

# The quest for professionalism and the dialectic of individualism and collectivism in work organisations

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We are all individuals now; not by choice, though, but by necessity. We are individuals *de jure* regardless of whether we are or are not individuals *de facto*: self-identification, self-management and self-assertion, and above all self-sufficiency in the performance of all these three tasks, are our duty whether or not we command the resources which the performance of the new duty demands.  
(Bauman 2001:105)

## Abstract

The objective of this paper is to analyse possible effects of organisational changes on the quest for professional competence in terms of contextualisation and individualisation. It firstly, discusses the concept of professionalism and professional competence in relation to common occupational competence and skills. Secondly, the discourse on knowledge, competence and professionalism is depicted and discussed via the labels of the knowledge and learning society, the service society and the knowledge company, and the rhetoric connected to the new public management and auditing, which is interpreted as a process directed to full-fledged organisations.

It is stated, firstly, that professional competence per se varies from formal and de-contextualised credentials to strongly contextualised performances. Secondly, deregulations and new forms of managing professional work construct the professional work organisation as the prevalent context for demanding and accounting professional work, whereby dialectic processes emerge between front-line professional and customer autonomy, versus the collective and organisational level of enterprised units. Thirdly, these alterations have enforced the marketisation and the individualisation of professional competence and rewards to possible disadvantage of professional collective control of professional knowledge and values.

**Keywords:** professionalism, competence, new public management, contextualisation, individualisation, enterprising.

## **Introduction**

Professionalism is a property on the organisational level usually meaning some kind of occupational control as e.g. knowledge development and formal education in a specialised area, and knowledge application in the exercise of a certain occupation, possibly secured by governmental legal regulations (MacDonald 1995; Freidson 2001). Professionalism is also a property at the individual level of the members of an occupation, and usually meaning a certain expertise or competence in the exercise or execution of tasks and problem solving according to certain quality and standards – and frequently in relation to clients as individuals or organisations. In recent decades alterations have taken place on the societal and organisational levels, creating new quests for professionalism in the dialectic between the collective and individual levels. These new quests go beyond the traditional permanent once conducted and carried by professional occupations and their associations in terms of professional traits or competitive power relations to other groups and agents. The changes have to do with deregulations and new forms of managing professional work, which lead into stronger contextualisation and individualisation of professional competence, urging in its turn for control of the professional front-line work and forcing autonomous individual and often implicit competence into collective and explicit organisational assets.

The following chain of reasons and causes is an introductory conclusion of the investigation made in the paper. Discourses on knowledge societies and organisations parallel to marketisation and management have enforced demands for professional competence. Enterprising states and service organisations have emphasised the relations of autonomous professionals to clients and their demands as customers. Enterprising service organisations comprise as well the development into more full-fledged commercial organisations with enforced identity, management hierarchy and rationality. The management of autonomous professional work through formal credentials before entrance into the employment is supplemented by recruitment along and socialisation into certain values and attitudes according to organisational cultures. Client control is partly replaced by the demands and evaluations by customers and their sovereignty to choose and exit from enterprised firms. Thus, professional competence tends to be less formal explicit and de-contextualised, and instead more personal, implicit, individual and more connected to the contexts of positions, tasks and actual performance. This increased front-line autonomy will raise new requirements for self-regulated governmentality by professionalism. On the contrary, marketing,

contracting and auditing increases the demand for explicit accounting of professional competence. This loss of control by the work organisation management will increase the demand for quality control and auditing, which by more or less bureaucratic means is trying to win back some control over the market directed enterprise. Thus, there is dialectic between individualism and collectivism based upon two mechanisms – autonomy and discretion for the self-regulated professional-client relationship and individual implicit competence, versus possible exchange of professional employees and collective explicit knowledge, respectively. These alterations have interesting consequences for professionalism as occupational control.

## **I. The concepts of knowledge and competence**

Professional knowledge is usually regarded as formal credentials in a certain discipline far from the actual practice and the demands for qualification at work. Much professional work is, however, routine experienced at work and by in-service education. Exceptionally, certain bodies of knowledge are referred to behind judgements, decisions, solutions, actions and measures (Collins 1979; Abbott 1988; Macdonald 1995). The use of theoretical and formal knowledge is on the whole often implicit and more explicitly referred to only in new problems and in situations of conflict and competition, or when professional knowledge has to be separated from occupational knowledge and skills in general. (Knowledge as legitimation is, however, disregarded in this paper.)

