

Reconsidering the Concept of Modern Professionals

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ABSTRACT

While the number of occupations known as “professions” has increased, studies in economics have not secured a grasp of old and new professions within the same context. One reason is that they do not view certain occupations in terms of the concept of “profession” as an ideal type. This study reconsiders many aspects of professions and extracts the most notable features that characterize an occupation as a profession. The most crucial characteristic of an ideal profession type is a codified body of knowledge. A profession needs to be socially accepted as being highly developed and not substitutable. In addition, the occupational function of a profession involves urgency and indispensability, and the profession must be at the vertex of its field while using a common body of knowledge. In categorizing modern professionals based on these criteria, we arrived at five types: established professions, new professions, semi-professions (A), semi-professions (B), and skilled workers and experts.

Keywords: Professions, Professional Labor Markets, International Standard Classification of Occupations

JEL Classification Codes: I11, J44, L84

1 Introduction

Professionals are those who in their work lives try to solve practical problems by using special knowledge. There has been a marked increase in the number of professionals over the past 30 years, in each of Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States (Table 1). Most professionals belong to an organization, although many—such as physicians and lawyers—are self-employed; in some cases, matters are further complicated by the fact that while some are self-employed, others work at large hospitals or law firms. In addition, people in certain occupations—such as musicians and artists—are now also categorized as “professionals,” because they have high skill levels and work autonomously. This increase in the number of professionals has made professional labor markets a “hot issue” (Ramseyer 2010).

Studies on professions originally fell within the field of sociology. There have been many studies on the attributes of professions (e.g., Carr-Saunders

Table 1. Changes in the Number of Professionals (in Thousands).

	1970	1980	1990*	2000*	2008
Japan	2,950	4,380	6,900	8,560	9,500
US	11,149	15,968	19,666	25,498	30,702
UK	n.a.	n.a.	4,797	6,938	7,979

Here, we consider the following as professionals: professional, technical and related workers in ISCO-68; and professionals and technicians and associate professionals in ISCO-88. The UK numbers are based on ISCO-88; US numbers are based on ISCO-88 only in 2008. Others are all based on ISCO-68.
 *UK data are from 1991 and 2001. n.a.: not available.
Source: ILO LABORSTA (<http://laborsta.ilo.org/>), accessed on July 31, 2014.

and Wilson 1964; Wilensky 1964; Greenwood 1966; Hall 1969; Freidson 1970; Elliott 1972; Nakano 1981; Nagao 1995) and on the credentials of professions or on social closure; many of those studies adopt Weber's (1978) thinking vis-à-vis monopolization (Berlant 1975; Collins 1979; Murphy 1988). Additionally, there have been studies on the differences between professions and other categories of employment, based on occupational elements (Goode 1969; Takeuchi 1971, 1972a, 1972b, 1972c).

Currently, the number of studies on professionals is increasing. In these studies, there is wide variation in the standards used to distinguish professions from other categories of employment, as well as within the occupations studied. For example, there are studies on flexi-time workers (Satō 1999), occupations with high mobility in the labor market (Ōta 1993), and white-collar workers in large companies (Miyashita 2001), all of which are considered to comprise professionals.

While researchers in these studies discuss definitions of "profession," they have not yet reached consensus on the matter. Moreover, given the increase in the number of occupations referred to as "professions," there tends to be the feeling that all occupations should be considered professions. We could say that the concept of professions is in chaos; in working to remedy this problem, this study offers a conceptual framework by which to order, categorize, and understand old and new professions systematically, from the viewpoint of specific knowledge that professionals use.¹

¹There are some other concepts besides "professions" that capture occupations, including "knowledge workers" (Drucker 1969), "gold-collar workers" (Kelley 1985), "symbolic analysts" (Reich 1991), and "creative class" (Florida 2002). This study does not refer to the differences among them. For further information, see Miwa (2011).

