

## Professionals under Pressure

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# PROFESSIONALS UNDER PRESSURE

The Reconfiguration of Professional  
Work in Changing Public Services

*Edited by*  
*Mirko Noordegraaf*  
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AMSTERDAM UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cover illustration: iStockphoto

Cover design: Sabine Mannel, NEON graphic design company, Amsterdam

Lay-out: JAPES, Amsterdam

ISBN 978 90 8964 509 8

e-ISBN 978 90 4851 830 2 (pdf)

e-ISBN 978 90 4851 831 9 (ePub)

NUR 756

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Amsterdam 2013

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# Preface

Since the turn of the century, there has been a renewed interest in the classic theme of professionalism, with particular emphasis on public professionalism. Growing public and political concerns over the state of public service delivery – whether in policing, health care, education or welfare – have fueled debates about the pressures professionals face and the problems with professional service delivery that are the result of these pressures. Professionals, it is argued, face the burdens of business-like managers, experience a lack of occupational recognition, are subjected to excessive monitoring and accountability demands, and have lost their professional autonomies. Generally, this worrisome state is linked to the rise of managerialism. The increasing reliance on business-like management and performance measurement in public domains has harmed professional practices and values. Although many academics sketch refined pictures of pressured professionals, many of them reiterate worries and many also blame managerialism.

This book goes beyond worries and explanations that focus on such managerialism alone. On the basis of theoretical and empirical insights into sectors like health care, social welfare, education and policing, the authors show that professional work is not always burdened, that professionals have great leeway in coping with change, and that changes come from much more than mere managerialism. Changes in and around public services are induced by societal changes – new technologies, ICT, complex problems, distributed knowledge, demanding citizens. The extent to which they affect professional practices depends on the policy sector and organizations, and on the abilities of professionals to cope with pressures. Therefore, instead of getting rid of managerialism in order to *restore* public professionalism, this book stresses the importance of the *reconfiguration* of public professionalism. Contemporary service delivery calls for new professional skills and standards in order to maintain certain occupational autonomies and values, but at the same time modernize professional ways of working.

The book is the result of the Dutch collaborative research colloquium ‘Professionals under pressure’ (PuP) – started in 2006 and relabeled in 2012 ‘Reframing Public Professionalism’ (RPP) – linked to research networks and projects abroad. It brings together Dutch scholars, who often also participate in international networks on professionalism, health care, education, and social work. International scholars, who have been visitors to the research colloquium, have contributed as well, especially Prof. Stephen Ackroyd and Prof. Janet Newman, both from the UK. We

thank all authors for their cooperation and valuable contributions, and we thank all those colleagues who have more indirectly contributed to this volume. Special thanks also to the Netherlands Institute of Government (NIG) which has supported the colloquium, also financially. Finally, we thank David Schelfhout for his professional (!) editorial support.

Contrary to managerial times that call for immediate results, this book took quite some time, and ‘the final touches’ took more time than expected. However, time – including delay – is often crucial for improving performances and quality. We are certain that it brought this product to a higher level.

*Mirko Noordegraaf and Bram Steijn*  
*Utrecht and Rotterdam, October 2012*

# I Introduction

*Mirko Noordegraaf & Bram Steijn*

## Public service professionals ‘under attack’?

There are many forms of public service delivery – providing healthcare, policing, educating children, assisting unemployed citizens in finding work – and in many ways, these services depend on professional workers. Policemen, medical doctors, nurses, teachers and welfare workers deliver services to clients. Although there are many types of professionals and it is difficult to define professionalism in clear and consistent ways, public service professionals have a few things in common. They primarily deal with clients – as cases, often complex cases – but they also serve public goals, such as safety, public health and employment. This case treatment is regulated by many rules and standards and to some or a large extent, these rules and standards are set by the occupational fields to which professional workers belong. The more standards are set by these occupational fields, the stronger these professionals are, also as far as autonomies and powers are concerned. This has always been legitimated by the fact that traditional professional rules and standards both concern case treatment, as well as wider public service ethics (e.g. Wilensky 1964; Freidson 2001). Professional fields not only establish bodies of knowledge and expertise in order to regulate complex case treatment; they also develop shared service orientations, in order to treat cases rightly and serve society ethically and justly. Professional associations secure both technical and ethical regulation.