Explicit knowledge refers to knowledge that can be verbalised or expressed in words and, thereby, can be communicated to others (Ellström 1992:23f; Schön 1983; Lam 2000). It may include facts about properties and relations, but also procedures that are given by means of rules and norms. This is theoretical knowledge or so-called assertive knowledge (knowing what, declarative knowledge, knowledge by description, knowing that). Implicit knowledge consists of what one is unable or unwilling to formulate in words. Such tacit knowledge, as it is frequently called, may be connected with skills and practical knowledge (know-how, procedural knowledge, knowledge by acquaintance). Moreover, it may be connected with the ability to recognise something, judge something, or see patterns. This is also called experiential knowledge or familiar knowledge. Much of the knowledge involved in handicraft

and other work is considered to be of the implicit type, and it may partially merge or develop into explicit knowledge insofar as it can be codified, verbalised or formulated in other ways.

If one defines knowledge quite generally as an ability to act, this leads to the concept of competence. The Latin origin of the word “competere” means to coincide, be devoted to something, or be capable, indicating that the concept of competence is contextual – a person has competence for something. This is defined as follows: competence is “an individual’s potential capacity for action in relation to a certain task, situation or context. More specifically, the capacity for successfully carrying out work, including the ability to identify, utilise and, if possible, widen the scope for interpretation, action and evaluation that the work offers” (Ellström 1992:21.) By this concept professional knowledge becomes apparently more contextualised (Cf. Polanyi 1966; 1978; Mieg 2001).

Competence is a broader concept than knowledge, since it has emotional and social as well as cognitive components. Competence is close to the concept of qualification, which refers to “the competence that is objectively required due to the character of working tasks, and/or is formally or informally demanded by the employer” (Ellström 1992:29). To be qualified for something is, according to the Latin derivation, to be influenced (or socialised) so that one is suited to something. Therefore, competence is based on the individual’s ability in relation to the work, and is often expressed in terms of the merits of an individual – while qualification is based on the demands placed by work upon the individual’s competence, and is often expressed by stating requirements that certain tasks set for people, as in job descriptions. Competence thereby focuses on the people, whereas qualification focuses on the work. There is ambivalence in the vocabulary between contextualised qualification and de-contextualised competence, where the latter has been concordant to a so-called service society and a so-called knowledge society. Contextualised qualification refers instead to organisational culture and values and position specific tasks connected to managing professional work and amplifying the degree of formal organisation. In recruitment matters various specific, more or less individual, requirements connected to the organisation and position at stake, are frequently amended in advertising beyond the simple occupational title as e.g. a teacher or a physician and their formal credentials.

Occupational proficiency in general, then, can include everything from extremely implicit, so-called tacit, practical knowledge to rules of thumb, to fully explicit and clearly codified

theoretical knowledge, and thus has a very broad spectre. Professional work and use of knowledge is in the first place very similar to occupations in general. Professional competence can, however, be specified as an application of general principles to specific problems in a specialized area or domain, based upon a certain field of relatively abstract knowledge and techniques and routines for application (Moore 1970; Abbott 1988:53; Schön 1983:22). This demonstrates the strong contextual character of professional practice, which has been elaborated with the concept reflection-in-action. Reflection is created through new and extended forms of auditing and the discourse connected to self-evaluations, which in itself has promoted the quest for professionalism.

Formal competence in terms of credentials can be separated from actual individual competence, from required competence by employers and managers, from actually required competence for positions and tasks, and from actually applied competence in performing certain tasks and solving certain problems. Direction towards clients as customers and higher degrees of organisation is putting forward evaluations by others and self-evaluations, which seems to focus the competence actually at use. This is also where the distinction between the explicit knowledge of the novice frequently is compared to the implicit skills of the expert, where declarative knowledge has been transformed into procedural knowledge (Schön 1983; Mieg 2001:85).

Combining the dimension: explicit-implicit and individual-collective generates four categories of knowledge, which are connected to different forms of organisations (Lam 2000:490). Embrained knowledge is explicit and individual and dependent on conceptual skills and cognitive abilities, and it is mainly formal, abstract or theoretical and de-contextualised. Embodied knowledge is implicit and individual and dependent on practical experience. Encoded knowledge is explicit and collective and codified into information carriers as systems, rules, recipes and procedures. Embedded knowledge is implicit and collective and is residing in organisational routines, traditions and shared beliefs and cultural norms and thus strongly contextualised.