In addition, reconsiderations of the concept of modern professions are very significant in the analysis of current professional labor markets. As mentioned, professions tend to garner more attention, and yet the nature of professional work varies and involves complexity that cannot be summed up by the word “professional.” In terms of providing a basic discussion that can be used to craft policy with regards to career development among professionals in labor markets, it would be fruitful for us to understand the nature of professionals’ work, and the diversity therein.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we review the growing body of research in the field of economics on professions, as well as the conceptual confusion that has accompanied the increase in the number of professions. In Section 3, by examining the concept of “profession” as an ideal type, we demonstrate that the principle of knowledge is the most important element of professions. In Section 4, we classify modern professions into four categories, using the principle of knowledge examined in Section 3. Section 5 concludes.

2 The Increasing Number of Professions, and Resulting Conceptual Confusion

Against the background of increased demand for highly skilled professionals from an expansion of the service industry (Seike 1999), the number of professionals has been increasing since at least 1970 (Table 1).

Most are employed professionals. “Professional employees constitute the most rapidly growing group in the business enterprise”:² these were P.F. Drucker’s words when he criticized industrial companies in the United States soon after World War II. In fact, the growth rate of the number of self-employed workers in all professional groups has remained virtually unchanged since World War II, at around 10% today (Table 2). Even among established professions—such as those of physicians and lawyers—we can identify the same tendency. In fact, in 2010, only 12.4% of physicians and surgeons in the United States were self-employed.³

The increase in the number of employed professionals has influenced academic studies on profession. Traditionally, researchers within the field of sociology who study professions have focused only on occupations that have the opportunity to monopolize their profession through the power of the nation or state (Berlant 1975; Collins 1979; Murphy 1988). They have been mainly interested in occupational characteristics extracted only from established professions that feature self-employment, like physicians and lawyers in practice.

²Drucker (1954), p. 329.

³Bureau of Labor Statistics (<http://www.dol.gov/>, accessed on Oct. 28, 2013).

Table 2. Ratio of Self-Employed Workers to Professionals.

	Self-Employed Workers
Japan (2007)	11.3%
US (2012)	13.3%
UK (2009)	*8.5%
*Unincorporated self-employed workers (5.4%) + Incorporated self-employed workers (3.1%). The chart shows the ratio of self-employed workers to all workers, in the following categories: professional, technical and related workers (Japan); professional and related (US); and professional occupations (UK). Source: Employment Status Survey in 2007 (Japan), Labour Force Survey, July–Sept 2012 (UK), Monthly Labor Review, September 2010 (US).	

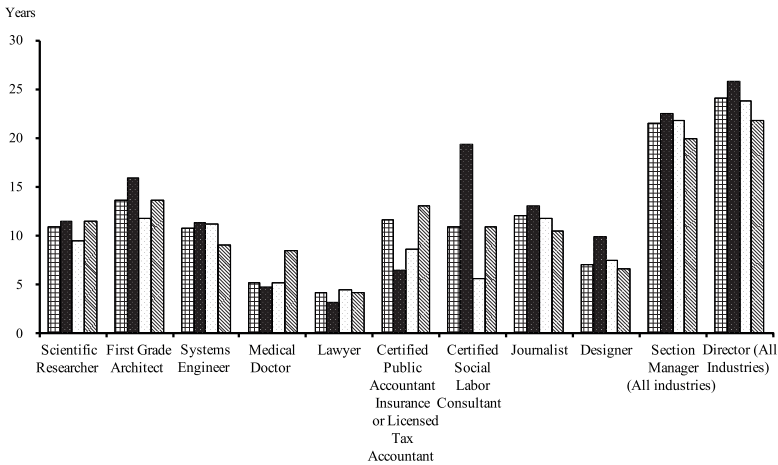
However, given the increased number of professionals employed in enterprises, the central interest of their discussion has moved to compatibility between the profession and the organization (Takeuchi 1972d). The question that emerged was whether it is possible for the purpose of the (bureaucratic) organization and the autonomy of the profession to be simultaneously achieved, alongside the issue of “deprofessionalization” (Haug 1975; Rothman 1984).

