamco (not its real name), a large British service industry. The study I conducted at Teamco was not originally concerned with professionalism but with graduate careers (Fournier, 1998). However, I was struck by the extensive and peculiar use of the vocabulary of professionalism in the company's literature, as well as in interviews with senior managers and some graduate employees. The image of professionalism was not used to refer to certain groups of employees possessing specific skills and knowledge (such as say accountants or engineers) but to index a certain form of conduct or work ethics, often centred around the customers, and applicable to all Teamco staff. This alignment between 'being professional' and being a member of Teamco is illustrated by one of the company's five core values: '*We are professional*'.

It is important to situate the appeal to professionalism within the context of change in the rules governing organisational life at Teamco. Teamco was one of the public service organisations privatised by the Conservative government in the mid 80s. Following its privatisation, Teamco engaged in a vast programme of reforms (including the usual elements of cultural change, restructuring, delayering, a new emphasis on innovation, quality and the customer) designed to transform it from a 'public sector bureaucracy' into an innovative, customer oriented, and global enterprise. The programmes of change were motivated by the competitive pressures Teamco faced after enjoying a monopoly position. Although the extent to which Teamco actually faced much competition (at least initially) is arguable, the rhetoric of having to compete for customers on a global market pervades the strategic discourse of senior management. The company's literature (eg Graduate Recruitment Brochures, Annual Accounts) is replete with references to global competition, for example:

At the beginning of the 1990s, only about 20% of the world's [. . .][9] market was open to competition, by the end of the decade, only 10% will not be.

In the context of this increasingly competitive and global market, Teamco's mission is 'to become the most successful global player' in the industry. In order to achieve its mission, Teamco has had to transform itself from a 'complacent monopoly' driven by administrative and technical principles into a more commercially and customer oriented company (at least if we believe Teamco's official and senior managers' discourse). This (constructed) image of Teamco prior to privatisation as an organisation bearing all the hallmarks of public sector bureaucracy (with the negative connotations such an image entails in managerialist discourse) pervaded senior managers and graduates employees' talk, many of whom used the contrast between 'civil service culture' and 'commercial culture' to describe the transformation Teamco had undergone. Indeed many reproduced the official discourse about the continuous need to become more customer oriented (and to shed the remains of the bureaucratic past) in order to compete successfully on a global market (although not all agreed that the programmes of change initiated by Teamco were the best way of doing so; or that Teamco was actually becoming less bureaucratic).

The discourse of professionalism needs to be seen in the context of this process of transformation towards a 'commercial' or customer orientation, and as part of the new values driving the change programmes. More specifically, professionalism is one of the five core values indexing the new forms of enterprising government in Teamco:

- We put our customers first
- We are professional
- We respect each other
- We work as one team
- We are committed to continuous improvement

The five core values serve to create a happy coincidence between customers, Teamco's own corporate objectives, and employees' personal development. However, this alignment is not left to chance but is actively constructed through the competency framework that Teamco introduced in 1993 to assess and develop all management staff in the organisation. The competencies articulate a mode of 'professional conduct' in line with the favoured mode of government of the organisation, a mode of government embracing the popular discourse of enterprise and excellence. The analysis of Teamco's competencies provides some indication of the way in which the appropriate conduct of the 'Teamco professional' is

constructed. Competency frameworks serve to translate the corporate values and objectives into codes of appropriate conduct. As several writers have observed, the turn to competencies marks a shift in the ways employees are evaluated; they relate not only to skills and task related behaviours but also to values, attitudes and motives (eg Townley, 1989, 1994). Competencies delineate appropriate ways of being, of conducting oneself. Going back to the case of Teamco, the competency framework articulates the ways in which employees are to conduct themselves to live up to the 'professionalism' promoted by the company.

Teamco's competency framework centres around a set of 15 standard competencies[10] used for the assessment and development of all managers in Teamco (all Teamco managers are subjected to three kinds of annual evaluation: performance review, performance pay review and personal development review). Each of these competencies is then detailed in terms of four to nine items related to employees' behaviour; some of these items will be illustrated in the discussion below. The appeal to professionalism ('*We are professional*') and its articulation in terms of competencies inscribe employees' conduct within a disciplinary logic – a chain establishing connections between the customers, Teamco's values, competencies, and personal conduct. The parallel between the operation of the disciplinary logic of professionalism in the 'professions' and in Teamco is illustrated in Figure 2 and discussed below.