Some qualifications may again be more work-related or connected with the tasks and how the work is carried out, while others are more related to the work organisation as a social unit, the employment, and the power structure it belongs to. The last of these comprises more ideological qualifications and attitudes bound to individual qualities, with aspects such as

super- and subordination, loyalty, conformity and motivation; hence they are less dependent on the actual tasks but more related to the organisation and thus contextual on that level instead of professional associations, and expected to be emphasised by the development into more full-fledged work organisations.

Professional expertise is in itself an individual domain-specific competence more or less shared by colleagues in the same professional collective and association (Mieg 2001). In work organisations the quest for professionalism is claimed by the groups of experts or individuals in terms of autonomy from clients or customers, as well as management. The quest for autonomous professionalism, controlled at distance through education and socialisation, is also claimed of managers and employers. The issue of professional autonomy has been a major theme in studies on professional work in organisations (Hall 1968; Larson 1977; Freidson 2001). In this paper it is regarded as dialectic inside work organisations between the demands for autonomous and individual professional work, and the demands for management control and collective assets for reproduction of the organisation.

## **II Reasons and causes to new quests for professionalism**

### **a. The knowledge and learning society**

In recent decades there have been many voices trying to invoke the prosperity of a so-called knowledge society by following arguments. The economy and competitiveness are facing great challenges in most Western countries. Internationalisation is growing e.g. through the four European free movements – of goods, services, work and capital. Global competition with other industrial and technological regions is increasing. Information technology and further technical change are raising new demands on the workforce at an ever faster pace. Knowledge and competence are becoming a more important factor in production, while access to raw materials plays an ever smaller role. The requirements of customers and clients, and the ability to satisfy needs that are progressively more differentiated, are making a greater impact. Thereby, the demands are growing on knowledge content in both products and production processes. This puts a focus on employees' knowledge and competence, and the volition, motivation, and capacity for learning. People themselves are the bearers of all

competence. The significance of their competence for particular countries and companies is growing not only because of new production processes, but also because of people's higher mobility. On the whole, it is essential to be able to attract and keep a workforce with adequate competence (Sörlin & Thörnqvist 2000).

Thus, universities and colleges have been included in regional industrial development and come to be regarded as regional engines, where innovative enterprise is assigned to the collaboration between university research and college instruction as well as companies. This has been a key motive for spreading and establishing new colleges and universities in different regions in many countries (OECD 1996; A Memorandum...). These expansions have been enforcing formal education as well as in-service education. As far as formal education is concerned there has been a de-contextualisation of general as well as professional knowledge and competence, while in-service and continuous and life-long learning is more connected to tasks as well as organisations and thereby contextualisation and individualisation.

Hence, a protracted discussion has occurred with a rhetoric that accentuates human resources as ever stronger driving forces for production and working life in the societies that, during the 1980s, began to be labelled the knowledge society, where knowledge and competence often lacks application area or a certain context (Freidson 2001:116; Knowledge management... 2000). The simultaneous and concomitant concept of learning society, which has emphasised in-service education and work and occupational experience is on the contrary contextualising skill and competence (Senge 1990). These are two ideologies and discourses almost permanently struggling, where professionalism has one foot in each. The terms "knowledge society" and "learning society" are, however, contemporary keywords that perhaps say no more than what "money society", "power society" or "culture society" would do (Fuller 2001:177). And "knowledge society" is only one of several designations, which try to point out information and symbolic analysis as the driving forces in a recent post-industrial economy (Brint 2001).

## **b. The service society**

The transition from goods to service sector, for both production capital and employees, has been another driving influence in emphasising knowledge, competence, and human capital for

economic prosperity (Bell 1976; Reich 1991). Theories about the productivity of human capital have also led this discussion, which at times has resulted in exaggerated claims about the post-industrial society, the service society, or the knowledge and information society. Experts, higher civil servants and planners who work primarily with symbolic analysis have been given more prominent roles, and their capacity is associated with higher education, research, and strongly person-linked competence (Frenkel et al. 1999; Hansen 2001: Ch. 2; Mieg 2001). “For the first time in history, human intellect is a directly productive force, not only a central element in the production system,” it is said (Sörlin & Törnqvist 2000:34).