Despite these clear features, public professionalism has always been a slippery concept, and increasingly, public professionalism seems to be under attack. To begin with, the value of functionalist readings of professionalism and professional strength is increasingly criticized. Professional regulation guarantees neither effective case treatment, nor societal gains. In fact, according to critical and political readings, (public) professionalism has mainly been a self-serving project, advancing the interests of professional workers themselves, instead of clients and society at large. Furthermore, there has been an uneasy relationship between professionalism and organizational contexts. Although contradictions between professionals and organizational action are logical and perhaps even desirable, they are contested as well. Most professional public service delivery occurs within bureaucratic and organizational systems. Clarke and Newman (1997) speak of bureau-professional regimes. Lately, these regimes are being reconfigured. Due to massive

managerial reform programs, aimed at Western welfare state restructuring, the rationalization of service organizations and the improvement of service performances, professionalism is considered to be disciplined by managerial and market logics. Authors speak about ‘troubled times’ (Gleeson & Knights 2006), ‘attacks’ on professionalism (Ackroyd 1996), ‘deprofessionalization’ (Broadbent et al. 1997) and ‘persecuted professionals’ (Farrell & Morris 1999). They stress the well-documented fact that our society increasingly distrusts professionals, that professionals are drawn into managerialized organizations, and that their professional autonomies and powers are far from secure.

These attacks and pressures that come from different directions, from above, beneath and sideways, are of course felt at and around workfloors where professionals do their work. No wonder that professionals and their associations (and others) have started to express worries and have voiced complaints about the state of affairs in public service delivery. This takes many different guises, and is framed and qualified differently, but the general thrust is clear. The parties involved stress the ‘burdens’ of professional work, the ‘obligations’ placed on professionals, and the ‘demands’ that policy-makers and others develop. Professionals are burdened by ‘bureaucratic’ systems, obliged to be loyal to ‘meaningless’ performance regimes, and forced to spend ‘valuable work time’ on administrative work instead of their ‘real work’, i.e. treating patients, educating children or arresting criminals.

## Pressures: Where do they come from?

In short, when it comes to the state of professionalism in public services, such as police forces, immigration offices, welfare organizations, schools, hospitals, and the like, there seem to be many *pressures* on professional work and professionals *feel pressured*. Moreover, it is not only assumed or observed that there *are* pressures; many generally assume that these pressures are *caused by* managerialist reforms and that they are *problematic*, especially for professionals themselves. When people – politicians, administrators, experts, opinion leaders, professionals themselves – speak about public professionals, their line of reasoning can be summarized as follows (e.g. Noordegraaf 2008; De Bruijn 2010; De Bruijn & Noordegraaf 2010):

Public and non-profit organizations like police organizations, health-care institutions and schools implement certain policies and to accomplish this they have professional workers who interact with clients and render services. These professionals, such as policemen, medical doctors, and teachers, are trained members of certain well-established and (partly) protected occupations. But they have been

encapsulated by businesslike regimes, bureaucratic standards, and market pressures, which harm professional motivation, values and service delivery. Politicians want well-designed and (cost) controlled service systems, with appropriate incentives. Managers – especially those with MBA backgrounds – have turned their backs on workfloors and primarily opt for economies of scale, productivity, efficiency, and transparency. ‘Clashes’ between professionals and managers must be reduced by reducing the number of managers, and by ‘setting professionals free’. Politics must be reinvented; politicians must set appropriate parameters for implementation and they must guard the autonomies of professionals.