Meanwhile, in Japan, research on professionals has also progressed constantly in the fields of economics and business administration, mainly from the viewpoint of “professionals in organizations” (Table 3). In addition, while studies in sociology “tend to converge on lawyers and physicians in the movement after the ’70s” (Yoshimura 1992, p. 51), some studies in economics and business administration have focused on a variety of occupations.

However, when these studies refer to “professionals,” the occupations to which they refer vary significantly. For example, Ōta (1993) refers to professionals as “those who are employed in non-professional organizations” (p. 15). He mentions that not all occupations listed as professionals by Shapero (1985) meet the standards of the established profession; he then goes on to say that “it is inevitable that the difference between occupations employed in non-professional organizations and the typical professions emerges in terms of the function of their associations, the importance of their standards of ethics etc.” (Ōta 1993, p. 20). He believes the standard that determines a professional occupation is “mobility, in other words, whether or not they, even self-employed workers, can find a place to work using their own specialty, besides the organizations they now belong to” (p. 21). He “treats four occupations, namely researchers, information technology technicians (systems engineers and systems analysts), (fashion) designers, and architects as the main objects” (p. 22) in his case study. In contrast, Miyashita (2001) defines professionals as “white-collar workers in Japanese large companies, especially the layer of material of middle managers in large companies” (p. 56).

Table 3. Examples of Recent Studies Treating Professionals in Economics and Business Administration.	
Studies	Professional Employees Treated
Inoki (1989)	Attorneys in business and industries, lawyers in law firms
Ōta (1993)	Systems engineers, systems analysts, fashion designers, architects
The Japan Institute of Labour (1999)	Labor and social security attorneys, designers, social workers, systems engineers, translators, accountants, professional <i>shogi</i> players
Satō (1999)	Research and development (R&D) workers, software engineers, television producers, journalists, designers
Miyashita (2001)	White-collar workers in large companies in Japan
Murakami (2003)	R&D workers
Imano (2005)	Designers, IT engineers
Fujimoto (2005)	R&D workers at consumer electronics manufacturers in Japan
Koike (ed.) (2006)	Journalists, R&D workers, managers, fund managers, screening persons in charge of financial institutions
Yamamoto (2009)	Accountants, quants
Kusano (2009)	Medical professionals
Miwa (2011)	Software engineers, management consultants

Figure 1 shows the years of tenure in Japan for some of the occupations listed in Table 3. These figures were taken from the results of the Basic Survey on Wage Structure in 2012, conducted in 2012 by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. As the graph shows, while the years of tenure of white-collar workers (section managers and directors) were stable at 20–25 years, those of all other occupations—except first-grade architects and certified social insurance labor consultants in companies with 1,000 and more employees—were 15 or fewer years. As a result, if we were to consider only mobility in the labor market, the image of professionals drawn by Ōta (1993) would be quite different from that of Miyashita (2001).

Figure 1. Job Tenure of Professionals.

Note: In each occupation, the poles indicate the case of companies with 10 and more employees, 1,000 and more, 100–999, and 10–99 employees from left to right, but in the case of Section Manager and Director, they indicate the case of companies with 100 and more employees, 1,000 and more, 500–999, and 100–499 employees from left to right.

Source: Basic Survey on Wage Structure in 2012 by Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (Japan).

3 The Concept of Profession as an Ideal Type

The most problematic point with many of the previous studies in economics and business administration is that they fail to grasp new professions in the same context as established ones, in line with the concept of “profession” as an ideal type that has been cultivated in sociology.

At first sight, sociological studies on professions seem to be part of an “operation” to separate professions from others, according to such criteria as body of knowledge, formation of strong associations, assurance of a monopoly of their work by law, and a code of conduct and ethics. However, if we simply follow this process to determine which occupations are indeed professions, we find that most new professions are not necessarily equipped with these requirements; thus, it can be difficult to capture them in the same dimension as established professions. Thus, previous studies in economics and business administration tend to “miss the mark” in comprehending new professions in terms of profession theory.