Professions in agriculture, industry and transport decreased during the later 20th century, while professional and technical professions multiplied (Hansen 2001: Ch. 4). This was a trend in several industrial countries. What can be defined as post-industrial jobs, i.e. service work, grew in the industrial countries during the later 20th century, especially professional and so-called semi-professional groups, and constituted about a third at the end of the 1990s. Among the services, greatest growth occurred in productive services that had to do with engineering and development work as well as social and medical services, while distribution services and personal services saw almost no change in their proportions (Hansen 2001:85). For comparison, it can be noted that the so-called scientifically professional sector of workers in the USA constituted 37% in 1994, an increase by 10 percentage units since 1959 (Brint 2001:120).

### **c. Deregulations and the new public management**

Systems for differentiating the political role of setting goals from the professional role of execution and performance has been implemented in many countries, according to the organisation of separating politics (purchasers) from performance (providers) and trying to use the market as the means of steering (Taylor-Gooby & Lawson 1993; Cutler & Waine 1994; Walsh 1995; Lane 2000; Pollitt & Bourckaert 2000; Considine 2001; Taylor-Gooby ed. 2001). Simultaneously, audit is being developed, whereby local politicians, employers, managers and clients will gain more say to the disadvantage of professional control and autonomy. Management by quality measurements emphasise relations to clients and their options and satisfaction, standardisation of regulations, new forms for documentation and accounting and visibility of performance and efficiency, which tend to individualise professional work and competence.

Sometimes this implies the surprising empowerment of consumers and sometimes the sudden withdrawal of their public rights. But everywhere it involves a greater interest in specifying and exacting measured performance, comparing the achievements of agents and increasing the flexibility and mobility of public resources. More than ever before the motivations and personal norms of actors are critically important to these questions of performance. Managers, professionals, clerical workers and clients are invited to enterprise themselves according to an ideal of improvement that shifts the risk of investment and consumption down closer to the level of the individual (Considine 2001:8).

Market-like forms or quasi-markets of control in public professional service have been implemented in many countries, including higher education (Slaughter & Leslie 1997; Sörlin & Törnqvist 2000; Trowler 2001). Privatisation of service production to various degrees; competition, bidding, contracting and marketing; payment by results to smaller units; internal markets; and freedom of choice for clients - or rather customers - are the most prevalent forms of market directions, creating new relationships between the government, the public and the professionals. Professionals are more or less forced to categorise and codify their competence and work into discernible units, which can be estimated and price tagged for bidding and contracting on internal or external markets. The combination between implementation of quasi-markets and quality measurement has been observed most carefully in health and schooling (Exworthy & Halford 1999; Blomqvist & Rothstein 2000; Considine 2001; Wilkinson & Willmott 1995).

Thus, the market closure and occupational control tends to erode, and professionals are challenged by the logic of the market threatening to un-make the professions in several ways (Fournier 2000). Firstly, the independent fields of autonomous professional knowledge are questioned by the discourse of the market, emphasising complexity and interdependency of social problems. Secondly, internal criteria for practice and performance are replaced by external criteria as customer satisfaction and financial success and the competition for public funding and customers seeking 'value for money' (Ibid. p. 80). Thirdly, the 'sovereign consumer' shops around for alternatives, questioning the authority of professions and dependence of clients and make up their own choices and appropriation of services, which creates new conditions and contexts for professional competence. There is a discourse of enterprise, which constitutes both professional service providers and customers as autonomous, self-regulating and self-actualising individual actors (du Gay & Salaman 1992:623). This culture of enterprise governs autonomous professional employees by a

number of everyday practises inscribed in various mechanisms as recruitment, briefings, project teams, accountability, and remuneration by bonuses. The quest for professionalism establishes connections between professional employees, customers and the interest of the organisation management and acts as a disciplinary and governing mechanism within work organisations (Fournier 1998). Though, the impact and ramifications of the discourse on enterprise may be exaggerated (Fournier & Grey 1999).

#### **d. Professional work organisations and knowledge companies**

Closely connected to the development of a discourse on the knowledge and service society is a discourse concerning professional and knowledge organisations. Professional work organisations, by a narrow definition, are administrations and companies that have a large share of persons in management and employment who are organised in professional associations – as at schools, hospitals, and offices of architects and lawyers. By a wider definition, they are units of working life, which have a large proportion of highly educated people who work relatively independently, in connection with clients or customers, with strong collegial control, and with a quest for professionalism. This involves referring to one's own autonomous competence as distinct from rules and routines governed by the management. Membership in such organisations is regulated and maintained mainly by standardisation in the form of embrained education, which is required upon recruitment (Mintzberg 1983; Freidson 2001).