Although there could be some truth in these argumentative steps, they must be handled with care (see e.g. Kuhlmann & Saks 2008; Muzio & Kirkpatrick 2011; Noordegraaf 2011; Faulconbridge & Muzio 2012). Although professionals might encounter the ‘burdens of bureaucracy’, it is questionable *whether these burdens have grown dramatically, where they come from, whether politicians and managers can be blamed, and what they mean, also in the longer term*. Pressures might also come from non-organizational or non-managerial sources, in fact, they might come from changing professional work and work forces themselves (e.g. Noordegraaf 2011). Moreover, pressures might not automatically create burdened professionals, as pressures – seen as new circumstances – might also offer new opportunities for professional services to innovate or be effective in new ways. Finally, there might be good reasons to renew professional work as well as work conditions, even if professionals feel burdened. All in all, an alternative reasoning might go like this:

Public and non-profit organizations still have professional workers, but the nature of their work is changing. Professionals are still operative, but the boundaries of professionalism have become less self-evident and inter-professional struggles have increased. Public and non-profit managers might act forcefully, but these managers are also subjected to pressures, i.e. bigger forces that come from elsewhere – politics, policy-makers and the media. Politicians and policy-makers want better and more efficient services, not only because of declining budgets, but also because of a perceived lack of quality. This is enhanced by the media, which tend to stress service failures. These forces are not merely intentional; they have a lot to do with changing demographic, socio-economic and cultural patterns. Professional services are unavoidably changing in nature, because clients have become assertive and demanding; because social norms – such as respect – have been changing; because means have become scarce, not

only financial means but also human resources; because technologies have progressed; because risks have been mounting and because expertise has become contested. Pressures on professional work represent pressures on professional services, which represent political struggles over the nature, content and limits of service delivery.

In such lines of reasoning, bigger societal forces are stressed and practical questions about pressured professionals and their day-to-day experiences are turned into more fundamental questions about societal changes, ambiguous service settings and shifting forms of professionalism. 'Pressures' on professional work are not taken literally – they become a *symbol* of searches for new service settlements (compare Noordegraaf 2011; Faulconbridge & Muzio 2012).

Although more balanced approaches to professional work have been presented earlier (e.g. Exworthy & Halford 1999; Leicht & Fennell 1997, 2001; Farrell & Morris 2003; Kirkpatrick et al. 2005; Evetts 2006; Duyvendak et al. 2006; Noordegraaf 2007, 2011; Waring & Currie 2009; Faulconbridge & Muzio 2012), analyses of professionals, professional work and professionalism can be improved further. We need research that is both empirical as well as theory-driven, including research that explores what *really happens* on workfloors but also stresses bigger analytical themes that lie behind perceived problems. We have to understand shifting *control logics* in more refined ways, including research that focuses more on relations between professionals and others (also managers) and less on either professionals or isolated professional work practices, as well as research that highlights new and emerging organizational dimensions of professional service delivery.

This book contributes to the debate about pressured professionals by bringing together insights from Dutch scholars – these are all members of the so-called NIG Research Colloquium 'Professionals under pressure'<sup>1</sup> – it addresses more fundamental questions than normally can be found in practices and debates throughout the Western world. This is illustrated by the fact that two chapters are written by UK experts (Janet Newman and Stephen Ackroyd) who place Dutch debates and findings into an international comparative perspective. Against this background, the book tries to understand:

'what is really happening' in and around public service delivery, by analyzing  
1) to what extent, how and why professionals are pressured, 2) how and why forms of professional control are changing, and 3) how and why new forms of organized professionalism are enacted.