As in any organisation aspiring to 'excellence', the customer is placed in a sovereign position by Teamco's discourse (du Gay and Salaman, 1992); this is made explicit in the core values ('*We put our customers first*') where Teamco offers itself as guarantor to the customer. This government 'in the name of the customer' serves to legitimise Teamco's actions and decisions and to efface organisational control (a point developed later). The competencies translate Teamco's values (eg serving the customer) into norms of personal conduct for employees. Teamco's competencies, just as the notion of 'professional competence', serve to articulate appropriate forms of conduct and work subjectivities in the name of other actors (eg the client, the customer . . .).

The competencies delineate an appropriate mode of conduct rather than simply a way of performing one's job (this would have to be the case since the competencies are used for assessing all managers and professionals at all levels and in all functions of Teamco). The 'competent person', or the 'Teamco professional' is not the person who is merely competent at his/her job or expert in a field
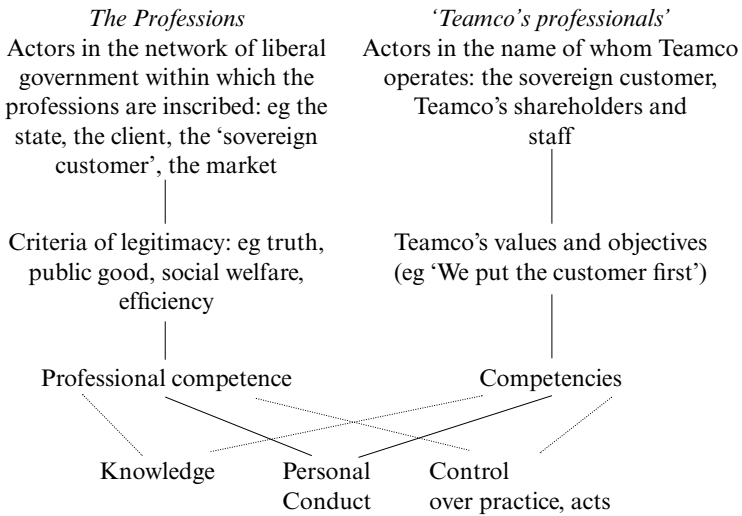
The Professions	'Teamco's professionals'
Actors in the network of liberal government within which the professions are inscribed: eg the state, the client, the 'sovereign customer', the market	Actors in the name of whom Teamco operates: the sovereign customer, Teamco's shareholders and staff
Criteria of legitimacy: eg truth, public good, social welfare, efficiency	Teamco's values and objectives (eg 'We put the customer first')
Professional competence	Competencies

Knowledge   Personal   Control
            Conduct   over practice, acts

Figure 2 Professionalism as disciplinary logic among 'professional employees'[11]

('Technical/Professional competence' *is* only 1 out of 15 competencies) but who, for example, *'seeks responsibility and welcomes accountability'*, *'demonstrates customer care principles'*, interacts with colleagues in an appropriate way (eg *'treats colleagues as customers'*, *'generates enthusiasm'*), *'is self-critical'*, or *'listens'*. These criteria are clearly not just about the way one performs one's job but the 'sort of person' one needs to be to become a Teamco professional. There is a clear parallel between the Teamco competencies, defining appropriate personal conduct, and the notion of professional competence delineating the conduct of the professional practitioner. As was mentioned earlier, professional practice is not regulated through the direct control of professional acts but is governed 'at a distance', by regulating the person of the practitioner. Similarly, employees at Teamco are not assessed in terms of task-related behaviour, but in terms of the sort of person they are.

The 'professional person' that the competencies construct is probably not very different from the sort of person constructed in other organisations aspiring to excellence; indeed the sort of person depicted in the competency framework closely resembles the model of the entrepreneur, or the enterprising self popularised by the management literature (eg Peters and Waterman, 1982; Kanter, 1990).

The competencies constitute the 'Teamco professional' in terms of enterprising attributes, such as initiative, self-reliance, the ability to accept responsibility for oneself (Keat, 1991b). For example, the competencies define the 'Teamco professional' in terms of having a taste for change and flexibility (eg '*Reacts positively to, and leads change*'); having a 'feel' for the mobilisation of human needs and energy (e.g 'Generates enthusiasm, high morale and positive team spirit'; '. . . building appropriate alliances and networks'); and as accepting responsibility for 'taking care of oneself, (eg 'Approaches all experiences and situations as opportunities for learning and development'; 'Takes responsibility for own personal and professional development').

The competencies create an alignment between professionalism and enterprising behaviour; they are part of a series of techniques (including culture, TQM, performance related pay) which serve to diffuse the enterprise logic through to individual conduct. Just as the notion of 'professional competence' serves to inscribe the disciplinary logic of professionalism in the person of the practitioner by translating 'truth' into appropriate conduct, the Teamco competencies inscribe the disciplinary logic of enterprise within the personal conduct of employees.