Professionals are bearers of the individual competence that is oriented towards operations in relation to the users or recipients of services – be they called clients, students or customers – in contrast to the competence that managers and supporting personnel have. Professional competence at work is difficult to control administratively because of this individual character and the demands often made by professionals for autonomy and for their own control between colleagues. It is also difficult to control when it is exercised in individual meetings with clients or customers beyond surveillance by management and employers (Lipsky 1980; Frenkel et al.1999). This is an important reason why such meetings have drawn stronger interest from managers and customers, as objects for control through company culture, internal training, evaluations, and quality measurements (Power 1997). The creation of organisational cultures and so-called communities-of-practices is thus characteristic of much

of the organising of enterprises since the 1970s, especially in the service sectors where client and customer relations are notably significant and, at the same time, both call for and allow great autonomy of the professional's practices in relation to the organisational management (Ahrne 1994; Freidson 2001; Alvesson 2002). Competence requirements and continued education thereby become a welcome part of ensuring affiliation and the inclination of employees to return and remain in the organisation, and new stronger bonds to the work organisations are being created.

So-called knowledge organisations or knowledge companies exhibit certain similarities to professional work organisations (Sveiby & Risling 1986; Sveiby 1997). They have a large proportion of highly competent or professional employees, whose work consists to a great extent of handling information and transforming it into knowledge, implying a large proportion of human capital. They have considerable elements of creative problem solving, non-standardised production and knowledge usage, in what is often independent and strongly individual-dependent work. Hence they are also called knowledge-intensive firms, and knowledge and competence are closely linked to individuals (Lam 2000). This is particularly clear when, as clients, we seek special professionals with a good reputation for personal help. The term "knowledge-company" was coined in opposition to other private service companies with a high degree of standardised services. Consultancy firms have been regarded as the prototype of knowledge companies, being largely composed of highly educated personnel and strongly oriented toward customers who buy knowledge through problem solutions, such as offices of lawyers, architects, accountants, advertising agents and computer services. Public administrations such as universities, schools and hospitals have also more frequently been labelled knowledge organisations in the sense of having a large proportion of highly educated staff and applying qualified knowledge. At the same time, in parallel with professional competence, this original definition states requirements of entrepreneurial competence and company development for markets, which the latter organisations and their personnel often lack. Deregulations and new public management have, however, strongly driven these governmental agencies in this same direction influenced by the discourse on enterprise.

Knowledge companies are very dependent on individual persons and their competence, which makes them more vulnerable, and this is where the dialectic between implicit, embodied and individual competence versus explicit, encoded and collective knowledge takes place. It takes a long time to train and acclimatise new employees. The competence tends to be embodied

and person-linked rather than connected with the capital in machines and other equipment, or with the organisation in encoded forms of knowledge as methods and systems, rules and routines, as well as embedded forms as values, norms and traditions – together making up the so-called collective memory of the organisation (Perrow 1986:26; Lam 2000). A difficulty in what is sometimes termed a knowledge-based economy is precisely that of binding competence to the organisation, so that it becomes less dependent on individual employees and ensures exchange of employees, and so that it can create a collective knowledge capital in the long run. There are, in principle, two methods for solving this organisational dilemma. One is to bind and embed persons to the organisation, while the other is to free the competence from the persons and materialise it in encoded forms that can be stored in the organisation.

According to the first method, work organisations offer, firstly, material rewards such as benefits, bonuses and part-ownership, in addition to high salaries, so as to ensure the employees' continued loyalty and return to the workplace, which means that professional employees are connected more to the work organisation and less to the professional occupation and its corresponding association. Individual salaries with referrals to more or less identified external and internal labour markets have been implemented also in the governmental professional agencies disconnected from professional associations. Secondly, work organisations use immaterial methods as socialisation into visions, values, norms and communities-of-practices according to an embedding strategy, which enforces internal markets and networks and weakens external labour markets on formal embrained types of knowledge (Lam 2000).