## Pressured professionals in the Netherlands

The book's Dutch 'bias' is valuable for scholars of other countries because there seems to be a Dutch case when it comes to pressured professionals. In the Netherlands, public and political debates on professionalism have increased exponentially since the turn of the century. This seems to be related to certain political events, such as the rise (and fall) of former politician Fortuyn and the subsequent reconfiguration of the political landscape (Noordegraaf 2008). Especially since 2003, when the Christian-Democrats (CDA) returned to political power, connected to the rise of Fortuyn's political movement, the Dutch orientation towards public professionalism was reversed rather radically. Backed by opinion leaders (Gabriel van den Brink, Thijs Jansen, Evelien Tonkens, Jos Van der Lans, Ad Verbrugge, March Chavannes, and others) as well as expert judgments and reports (e.g. RMO 2002; Van den Brink et al. 2005; Jansen et al. 2009) and certain 'movements' (e.g. Beroepseer.nl, also strongly linked to Christian-Democratic spheres), public and political opinion turned professionals into 'victims', who were 'constrained' and 'encapsulated'. They had to be 'freed'. Managers, on the other hand, were 'guilty' of constraining professionals, and their managerial worlds – with excessive 'layers' of managers and much 'overhead' – had to be eliminated as much as possible.

Other political parties readjusted their opinions on public service delivery, sometimes quite drastically. The liberal party, for example, started to blame managers for harming public services, whereas before 'management' was seen as the solution. In addition, certain authoritative studies (e.g. WRR 2004) were drawn into the new *pro-professional* public service ethos. Professional logics, with their emphasis on clients, quality and craftsmanship were seen as being weakened, whereas bureaucratic and managerial logics were seen as becoming hegemonic. The consequences were clear; we had to 'get rid of managers', as one former political executive said (a former Minister of Education); the value of honest professional work and 'real' professionalism had to be re-acknowledged.

Later on, these general turn-around tendencies were reinforced by subsequent political and public debates, which focused on specific service sectors. Backed by a continuous stream of reports – coming from political parties, but also from government ministries and advisory councils – and by specific 'incidents' in and around public services, service 'problems' were discussed in terms of 'over-bureaucratized' and 'overburdened' service organizations. Policemen were presented as 'alienated', teachers as being part of 'anonymous educational factories', and home care workers as 'time controlled' and 'Tayloristic' factory workers. Although attention for the 'growing number of' medical errors, incidents in youth care, and the like, did not eliminate the need for better management completely, they signaled the 'worrying' state of affairs, if not 'crisis' in and around public service delivery. In 2012, one of the

leading Dutch newspapers (*de Volkskrant*, 28 January 2012) concluded that the ‘divide between craftsmen and managers’ was the most fundamental division in Dutch society.

All of this resulted in political attempts to ‘rescue’ social services, such as programs for ‘reducing burdens’, projects for generating ‘professional freedom’, and rules for stopping ‘scaling up’ and ‘managerializing’ professional services. It also resulted in much academic attention being paid to public professionals. More than ever, and perhaps more than elsewhere – at least in relative terms – Dutch scholars are actively studying public services, professionalism and professional practices. There is a wealth of research projects, reports and results, carried out by all kinds of researchers. This book profits from this. It brings together various researchers who have studied public professionals over the past few years. Some were visible in the fierce and rather ‘black and white’ Dutch public debate, but others were less visible and have mainly emphasized the nuances and intricacies of (changing) public professionalism.

## Set-up of the book

The book starts with chapters by two prominent UK scholars. Stephen Ackroyd’s chapter tells the story of forty years of (UK) research on professional occupations in several sectors. In a way, the main argument of this chapter fits the line of reasoning that was developed above: pressures on professionals must be problematized. Economic circumstances, organizational settings and management practices are important factors. The chapter also contextualizes public professional work (and compares it with professional work in the private sector) and puts changing manager-professional relations into a broader societal context, including the evolution of capitalism. In contrast, Janet Newman’s chapter is more analytical and less tied to specific sectors and countries. It places ‘new’ pressures on professionals within the knowledge/power knot perspective developed by Clarke and Newman (2009). One of her arguments is that professionals are not just passive victims of reform but have an active role in shaping not only large-scale reform programs but also specific spaces of agency. Many of the subsequent chapters will refer to the analytical framework of Newman’s chapter.