However, we can overcome this problem if we carefully examine the concept of profession as an ideal type. In this section, we systematize what has been discussed in previous studies; we do this in preparation for Section 4, wherein we categorize various professions.

In profession theory, researchers highlight a knowledge base, community sanction, and colleague control of behavior (Greenwood 1966; Hall 1969) as attributes of professions. In addition, it is often said that professionals work

autonomously. How does the autonomy of professions relate to their attributes? Hall (1969) deals with this issue:

In a very real sense, autonomy can be considered the key element of professionalization, since the knowledge basis, community sanction, and colleague control of behavior are all elements of autonomy. ... [Autonomy] involves the feeling that the practitioner ought to be allowed to make his own decisions without external pressures from clients, from others who are not members of his profession, or from his employing organization. (pp. 81–82)

We define “professional autonomy” in line with Hall (1969)—that is, a professional has the freedom “to exercise his [or her] judgment and discretion” (p. 81), based on the profession’s attributes (i.e., knowledge base, community sanction, and colleague control of behavior). These attributes are not regulated by clients or employers, but may be regulated by colleagues (Figure 2).

Conversely, a profession cannot maintain autonomy in the absence of a knowledge base, community sanction, or colleague control of behavior; thus, these three points more closely relate to the essential elements of a profession than the maintenance of autonomy.

What, then, is the most essential element of a profession? In the case of community sanction, for example, undertakers in the United States have established “funeral universities” for professionals who look to achieve the same social position as physicians and lawyers. However, they are not socially sanctioned, and a superficial imitation of an established profession must be considered fake professionalization (Takeuchi 1972b). Moreover, Collins (1979) states that “[p]olitical power is involved in almost all successful professions; they achieve their monopoly and self-governing rights by getting the force of the state to license them and back up their collective authority over members” (p. 133). Regardless, however persistent associations are in lobbying and referring to themselves as “professions,” “[s]elf-advertisement may create self-delusion but will hardly persuade others” (Goode 1969, p. 269). As a result, society never perceives of these occupations as real professions.

Figure 2. Attributes as Bases Supporting Professional Autonomy.



As for the second attribute, the quickest way to control the behavior of colleagues is to introduce a license. Licensing, as Collins (1979) says, ensures the monopoly of a profession's work under law by means of "political power." In addition, the license is the mechanism by which people can be suspended from business if they violate the profession's code of conduct and ethics. However, "to see the case of some medical occupations (massagers, acupuncturists, cauterizers) that are related to our life and death and licensed occupations in real estate that are related to a big loss of money," it can be said that a license "is brought about by the importance of [the practitioners'] occupational function" rather than the level of the professionalism within an occupation; therefore, "the license system is not the crucial index of the profession" (Takeuchi 1972a, p. 79).

Next, let us examine the knowledge base. Needless to say, merely equipping an individual with knowledge leads to fake professionalization. Here, we advance our discussion by citing the work of Goode (1969) and Takeuchi (1972a, 1972b).

First, Goode (1969) lists the seven major characteristics of knowledge that any profession should have.

1. Ideally, the knowledge and skills should be abstract and organized into a codified body of principles.
2. The knowledge should be applicable, or thought to be applicable, to the concrete problem of living.
3. The society or its relevant members should believe that the knowledge can actually solve these problems (it is not necessary that the knowledge actually solve them, only that people believe in its capacity to solve them).
4. Members of the society should accept as proper that these problems be given over to some occupational group for solution because the occupational group possesses that knowledge and others do not.
5. The profession itself should help to create, organize, and transmit the knowledge.
6. The profession should be accepted as the final arbiter in any dispute over the validity of any technical solution lying within its area of supposed competence.
7. The amount of knowledge and skills and the difficulty of acquiring them should be great enough that the members of the society view the profession as possessing a kind of *mystery* that it is not given to the ordinary man to acquire, by his own efforts or even with help. (pp. 277–278)

Goode's characteristics 3 and 4 illustrate the necessity for the social sanction of knowledge—that is, community sanction. However, as discussed earlier in this section, social sanction is a secondary product that first becomes available when the level of professionalism is already high. Therefore, these characteristics cannot be considered essential to the knowledge a profession should feature. Thus, of Goode's characteristics, we consider only 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7.