The other method involves codifying and documenting solutions and ways of working so that they can be communicated to others in encoded forms as databases, manuals, handbooks and the like, which will increase the ability to replace employees, and which corresponds to a proletarianisation of professionals. Firms with project- and team-based and a more or less ad-hoc organisation, hereby try to use bureaucratic forms of control for documenting and registering the work of teams as well as of individual employees. Professional competence occurs this way at the organisational level, where it may refer to the joint and embedded competence of employees. In addition, however, it may concern the encoded competence stored and owned by the organisational, as distinct from what employees provide and freely dispose as embodied knowledge. It may have to do with rules, routines, systems, norms and

values, alongside more tangible and materialised forms such as drawings, recipes, patents, manuals, handbooks, registers, software and other means, although these are not counted as part of the material equipment. Sources of information such as customer registers are sometimes made inaccessible to individual employees, and innovations are protected with patent and copyright laws that are tied to the organisation. This is intended to prevent employees who leave from extracting valuable information and exploiting it in competition with the work organisation concerned.

### **e. Constructing professional organisations**

Public administration and bureaucracies have been lacking many aspects of identity, hierarchy and rationality, characterising complete organisations as proper actors usually found among private companies, which are the prototype used in the theories of organisations, and most prevalent in the changes affecting professional work and organisations in recent decades – not least by a discourse on enterprise. An actor would be an entity with independence, autonomy and self-interested goals with rational means, commanding independent resources within clear boundaries (Brunsson & Sahlin-Andersson 2000:731). Public administration is agents fulfilling given tasks and often several inconsistent objectives and following given rules, leaving little space for own intentions and rationality. An entity is incomplete as an organisation, when members are recruited, guided and controlled according to external rules, values, norms, standards and interests instead of an internal policy, as in the case of many professional occupations. Hospital, universities and schools e.g. may be described as arenas, where the members have considerable autonomy to local managers and instead are controlled by external parties as professional associations and state authorities.

Incentives for this construction process could be explained in different ways: as an intentional policy and strategy aimed at constructing complete organisations; as a side-effect of introducing markets instead of politics, customers instead of clients, auditing instead of rules and managers; and expertise instead of orders and binding rules. All these factors can be both causes and effects in a dialectic relation – reinforcing the idea of constructing organisations with a discourse on enterprise and being reinforced by it, where front-line autonomy is partly taken back by bureaucratic means (Fournier & Grey 1999:112). Many of these reforms have met surprisingly little resistance from professionals in most parts of the Western world and

have been introduced at great speed by central and local governments of various political orientations. Exceptions are, however, e.g. health professions in various countries, which have opposed retrenchments and reorganisations by referrals to professional ethics (Freidson 2000).

Firstly, to see something as an organization means to bestow it with identity, which in its turn, means emphasizing autonomy and defining boundaries and collective resources. Many reforms represent an attempt to install or reinforce these features of identity in the public services. The local autonomy has been increased in the public services e.g. at schools in many countries. Deregulation of rules and decentralisation of the decision-making has taken place. Staff is employed by the units, and the division of labour among professionals are determined locally by managers rather than by central or professional regulations. Single units have become economic entities with budgeting and resource allocation and local accounting and auditing. Boundaries to the environment have been constructed in policy documents, defining assets, members and results as external or internal. Providers of services have been separated from purchasers and customers. Public services have been more or less forced to formulate special profiles emphasising the differences to other similar service providers for their own marketing, contracting and auditing.

Secondly, organisations co-ordinate objectives and activities, and co-ordination is achieved by an authoritative centre in a hierarchy, directing the actions of the members. Various reforms have tried to enforce the co-ordination by e.g. creating local internal working teams, which should be guided by organisational policies and values rather than central rules or professional norms. The new managerialism has defined the executives as managers with freedom to manage rather than civil servants following and implementing central directives (Webb 1999:727). Leadership and management training has been the first priority for further education of the personnel, which has been conspicuously evident in allocation of resources for competence development.