These subsequent Dutch-authored chapters are clustered into the following three parts:

- *Part I: Professionals and pressures*: How do reforms affect professional work and work settings; which bureaucratic burdens arise; how do professionals cope?
- *Part II: Professional practices and control*: Which changes in organizational control and governance systems can be traced; what are the consequences for professional autonomy and loyalties?



- *Part III: Organizing professionalism*: How do service managers respond to changes; which organizational structures arise; how do rules and standards change in order to accommodate changing professionalism?

### *Part I: Professionals and pressures*

In chapter 4, Peter Hupe and Theo van der Krogt conceptually refine understandings of professional work, first by elaborating the notion of professionals, next by exploring the notion of pressures, and finally by emphasizing various coping strategies of professionals that might be applied when they face pressures. They go beyond black and white images of professionals and pressured professionals, and sketch a realistic picture of the complexities of professional work spheres.

In chapter 5, Romke van der Veen, also highlights these complexities, by focusing on healthcare and on the ways in which healthcare professionals are disciplined by new performance-based regimes. He distinguishes between professional autonomies and discretionary spaces and concludes that a loss of (institutional) autonomy does not imply a loss of (individual) decision spaces.

In chapter 6, Arie-Jan Kwak focuses on legal spheres, and like Van der Veen he shows that judges and accountants do not immediately experience a loss of professionalism as a result of managerial reform. But, more fundamentally, their work is transformed. He stresses the ideological sides of professional work and shows how longings for objectivity are more than managerial in the so-called ‘age of expertise’; in fact, they are at the (societal) heart of legal work.

### *Part II: Professional practices and control*

In chapter 7, Amanda Smullen returns to healthcare (mental healthcare) and like Kwak she analyzes ideological transitions in professional work, but she does so by analyzing how control is exerted. She focuses on the Dutch diagnosis-related treatment system that was introduced to finance and govern healthcare, including mental health care. She explains how this system was resisted but also how resistance is overcome by shifts in medical paradigms. In mental healthcare, biomedical psychiatry becomes more dominant.

In chapter 8, Lars Tummers, Bram Steijn and Victor Bekkers focus on policy control and analyze whether and how professionals are subjected to policy ideas and reforms. They use the term policy alienation to understand professional responses and especially show the importance of policy meaning (and meaninglessness). When policies have no meaning for professionals, professional workers feel alienated.

In chapter 9, Gjalte de Graaf and Zeger van der Wal also focus on relations between professionals and other actors, in this case professional

administrators and organizational actors. They study these relations in terms of loyalties and mainly show varieties in professional administrative loyalties; different groups of workers develop different loyalties.

In chapter 10, Evelien Tonkens, Marc Hoitink and Huub Gulikers shift attention to external relations between professional workers and clients, and wonder whether new control logics appear at the edges of service organizations. Instead of assuming a market-based logic, with customers and preferences, they view changing relations as democratizing relations; professionals might contribute to the empowerment of citizens.

### *Part III: Organizing professionalism*

In chapter 11, Mirjan Oude Vrielink and Jeroen van Bockel study bureaucratic burdens and administrative regulations, and wonder whether all 'burdens' and 'regulations' are in fact burdens and regulations. They especially show that professionalism and bureaucracy are not antithetical; they presuppose each other. Professionalism is also built upon rules and regulations, although professionals tend to organize these rules and regulations themselves.

In chapter 12, Rik van Berkel and Paul van der Aa focus on welfare agencies and welfare workers. They study how new welfare professionals – i.e. activation workers – are forced to become more professional, but they work in strong organizational contexts and they lack professional fields that regulate their professionalism.

In chapter 13, Martijn van der Meulen and Mirko Noordegraaf focus more on organizational contexts and analyze whether and how public managers – especially police chiefs – become professional managers. Contemporary professionalization does not only concern new modes of regulating professional fields, nor new types of work within organized policy implementation, such as welfare work; it also concerns the joint endeavour to improve management and to create professional managers. This is far from easy. Despite attractive yardsticks, such as leadership, public managers compete over legitimate definitions and forms of managerial professionalism.