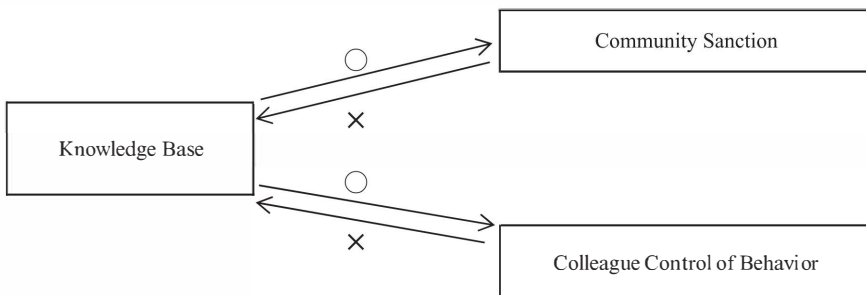
Takeuchi (1972a) states that “the level and non-substitutability of occupational skills and urgency and indispensability of occupational function are [together] the primary element” (p. 79). In particular, with regard to the urgency and indispensability of occupational function, Takeuchi (1972b) says:

About physicians, medicine is related to our life, and the medical services themselves require the maximum of professional science. In the case of lawyers, the maximum of professional science is also required because of the battles between lawyers. We should focus on the level of marginal utility of professional science of traditional professions, like physicians and lawyers, to their clients or the public. That is to say, professionalization cannot be the sufficient condition by merely making training term longer or equipping professional science. When its (marginal) utility relatively rises, the position of the profession as “those who apply science” pays off. (p. 181)

Takeuchi’s and Goode’s discussions show similarities. In summary, the following are the main tenets of the ideal profession type, in terms of the profession’s knowledge base: (1) a codified body of knowledge is the major premise, (2) there is a high level of and nonsubstitutability of occupational skills and knowledge, (3) there is urgency and indispensability inherent in the occupational function, and (4) the profession is at the vertex in its relevant field while using a common body of knowledge. The social characteristics of the body of knowledge of a profession constitute the most crucial element to support the scarcity of the profession (Figure 3).

Moreover, of tenets (1)–(4), adherence to (2) is important in deciding whether a given occupation is considered a higher-level profession. The reason why teachers and social workers are considered semi-professionals lies in this point (Goode 1969; Takeuchi 1972a). In addition, unless both tenets (1) and (2) are met first, tenets (3) and (4) can never be achieved. Again, this is because it is obvious that even if tenet (3) is met, society will not consider a given occupation a profession unless tenet (2) is also achieved. This can be seen in the case of massagers, acupuncturists, and cauterizers. In other words, the realization tenet (2) is the first step to achieving scarcity of profession.

Figure 3. Knowledge Base as the Crucial Element of the Ideal Profession Type.



Between tenets (3) and (4), which should be achieved first? Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1964) state:

[P]rofessional men have something to contribute as the result of study which no one else can supply. They may not be as well placed as academic students of the science, upon which the professional technique is based, to make contributions to that science; but they alone are in a position to observe how the technique works in the everyday world. A professional man has one foot in the academic world and the other in the world of affairs; the academic man knows what is theoretically possible, the professional man knows what is possible in practice, or at least he is in a position to discover what is possible and to make it known. (p. 485)

Carr-Saunders and Wilson describe scientists as “pure” theorists, as opposed to professionals who are practical people who base their thinking on theory. This means that they accept that the first evolution of theory is always brought about by scientists. For example, consider the current collaboration between industry and academia. It is difficult to say whether scientists contribute only to the evolution of scientific theory, and so it is appropriate to say that the line that divides scientists and professionals is becoming vaguer. That is to say, tenet (4) will be achieved even if tenet (3) is not.