Thirdly, complete organisations are assumed to be rational, i.e. goals, preferences, alternatives and consequences should systematically be forecasted and evaluated. Management-by-objectives has replaced much of the rules and directives. Various and inconsistent objectives have been subjected to attempts to simplify them and to make up hierarchies of goals. Another strategy has been to break down the service provider into smaller units in order to create more clear objective; e.g. into inspection and service-supplying units or purchasing and

providing units. Organisations are expected to account for their actions, and to be efficient. A focus on results passes on responsibility to the local managers, and managers free to choose the means are also responsible for the results of the choices made. Accountable managers and professionals are identified, which further construct the idea of the rational organisation. Accounting for output results have to a great extent replaced governing by rules and regulations, which measures the professional competence according the specific organisational goals of efficiency instead of professionally controlled credits, performances and values, and which attaches the efficiency to individual rewards and privileges in the context of the specific work organisation. Total quality management emphasises the demands and the satisfaction of customers rather than competence according to professional standards, whereby front-line autonomy is again controlled of work organisation managers.

## **Conclusions**

The discourse on knowledge, competence and professionalism has demonstrated a number of trends and processes. One is the emphasis of the alleged importance of knowledge and human capital – frequently exaggerated – in the temporary so-called knowledge, learning, and service society. There is a new quest for professionalism in the sense of autonomous individual and self-regulating competence. In the so-called knowledge companies the dependence on such individual competence is regarded as an important problem, and much effort is put into strategic recruitment and socialisation by culture and values, and other methods to bind new employees to the firm. Many of these changes connect professionals to their work organisations rather than to their professional occupations and associations, whereby professional work and competence will be more related to the work organisations as the primary context.

The quest for professionalism has also been changed of the new public management with its emphasis on internal as well as external markets, and entrepreneurs, economic contracting, and privatisation. This movement includes new forms of management and control as e.g. tendering, accounting and audit for managers and other parties, which forces professionals to codify their competence for contracts and evaluations. Professional work is defined as service products to be marketed and price tagged and individually evaluated and remunerated, and are in that sense commodified. The new public management is enforcing the construction of

professional organisations into more full-fledged organisations as enterprises in terms of identity, hierarchy and rationality. The construction process covers identity aspects as autonomy, resources, boundaries and profiles; hierarchy aspects as co-ordination and control, management and leadership; and rationality aspects as setting objectives, measuring results and allocating responsibility.

By establishing quasi-markets and payment by results, relationships between clients and professionals have in many areas turned into customer relations, which are strongly shaped by the experiences of the customer in using the organisation. The production, publication and diffusion of quality measurements are, thereby, crucial matters to turn welfare services into a market. The relationships between consumers and professional producers are shaped by the interest of the consumers in the product or the service provided. The service in itself is strongly focussed and has to be compared to equivalent products provided by other producers. The marketing of an occupational group and its service is expected to be more closely related to work organisations and to the potential group of clients or customers rather than to the competence of the professionals in relation to regulations and standards managed by professional associations and state authorities. Entrepreneurial forms individualise work relations, make rules and regulations less determining and informal networks, personal qualities and negotiating skills more important (Webb 1999:756). On the whole there is an increase in the responsibility of the individual clients or customers to estimate the quality of the services and the competence of the professionals, which partly may solve the old problem of professional hegemony and paternalism, but to the possible disadvantage for professional occupations and their control of certain bodies of knowledge and values.

Professional competence as such varies from formal, explicit and de-contextualised credentials to strongly implicit and contextualised performances. Deregulations and new forms of managing professional work construct the professional work organisation as the prevalent context for demanding and accounting professional work, whereby dialectic processes emerge between front-line professional and customer autonomy, versus the collective and organisational level of enterprised units. These alterations have enforced the marketisation and the individualisation of professional competence and rewards to possible disadvantage of professional collective control of professional knowledge and values. There are at least five functions for control of knowledge, competence and performance in professionalism: (1) state regulated licensing for partially autonomous professional work, (2)

entrance through certain professional education into a professional occupation (3) regulating internal competition, (4) recruitment quality measures for employers and managers, and (5) a quality guarantee for clients. Alterations as the national deregulations and enterprising states, organisations and relations to clients have emphasised the control by management and customers, which in its turn have changed the quest for professionalism and the conditions for professional competence and performance and its remuneration.

Professional competence tends to be less formal, more social, personal and individual; less controlled by professional occupations and associations and more controlled by managers and customers; less explicit and de-contextualised according to recruitment and evaluation routines, and more connected to positions, tasks and actual performance. There is dialectic between individualism and collectivism based upon two mechanisms – autonomy and discretion for the self-regulated professional-client relationship and individual implicit competence, versus possible exchange of professional employees and collective explicit knowledge, respectively.

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