In the final chapter 14, we will draw conclusions. On the basis of all of these chapters we reframe public professionalism from a socio-political perspective and we stress the relevance of *reconfigured* public professionalism that represents the changing nature of professional public services.

### Note

- I. See <http://www.uu.nl/faculty/leg/NL/organisatie/departementen/departementbestuursenorganisatiewetenschap/onderzoek/publicmanagement/Re>

framingprofessionalism/Pages/default.aspx. The book builds upon other Colloquium initiatives, such as yearly NIG Conference workshops (November 2007, 2008, 2009), regular Colloquium meetings, and special issues of the Dutch journals *Bestuurskunde* (2007, no. 4) and *TvA* (2012, no. 3) that focus on the clash between professionalism and managerism.

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## 2 Professions, professionals and the ‘new’ government policies

A reflection on the last 30 years

*Stephen Ackroyd*

### Introduction

This chapter offers an account of a body of research relating to professions and professionalism in the UK public sector which the author has undertaken with colleagues over a thirty-year period. At the start of this period, following the election of a Conservative government in 1979, there was the introduction of a distinctive new policy. A decisive break with the past, this policy was collectively identified as New Public Management (NPM) (Exworthy & Halford 1999; Ferlie & Fitzgerald 2000). The general direction of policy did not change much thereafter, despite changes of administration and the election to power of different parties (Ackroyd 1995a; Harrison 2002). NPM was extended and consolidated over the intervening years. Thus, the policies under consideration may hardly be considered as new in 2012 – as the parentheses around ‘new’ in the title here indicate. However, many observers are still thinking of these policies as new. NPM is still something distinctive – it has not been accepted as simply the way things now are.

This chapter makes an assessment of a particular body of academic research undertaken to assess the implementation of NPM policies. Doing this assessment in conjunction with work undertaken in the Netherlands will allow readers to assess how far there are similarities in research interests and outcomes between academic communities in adjacent countries. Britain, like the USA (together sometimes called ‘Anglo Saxon’ economies and countries), is often regarded as in the forefront of change; though whether this is really so and what constitutes being ‘in the lead’ or ‘behind’ are matters of controversy. Anyway, the chapter is written in the hope that the research reported (and particularly its lack of impact) will be of interest to scholars and professionals working on similar organisations but within a somewhat different institutional context. The conclusion will discuss why the outcome took the shape it did.

NPM entails the proposition, in itself relatively unobjectionable, that existing arrangements for the provision of social welfare are inefficient, and, to improve this, it is necessary to turn to management modelled on

the private sector. Inevitably, however, achieving efficiency as defined by NPM, was not a simple change easily implemented that would quickly improve things. To be made to work, NPM brought along in its train other necessary changes, such as the commodification of services and marketization of their procurement; but this was unclear at the outset. However, it soon became clear, and from a relatively early point, that the introduction of NPM meant substantially displacing both the existing mode of provision (administration) and some existing practices of the occupations that provided services within this framework (the public sector professions). The research to be considered here may be understood as work that gradually uncovered the extent of the opposition between NPM and the professional ideals and modes of organizing central to public sector professions. The extent to which it is necessary and desirable to change the character of the public sector professions, therefore, is a key issue brought to the surface by this research.

## British professions in their field

I shall begin by making some points about the field of professional work in Britain. A first point is that certain kinds of professional work are growing in importance and becoming more abundant.<sup>1</sup> Almost all the significant growth in the UK economy in the last thirty years has been concentrated in financial and business services (Ackroyd 2002, 2011). The majority of growth of employment in the UK is also concentrated in this sector, and while many of the jobs created are unskilled (call-centre workers for example) or de-skilled (bank tellers and data entry jobs), there are many new jobs which are both highly skilled and highly rewarded. Some of these are in occupations of recent development such as business consultants and business systems designers, financial analysts and advisers, fund managers, project managers, public relations workers, marketing and advertising employees.