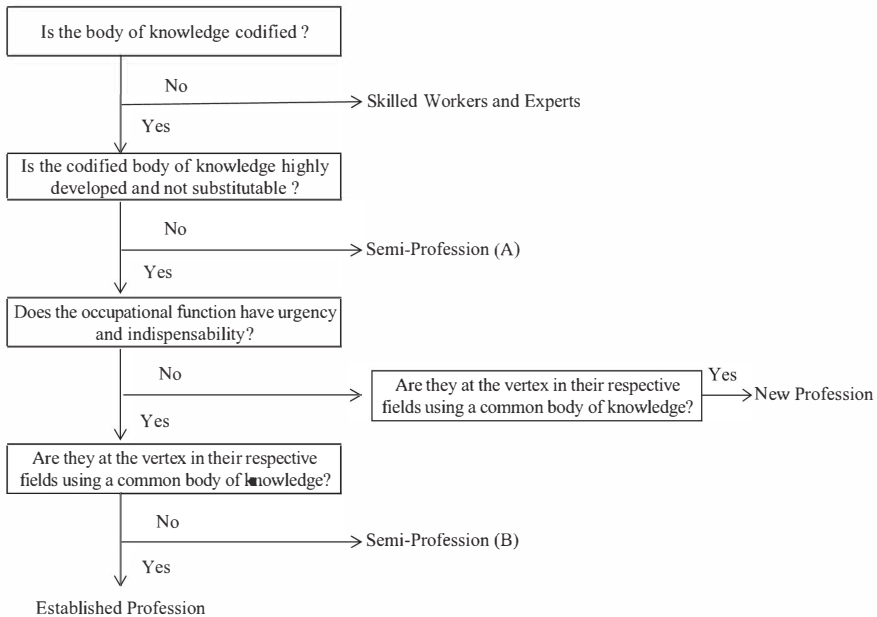
4 Categorizing Modern Professionals through Systematic Knowledge Indexes

By using four indexes extracted from the ideal profession type in terms of each profession’s knowledge base, we attempt to categorize modern professionals in view of an expanding conception of the ideal profession type. In addition, although we can refer to all professions, the work within them varies from country to country; thus, we confine our discussion of occupations to those in Japan. Moreover, due to time constraints, actual data for each occupation are not reflected. We attempt to categorize occupations “ideally” on the basis of an ideal type.

In choosing the occupations we examine, we refer to the International Standard Classification of Occupations, revised in 2008 (ISCO-08) by the International Labor Organization (ILO).⁴ In ISCO-08, one of the major groups, “professionals,” is separated into six subgroups: science and engineering professionals (e.g., scientists, engineers, architects, actuaries, and designers), health professionals (e.g., medical doctors, nurses, and pharmacists), teaching professionals (e.g., teachers), business and administration professionals (e.g., accountants, financial and investment advisers, and financial analysts), information

⁴Please refer to the ILO homepage (<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/index.htm>; accessed on Oct. 28, 2013).

Figure 4. Categorization on the basis of the Ideal Profession Type.



and communications technology professionals (e.g., software and applications developers, systems analysts, and applications programmers), and legal, social, and cultural professionals (e.g., lawyers, attorneys, librarians, social work professionals, journalists, and creative and performing artists). In addition to these occupations, we add fund managers, labor and social security attorneys, translators, and middle managers in large companies (Table 3). Moreover, we consider both white-collar workers and skilled blue-collar workers.

Using the four indexes, we categorize these occupations by using the steps shown in Figure 4. As a result, these occupations are divided into five categories, as listed below.

1) The Established Profession

These professions are at the vertex of their respective fields, in each of which a common body of knowledge is used. Their occupational function is accompanied by urgency and indispensability. Examples include medical doctors, lawyers, accountants, and architects.

