
Presentation at the CSR Meet Up
London Business School
7.00-8.30pm Wednesday 3 October 2018

HUMANISING THE PROFESSIONS: RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN THE PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR

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My background

- Doctorate in Sociology from the London School of Economics
- Taught in a Business and Law School for ten years
- Dean of Faculty/Head of School of Health for ten years
- Chair of two major charities in health sector
- Member/Chair of many NHS committees at all levels
- Executive member of five UK universities (including as CEO)
- Current Board member of a London university
- Member of Innovation Council with CEOs of multinationals
- Adviser to professions and several governments
- President of global research committee on professions
- Senior adviser to the United Nations on leadership
- International researcher with seventeen published books.

Overview

- The professions have come under sustained attack for putting their self-interests before the public interest in the UK, but also more widely in Western societies.
- From medicine to accountancy and law, the professions are losing their authority as trusted experts and protectors of the public interest.
- This session charts this trend and aims to prompt discussion about the role of responsible leadership in the reform of professions and associated bodies in fast-changing and turbulent times.

Professions and social change

In the 1940s/1950s professions were primarily autonomous self-regulatory groups – whether through national registers (UK) or state licensing (USA) (Millerson 1964; Freidson 1996).

Income, status and power particularly lay with ‘top dog’ professions like law and medicine rather than with their clients who were largely marginalized (e.g. Johnson 2016).

But this was to change with the rise of the counter culture in the 1950s/1960s...



THEODORE ROSZAK
The Making of a Counter Culture
Reflections on the Technocratic Society & Its Youthful Opposition



Professions and the counter culture

The attack on professions was especially associated with the development of the counter culture in the 1960s and 1970s (Roszack 1995) based on:

- An increasing belief in the limits to scientific progress in modern societies
- Growing awareness of the availability of alternatives
- A response to professional depersonalization and disempowerment
- A drive by consumers to exercise greater control over their lives.

The impact of professional wrongdoing

This attack has recently been amplified by recent media attention given to abuses of professional power.

This has included cases ranging from the mass serial killing of patients by the general practitioner **Dr Harold Shipman** (Allsop and Saks 2002) to the invidious role of the accounting and legal professions in the collapse of **Enron** (Rochvarg 2003).

These induced growing state intervention to protect the public from professions – even if increased corporatization may have led to individual clients becoming less important with the rise of multinational firms.

Theories of the profession

It is argued that these trends have had a great influence on theorizing about the professions.

In such theories professions were initially seen as a positive force in society – differentiated from other occupations – to whom clients should defer in their own best interests.

This view of professions as trusted experts and protectors of the public interest was reflected in the deferential **trait** and **functionalist** schools of thought prevalent in the 1950s/60s (e.g. Barber 1963; Goode 1960).

Trusted professions from the past



The critique of deferentialism

However, the largely uncritical trait/functionalist perspectives underpinning professional ideologies themselves were increasingly attacked in the 1960s/70s counter culture.

This started with **interactionism** – which viewed professions simply as an honorific symbol won in the politics of work (e.g. Hughes 1963).

But interactionism was micro oriented and based on anecdotal evidence – and was soon largely supplanted by more critical **structural theories** in terms of profession-public relationships.

Critical macro-structural approaches of professions

Marxists see the power of professions like lawyers and doctors over clients as derived from the class struggle of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Here professions are viewed as being engaged in surveillance or control on behalf of a dominant class in maintaining the capitalist status quo (e.g. Esland 1980).

Foucauldians provide another negative stance on professions. They challenge the progressive client oriented rationality of professions like psychiatry and social work based on the state's need to govern populations (e.g. Foucault 1979).

The neo-Weberian riposte

Professions are defined by **neo-Weberians** with a more open view of the state than Marxists and Foucauldians, still without assuming professional power is used in the public/client interests.

As such professions are seen purely in terms of legally underpinned **exclusionary social closure** in the market sanctioned by the state – with registers enhancing the income, status and power of insiders (e.g. Parkin 1979).

Neo-Weberianism thus focuses on **professional self-interests** – and how these may be used to gain/maintain professional standing against clients or the public (e.g. Johnson 2016).

Further shifts in theorizing about professions

Nonetheless, professions are no longer islands of power – as sometimes depicted.

Their position has changed in the public and private sector due, amongst other things, to:



- The rising corporate influence on professions
- The implementation of the New Public Management
- The growth of state oversight of professional groups
- The development of multinational professional service firms
- The rising power of citizens (Saks and Muzio 2018).