These occupations hardly existed 100 years ago. All have developed strongly in the last three decades. Some are now very large. At a conservative estimate there are more than 100,000 business consultants in the UK (Clarke & Kipping 2012), or roughly as many as there are doctors. However, these new occupations are not organized in the manner of traditional professions. They lack independent and effective professional bodies that certify the competence of practitioners, for example. Only a few traditional professions have shown comparable growth to the new business-related occupations discussed above. However, there are two important exceptions: accountancy and the law. The legal profession has around 120,000 qualified practitioners (up nearly 30,000 (24%) since 2001). The great growth in the legal services has been in commercial law, so this is not an exception to the rule that the only area of employment growth has been in business services. We shall return to the con-

sideration of the legal profession later in this chapter. However, the main growth profession in the UK in recent years has been accountancy – a business service par excellence. Today there are approaching 300,000 practising accountants in Britain (up nearly 80,000 (28%) since 2001), and the profession continues to grow at a phenomenal rate. The UK already has the highest number of accountants per capita of any country in the world; and there are more accountants in Britain than in the whole of the rest of the EU taken together.

In most other areas of professional employment, in contrast with professions providing business services, there is little growth,<sup>2</sup> and professions are under severe challenge. The Engineering Council, the professional association for all types of engineers in the UK, estimates there will be over 100,000 job losses in the next few years, and only a small fraction of these will be replaced by newly qualified recruits. Public sector professions are under an acute challenge. The number of teachers fell in 2011 by 10,000 and almost everywhere in the social services the growth in employment does not keep pace with client needs. One favoured procedure for the public sector professions is skill dilution – the recruitment of unqualified assistants instead of fully qualified professionals. The ratio of unqualified teaching assistants to qualified teachers in British schools, for example, is now 1:2; in nursing, the ratio of health care assistants to qualified nurses is roughly 3:4. More generally, the profession, as a distinctive occupational form, is under challenge in two ways. It is criticized ideologically for being an unnecessary restriction in labour markets, and acted against materially, in that policies designed to remove monopolies of provision have been widely instituted. Accountancy and law are also under challenge, of course, and almost everywhere even amongst the more powerful professions, significant concessions have been made by these occupations accepting reductions of their monopoly power. However, it is fairly clear the closer the work of a profession is to growing parts of the economy, the more likely their own growth will occur. Given the remoteness of the public sector professions from the growing points of the economy, the question arises whether public sector professions can survive long<sup>3</sup>; certainly, it seems unlikely in their traditional forms.

A background question of this chapter concerns how academics may produce research which has secure empirical grounding and yet has broad policy relevance. The scholarly community in which I have been working has certainly tried to do good, collectively based research that is policy relevant, but there has been little success in terms of its influence. More generally, the aim here is to give an account of the solution to the problems of generalization worked out with my colleagues, and to let the reader be the judge of its contribution.

The research work I was associated with moved from detailed studies of a particular service (nurses in the hospitals of the National Health Service – NHS) to the established division of labour amongst the clini-

cians (doctors, nurses and ancillary medical staff) and the impact on these roles of the first developments of New Public Management (NPM). Subsequently, after a lot of work in the NHS, in collaboration with colleagues, we made systematic comparisons between the health service and other UK social services. We developed a protocol for comparing changes in a range of different services and estimated the effects of NPM. Finally, again in collaboration with colleagues, comparisons of a sample of professions in the public and private sectors in the UK were made, nationally and internationally. This work had good empirical grounding and revealed important findings. Nevertheless, in common with earlier work it failed to produce results of interest to policy-makers.