Furthermore just as the 'liberal professions' – through their inscription in the art of liberal government – are governed in the name of their constituency (eg the clients), 'Teamco professionals' are governed in the name of the customer. The appeal to professionalism through the articulation of competencies serves to efface direct control; the managers/professionals are not directly controlled by Teamco (or its senior managers) but by the needs of, in the name of, the customers (du Gay and Salaman, 1992; McArdle et al, 1995). The competency framework gives a privileged position to the customer; thus employees are urged to 'own customers' problems', 'see through the eyes of the customers', and 'do whatever it takes to satisfy customers' needs'. This last item is a poignant illustration of 'government at a distance'; employees are not 'told what to do' but are empowered to use their initiative in 'responsible' ways, that is, in ways that answer to the 'sovereign needs' of the customers. The customer is mobilised as a resource to legitimise the regulation of conduct, to 'responsibilise' conduct, and at the same time effaces direct managerial control. It is for the customer (at least partly) that employees have to display particular forms of conduct.

However, the competency framework suggests that the 'Teamco professionals' do not regulate their conduct merely for the customers but also for themselves. Professionalism is articulated in terms that

align professional conduct and competence with self and personal development. Professionalism is defined in terms of adopting a certain relationship to oneself, professional persons are urged to pursue 'Self-Management and Personal Development' (eg 'has realistic view of own strengths and areas for personal development', 'take responsibility for own personal and professional development'). Here we are reminded that professionalism is a disciplinary logic relying on technologies of the self. Thus professional conduct is not 'imposed' on employees by Teamco but is 'offered' as a way for individuals to develop and better themselves. The articulation of professionalism through competencies serves to translate organisational control and authority into individual self-development. However, this alignment is predicated upon a particular understanding of individual development; individual development is articulated in terms such as 'taking responsibility', 'flexibility, adaptability and persistence in the achievement of goals and in dealing with changing business priorities'. The competencies allow for an alignment of individuals' self-regulating and self-developing capacity with corporate values and objectives by delineating the space within which individuals are to exercise their development and autonomy. Under the banner of professionalism, competencies inscribe employees' conduct within a network establishing connections between customers, Teamco's values, employees' competence and development.

Discussion: (re)negotiating professionalism, loosening the disciplinary logic

The professionalisation of conduct through the articulation of competencies allows for the control of employees at a distance, in the name of the client and the self. The mobilisation of professional images is interwoven with two other central motifs in current programmes of organisational reforms: the cult of the customer (eg du Gay and Salaman, 1992) and the celebration of the self-actualising employee (Miller and Rose, 1995). Re-imagining labour as offering 'professional service' serves to construct an image of quality and reliability appealing to the allegedly increasingly discerning and demanding customer; it also opens up some imaginary space within which self-actualising employees can strive for continuous fulfilment and improvement. Competencies, just as the notion of 'professional competence', act as a translating device that *potentially* establishes connections between employees, customers and organisations'

interests. I want to end this paper by discussing the potential or contingent rather than pre-determined nature of this alignment. The analysis of the 'Teamco professionals' presented above needs to be qualified with two important points of caution, both pertaining to the negotiable and contestable meaning of professionalism.

First, I am not suggesting that the appeal to professionalism always travels in new occupational domains with the same effects, or is always inscribed within the logic of enterprise. Professionalism may not always be indexed to enterprise and may not always govern through technologies of the self, at least to the same extent. For example, waitressing or retailing personnel labelled 'professional' are unlikely to be seduced into professional conduct through similar technologies of the self (eg appeal to self-development) and are more likely to be coerced into appropriate conduct by the threat and insecurity characteristic of the labour market in which they find themselves.

Secondly, I am not suggesting that the professionalisation of conduct operates in a deterministic fashion, or always produces the sort of conduct and subjectivities articulated by competency framework. To illustrate this point, we need to examine the various ways in which Teamco employees engage with the disciplinary regime of professionalism. I have discussed elsewhere how graduate employees at Teamco embraced or resisted the dominant enterprise culture (Fournier, 1998), here I will only provide a brief illustration of the ways in which they accepted or contested the model of professionalism propounded by Teamco's official discourse. Some of the graduates certainly seemed to buy into the enterprise and professionalism discourse; they saw the competencies as a 'benevolent aid' for self-development (technologies of the self) which would help them become more professional and better selves (Fournier, 1998). Furthermore, they deployed the vocabulary of professionalism to index a form of conduct closely aligned with Teamco competencies, and to establish connections between the customer, Teamco and their own development. For example, several graduates talked about moving towards more commercially or customer oriented work as central to their professional development; or as the following quote illustrates, aligned their 'professional development' with a better understanding of 'business' and 'customers':

> I've developed as a professional person, I understand a lot more what's important in a business; everything is about business, dealing with customers.