2) The New Profession

These professions are “built on new instruments and techniques” (Goode 1969, p. 272) and are at the vertex of their respective fields while using a common

body of knowledge. However, each profession's occupational function is not accompanied by urgency and indispensability. Examples include scientists, engineers, and actuaries.

3) Semi-Profession (A)

This category contains occupations that do not clear a high level, and that feature a nonsubstitutability of occupational skills and knowledge. Either no body of knowledge is observed when these semi-professionals work, or they defer to “instinct and knack” (Takeuchi 1972a, p. 82) acquired through experience. Examples include teachers, librarians, social work professionals, creative and performing artists, designers, software and applications developers, systems analysts, applications programmers, labor and social security attorneys, and translators.

4) Semi-Profession (B)

This occupational category is marked by urgency and indispensability, but the professions therein are not at the vertex of their respective fields while using a common body of knowledge. Examples include nurses, attorneys, and pharmacists.

5) Skilled Workers and Experts

Workers in this category acquire high-level occupational skills through apprenticeship, rather than through a codified body of knowledge. They are experts within firms and have been developing their specialties through years of work at the same firm; in addition, they are skilled workers who have acquired high-level occupational skills through apprenticeship. Examples include journalists, middle managers in large companies, financial and investment advisers, financial analysts, fund managers, and craftspeople.

We can say that the established profession, new profession, and semi-profession (B) cannot be isolated from each other, because they all play important roles in creating, developing, and applying knowledge. In other words, practice and work are complementary. On the other hand, the semi-profession (A) category contains occupations that seem to have high levels of occupational autonomy. It is possible that in categorizing by ideal profession type in terms of knowledge, we see in these occupations what Freidson (1970) refers to as “autonomy by default.”⁵ In this sense, teaching—which has achieved monopoly of work

⁵“Nightclub magicians and circus acrobats, [...] cab drivers or lighthouse keepers, are fairly autonomous because their work takes place in a mobile or physically segregated context that prevents others from observing, and therefore evaluating and controlling, performance. In all these cases we have *autonomy by default*. An occupation is left wholly to its own devices [...] because its work (in complexity, specialization, or observability) precludes easy evaluation and control by others. [...]

through the introduction of a licensing system—is very unlike the other occupations in this category.⁶ Skills and knowledge among white-collar workers in large companies are cultivated through years of work experience after entering companies (Satō 2001; Koike 2005); thus, even if their skills and knowledge are highly developed, it is difficult to say whether society perceives of them as having a codified body of knowledge. In this sense, white-collar workers are experts, rather than professionals. The same applies to skilled workers, who develop their skills through apprenticeship (Koike 2005). In the financial field, for example, while actuarial science is an occupation that requires advanced knowledge of mathematics and statistics, financial and investment advisers, financial analysts, and fund managers often cultivate their skills and knowledge after entering the workplace.⁷ In this sense, both occupations are categorized separately.

Here, we need to address the problem of knowledge obsolescence. According to Yamamoto (2009)—who compares the knowledge type of accountants and quants—quants’ knowledge is more highly codified than that of accountants; additionally, quants’ knowledge becomes obsolete more quickly, and so they must constantly acquire new knowledge by accessing journals and the internet, and through congress and private human networks. Conversely, low-level codified knowledge becomes obsolete more slowly, but it takes more time to acquire. In particular, knowledge within occupations that are considered established professions becomes obsolete slowly, and these professionals need to undergo long-term training during their careers. We can say that established professions have been able to maintain their positions because of slow rates of obsolescence and a certain universality of knowledge. Collins (1979) states this as follows:

A strong profession requires a real technical skill that produces demonstrable results and can be taught. Only thus can the skill be monopolized, by controlling who will be trained. The skill must be difficult enough to require training and reliable enough to produce results. But it cannot be too reliable, for then outsiders can judge work by its results and control its practitioners by their judgment. The ideal profession has a skill that occupies the mid-point of a continuum between complete predictability and complete unpredictability of results. (pp. 132–133)

The knowledge to which a profession should defer is appropriately codified by retaining “the abstract part.” Professionals in financial fields—such as actuaries

Should interest in such an autonomous occupation be aroused among other workers or in society, its autonomy would prove to be fragile indeed without the introduction of such institutions. In short, *organized autonomy* is most stable and relevant to professions” (Freidson 1970, pp. 135–136).