## Phase I (1985-1999) Nurses and the division of labour in NHS hospitals

Research in the public sector with which I was associated was, at different times in the 1980s, looking at a range of services, including education and the police (Ackroyd et al. 1989, 1992). But the service which absorbed me was National Health Hospitals (Soothill et al. 1992; Ackroyd 1987, 1992, 1995). Serious problems began to emerge in NHS hospitals in the UK from the middle of the 1980s, and have continued since with deepening crises. These centred on such things as the supply and the motivation of health professionals, questions about the cleanliness and safety of hospitals and the division of labour between occupations. There was more than a little complacent puzzlement on show at the time. Surely the NHS, particularly the hospital service, was the envy of the world? There surely could not be anything basically wrong with it?

The reforming government elected in 1979 took the view that there was a need to improve NHS hospitals in particular. Costs had spiralled upwards, and it was natural for this government to take the view that efficiency was lacking. There was a general need – allegedly – to modernize. Hence the new government soon commissioned the NHS Management Enquiry (1982), under the chairmanship of an executive in charge of a major supermarket chain. This committee lost no time recommending that, since there was no developed management in NHS hospitals, and no group uniquely responsible for management, the solution was to put effective managers in there (Griffiths 1983). Yet it is not obvious – as later studies of professional firms would show – that organizations with little management are therefore not efficient or effective.

Academics typically wanted to get to the seat of the problem and many of them, including the research teams with which I was associated, began in-depth research into nurses. Close colleagues at the time, Soothill and MacKay (MacKay 1989; Soothill et al. 1992) led detailed research into nurse recruitment – and found that nursing was no longer an attractive career for the rising generation of school leavers (Francis et al.



1992). Later, the motivation and morale of existing nurses was studied, and found to be at an all-time low. There were evidently problems in the division of labour amongst hospital staff emerging. In our work a picture of the traditional pattern of relationships in the NHS hospitals was charted (Ackroyd 1992). In the heyday of the NHS hospital service, the senior doctors had the most powerful occupation, and to all intents and purposes, controlled the service. They held a strategic position in the hospital management committees, had come to monopolize the consultative positions in the regional and national administrative structure, and basically fixed the budgets, determining how much was spent on each medical specialty.

A lack of willingness by doctors to limit their activities or to ration their spending was leading to more effective service by allowing new treatments. As professionals do everywhere, there was a tendency for senior doctors to explore state-of-the-art treatments which test the boundaries of knowledge and skill. But they also rack up costs, whilst the mundane but necessary standard treatments (hernias and hips) were neglected. Waiting lists for these treatments formed, whilst there were spiralling costs. There was increasing pressure on nurses and ancillary staff who were meeting patients. In effect, NHS hospitals had become the victims of their own success. The capacity to do more did not lead to the diminution of demand, as was once naively assumed. On the contrary, better services stimulated demand and made the need for rationing acute (Ackroyd & Bolton 1999). In the end the available resources were stretched too thinly in many areas of provision. There is no doubt that the situation was wasteful too, but the solution adopted, to introduce a new occupation, the NHS hospital managers, with the brief to 'take charge', was questioned by most academic observers (Griffiths 1983).

The continuing confrontation between new managers and senior clinicians stands out as perhaps the most challenging episode of continuing misunderstanding of low-level non-cooperation I have witnessed. Certainly it did not lead to greater efficiency in the medium term, it simply added greatly to the costs of running a less efficient service. Clinicians – especially in surgery – took issue with what they saw as interference with their clinical freedom to decide which patients to treat. Managers on their part could see more clearly where the failure to provide treatment was causing problems for patients and embarrassment for the hospital. The gap between viewpoints was only closed through innovation of new systems of classification for conditions and treatments and the adoption of new operating procedures. However, until these practical steps were taken, there was often a stalemate that was difficult to resolve. Since the development of these protocols was primarily the initiative of management and difficult to generalize across specialties, the increase in the size of the managerial cadre continued. However, leading-edge policy did change. By the beginning of the 1990s, commoditizing clinical pro-