Others drew upon the vocabulary of professionalism to express their commitment to continuous improvement, which they contrasted with the 'unprofessionalism' of those who were 'just interested in getting the job done but lacked the ambition to improve themselves'. Ironically, although some graduates had accepted the model of professionalism articulated by the competency framework, they saw Teamco as 'still rooted in bureaucratic rule' (which was deemed unprofessional because 'not customer oriented').

However, the happy alignment between customers, Teamco and employees' professional development indexed by the competency framework was challenged at several levels by some graduates. In particular, most graduate employees working in computing 'failed' to see the competencies in terms of 'professional development' (or technology of the self); for them the competency framework was a technology of domination enticing (compelling) employees to work beyond contract, or aimed at targeting people for the 'release Programme' (ie 'voluntary redundancy'). Here, the idea that professional development, customer satisfaction and organisational interests could coincide was considered preposterous. Many computing graduates saw opportunities for professional development (such as moving between different projects in order to acquire a broad experience and skill base) as limited since 'it wouldn't be in the organisation's benefits'. One graduate argued that '[Teamco's] logic is to get more and more out of less people, this creates unhappiness and stress for staff'. Others questioned the alignment between the new emphasis on the 'sovereign customer' and employee development, customer satisfaction could only be at the expense of employees:

> Management has promised everything to the customers, and the staff has suffered.

However, rejecting the model of professionalism articulated by the competencies did not necessarily mean abandoning the notion of professionalism. Indeed, many computing graduates used the vocabulary of professionalism. However, they did so to refer to their desire to remain in technical areas of work rather than climb the greasy pole of management. They imagined professional development in terms of building expertise by working across different projects and acquiring different skills, or in terms of doing 'technical work'; for example some talked about the 'satisfaction of job well done', of 'solving problems', of 'doing something that is of benefit', or of 'working for customers who appreciate what you've done'.

Thus for many computing graduates, professionalism was seen as the preferred (and, to them, implicitly more moral) alternative to entering the corrupted world of enterprise and management (Fournier, 1998); unlike Teamco's official version of professionalism, it was not aligned with, but opposed to, the values of enterprise.

In computing graduates' discourse, as in Teamco's official discourse, the image of professionalism is deployed to invoke a particular form of moral conduct (eg broadening technical expertise for the former, enterprising behaviour for the latter), and to portray other forms of conduct as immoral (eg corrupting oneself with managerialism in one case, lacking drive or ambition in the other). In both cases, as in the 'traditional professions', the appeal to professionalism acts as a disciplinary mechanism by inscribing professional practice within a network of accountability that establish connections between other actors (eg the sovereign customer, or the 'appreciative' client), criteria of legitimacy (quality of service, technical competence) and professional conduct. However, as is evident from the Teamco case, the meaning of professionalism, and the type of 'moral conduct' it invokes, is not fixed but is highly contestable. And it is precisely this indeterminacy and slipperiness that makes the disciplinary logic of professionalism an inevitably imperfect form of government. Whilst the deployment of the discourse of professionalism and the articulation of 'professional competence' may index new forms of organisational control, they also open up new possibilities for resistance or subversion as the meaning of professionalism gets contested.

Notes

1. Following Trepos (1996), professionalisation can be seen as a process of 'black-boxing' of expertise. Professionalisation is a process of social crystallisation of expertise allowing the expert to 'practice in peace'. Thus experts acquire authority once they have secured autonomy and exclusive appropriation through such strategies as accreditation and licensure (Rose, 1993).
2. Samuel Weber (1987) for example suggests that the professions have contributed to cultivate an atmosphere of anxiety among clients to establish and reinforce the lay public dependence on them.
3. It is important to note that the Foucauldian notions of technology of the self and technology of power/domination (Foucault, 1980, 1988) do not reflect the

old free-will/determinism dualism but refer to different ways in which power is exercised, or individuals are made to adopt 'appropriate conduct'. Technologies of the self refer to the ways in which individuals act upon themselves as subjects 'to effect by their own means or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection and immortality' (Foucault, 1998: 18). Technologies of power/domination refer to objectivising techniques through which individuals act over one another. But of course, technologies of the self and technologies of domination are not independent but interconnect, and it is the interaction between these two types of techniques that we need to take into account to understand the constitution and government of the modern subject (Foucault, 1980). To repeat the words of Foucault quoted earlier in the paper, 'technologies of domination . . . have recourse to processes by which the individuals act upon himself and, conversely, . . ., where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion' (Foucault, 1980).