⁶We referred to Goode (1969) and Takeuchi (1972a, 1972b, 1972c) in categorizing teachers into the semi-profession (A) category.

⁷According to Tobita (2006, p. 154), while “actuaries are adopted by occupations,” fund managers are usually “adopted as general staff.”

and quants—and who always use financial engineering are essential to the activities of enterprises, and so their occupational function takes on urgency and indispensability. Furthermore, they are at the vertex of their respective fields. However, we do not categorize them as established professionals, because they are not able to overcome the problem of knowledge obsolescence. The same applies to the field of information and communications technology (Tsai et al. 2007).

We do not mean to imply that an established profession is “best.” It is often said that “every occupation deserves respect,” and that society is maintained through the division of labor—something that is achieved by many workers who work in various conditions in a complementary fashion. Here, we find that this is true in the world of professionals.

5 Summary

Profession, as a concept, has been discussed in a diversity of contexts. Although many researchers have touched upon the definition of “profession,” there is still no consensus on this matter. One of the reasons is that current studies do not adequately examine occupations referred to as “professions” in terms of an ideal profession type.

In this study, we focused on research that touches upon established professions and extracted the crucial elements of those professions. Based on these elements, we attempted to systematize and understand modern professionals as extensions of an ideal profession type; herein lies the novelty of the current study. As a result, many occupations that are currently considered elsewhere as “professions” are not referenced in this paper. It could be said that such categorization withstands the current and popular trend of referring to every occupation a profession; however, we require the use of an evaluation axis to determine the real social value of these occupations. This study sought to clarify the nature of each profession, and to contribute to estimations of what society asks of these professions and the social value it assigns to them.

Our analysis revealed that the most crucial element of a profession is its codified body of knowledge, and how the nature of a profession’s specific body of knowledge distinguishes it from other professions. This is the key contribution of this study, and it bears important implications for analyses of professional labor markets in terms of labor economics. Differences in the nature of skills among professions will generate variety in the lengths of job ladders and the administrative rules found within internal labor markets. However, labor economics has not adequately referred to the relationships among skills, job ladders, and administrative rules in professional labor markets. If some aspects of labor markets (e.g., wage structure, labor mobility, and the transferability of skills) differ among professions, then differences in the nature of the skills must be reflected.

We need to refer to one outstanding issue. Throughout the analytical process, we could show the nature of work that professionals undertake, especially

in terms of the “conceptual” nature of knowledge. We need to highlight the varieties of and variation in the “real” nature of empirical knowledge by understanding it as it changes across situations and over time. This point is not adequately addressed in the literature on professionals in economics and business administration, despite the fact that it seems meaningful to better understand their activity within labor markets.

Finally, let us summarize our results. The most crucial characteristic of the ideal profession type is a codified body of knowledge. A profession must be socially accepted as being highly developed and not substitutable. In addition, the occupational function of the profession features urgency and indispensability, and the profession must be at the vertex of its field while using a common body of knowledge. In categorizing modern professions in Japan based on these criteria, we arrived at five types: established profession, new profession, semi-profession (A), semi-profession (B), and skilled workers and experts. In particular, occupations such as journalists, middle managers in large companies, financial and investment advisers, financial analysts, and fund managers—all of who have been treated as “professionals in organizations”—are instead categorized here as experts in firms. Moreover, the new profession and the semi-profession categories contain occupations whose specialties are highly developed and whose occupational functions take on the characteristics of urgency and indispensability. However, many of those occupations suffer from knowledge obsolescence; thus, we pointed out that it is difficult to categorize them as being established professions.

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