4. In response to one of the referees' comments, and maybe more generally to labourist critiques accusing Foucauldian analysis of reproducing the reactionary bias of functionalism (eg Thompson, 1993; Thompson and Ackroyd, 1995), it is important to note that this emphasis on the constructed and contested nature of professionalism makes the analysis of the professions presented here fundamentally different from functionalist accounts. Functionalist analyses portray professional specialisation into distinct areas of 'expertise' as the inevitable product of the division of labour, as the outcome of a process of rationalisation that provides for the most efficient way of organising and applying an increasingly complex knowledge to the regulation and maintenance of the social order (eg Carr-Saunders, 1928; Parsons, 1954, 1968). By linking the development and function of the professions to 'objective' notions of truth, knowledge, and rationalisation, functionalist analysis presents a universalist and ahistorical account of the professions which has been discredited (eg Ackroyd, 1996; Burrage and Torstendahl, 1990) . On the other hand, the Foucauldian account presented in this paper suggests that what comes to count as 'professional expertise' or competence is not the simple reflection and organisation of 'truth' but has to be established and continuously re-negotiated with actors, and in terms of criteria, varying historically and culturally (eg 'clients' versus 'customers', public good versus efficiency). According to Foucauldian analysis, the possession of truth or expertise is not sufficient for establishing the professions, for truth is indeterminate and contestable; it is the construction of truth and of its legitimacy in the eyes of other actors that constitutes the professions (Power, 1991). Thus the development, power and status of the professions needs to be understood within the historical context of liberal forms of government typical of modern Western societies, rather than as the outcomes of a universal and inevitable process of rationalisation. Furthermore, the move towards advanced liberalism suggests that the professions may need to re-construct their practice and legitimacy in terms of market related criteria rather than merely 'truth' related criteria (Power, 1997; Rose, 1993) . The Foucauldian emphasis on the historical and contingent nature of the professions suggests that the meaning of professionalism is contestable for it can be constructed around various alignments and connections (eg between professional competence and the public good, or professional competence and efficiency to repeat a simple example); as such, it problematises the

functionalist analysis of the role of the professions in maintaining social cohesion. The meaning of professionalism is not fixed but negotiated and contestable; thus as any other forms of government, the disciplinary logic of professionalism can never be total but is fragmented and subject to various forms of resistance or re-articulation, as will be illustrated in the final part of the paper.

5. Whilst I found it useful to summarise the arguments in the form of a diagram, I acknowledge the dangers associated with representing relationships through the tracing of lines. Thus it should be stressed that the lines are not meant to represent cause and effect relationships but processes through which connections and translations are made. The dotted lines suggest that professional competence is only loosely connected with the knowledge of the practitioner, or control over practitioner's acts; professional competence is essentially translated in terms of personal conduct.

6. By talking about the deployment of the discourse of professionalism to new occupational domains, I am not implying that it was initiated in the 'real professions' and is now moving into 'sham' professions. As I hope I have made clear, professionalism and what comes to be recognised as 'professions' are culturally and historically contingent. Thus when I talk about the 'traditional professions' I do not mean the 'real/authentic' professions but simply those 'occupations' which have been constructed as professions in the UK.

7. Although we need to be critical of the 'globalisation thesis' (eg Hirst and Thompson, 1996; Scott, 1997), it remains that invoking the forces of globalisation has been a favoured trope in managerialist discourse and has served to legitimise various programmes of organisational restructuring, as will be illustrated with the case of Teamco.

8. Once the discourse of professionalism pervades organisational life, it becomes difficult for employees not to align themselves with it, or not to constitute themselves as 'professional' for not doing so would mean being marked as 'unprofessional'. However, as will be discussed in the final section of the paper, this is not to say that it leaves no space for resistance; adopting the discourse of professionalism does not necessarily mean accepting the way in which professionalism is articulated by organisational discourse.

9. Here the name of the industry has been omitted to protect the anonymity of the company.

10. The 15 competencies are as follows: Customer Focus, Commercial and Business Awareness, Performance and Results, Leadership and People Management, Teamwork, Effective Communication and Impact, Continuous Improvement and Managing Change, Financial Awareness, Global Awareness, Strategic Vision and Direction Setting, Creative Thinking and Innovation, Planing Organisation and Project Management, Problem Solving and Decision Making, Self-Management and Personal Development, Professional/Technical.

11. The point of caution made in relation to Figure 1 also applies to the reading of Figure 2.

Acknowledgement

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