The changing power of professions

But if this prompts questions about how far the independent power of professions has been reduced in public and private sector settings (Brock and Saks 2016), there are some counter claims to the **deprofessionalization** thesis.

Others commentators, for instance, point to the **restratification** and **hybridization** of professions (e.g. Noordegraaf 2015) – so it is not simply one-way traffic.

What is clear, though, is that professions in Western societies are increasingly embedded in fast-changing and complex national/global environments.

The potential reform of the professions

Whether the professions in this environment pursue their own self-interests or subordinate these to the interests of the client or the wider public is a matter of empirical investigation.

There are studies which support the predominance of professional self-interests, as much as those that see the professions as serving the wider public.

In this sense, the professions for me are metaphorically like the **Minotaur** of Greek legend – **half human and half beast** (Liljegren and Saks 2016).



Humanising the professions

This depiction of the diminutive figure of Theseus in the labyrinth, at the heart of which the Minotaur lives, represents the all too frequent imbalance in power between professions and clients/wider public.

Theseus journeyed to the heart of the labyrinth to slay the Minotaur who was devouring human sacrifices.

In a parallel way we need to ensure that the professions are humanised by ensuring that they more often serve client and wider public interests, rather than pursuing their own ends at the expense of these interests.

Making the case: Accountancy profession

The need to further humanise the professions can be highlighted by a range of contemporary case studies of different professions based on a neo-Weberian perspective:

- The **accountancy profession** in Ireland has been depicted as obstructing efforts by both the state and wider global forces for stronger regulation of its monopolistic governance and commercial freedoms. It has done little to increase accountability in terms of the public interest it claims to serve – in face of significant malpractice and a weak disciplinary process (Canning and O’Dwyer 2018).

Crab antics



Accountants in Scotland at a local level have been described as ‘crabs in a bucket’ – too busy fighting amongst themselves over status and other issues to properly serve their clients (Stringfellow and Thompson 2014).

Making the case: Audit profession

The big four audit firms in the UK came under scrutiny from a House of Lords Economic Affairs Committee in light of their apparent failure to adequately audit the banks following the 2008 global financial crisis.

The challenges the **audit profession** subsequently faced from the Competitions and Market Authority included that it had improperly acted in a self-interested manner to prevent, restrict or distort competition – following which a range of regulatory changes were put in place. These included introducing mandatory tendering to open up the market to those beyond the big four (Whittle, Mueller and Carter 2016).

Making the case: Legal profession

Similar arguments can be made about the longstanding self-interested protectionism of barristers in defending their historic and arcane privileges against solicitors in England and Wales.

Although the two branches are growing closer together and there are arguments for and against, a fused profession may be more in the public interest (Bargate 2014), not least because:

- It would help offering a one-stop shop for the public
- Extra costs for clients are imposed by needless duplication
- It inhibits nurturing advocacy talent from a wider pool.

Obdurate barristers



Making the case: Medical profession

The impact of self-interests can be applied to the defensive actions taken by the **medical profession** in undermining the periodic medical re-accreditation introduced after Shipman.

To date this seems to have been fairly superficially implemented without systematic data, especially in smaller organizations with less effective oversight of transitory staff.

The public and patients do not feel they can fully input to the feedback process on performance – and it is still extremely rare for doctors involved in serious criminal misdemeanours to be struck off the register (see e.g. Chamberlain 2018).

Redeeming features of professions

This is not to say there are no redeeming features of professions. That they can rise above their own self-interests to advance the public interest is highlighted by, for example:

- The health promotional work with government and the public by bodies like the British Medical Association (e.g. Saks 2015)
- The pro bono work of the legal profession and its role in defence of legal aid for criminal cases (e.g. Croft 2018).



Professional reform

There have also been **reforms** in professions that have enhanced their public-facing side, for example:

- In law the Solicitors Regulation Authority now exists and the regulatory Bar Standards Board has a lay majority.
- In medicine the General Medical Council has been streamlined with equal numbers of doctors and lay members – with independent adjudication of complaints.

However, in terms of professions, has it all gone too far? Should we not simply **de-regulate** the professions and let the **market** determine the public interest along the lines advocated by free market economists (e.g. Friedman 1962)?

THE ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST DE-REGULATION

The arguments for de-regulating professions are that it could:

- Cheaper services by exposing them to more competition
- Reduce central state intervention
- Result in more direct consumer control, with *caveat emptor* ('let the buyer beware').

Against this, there may be:

- Risks to consumers without certified expertise/ethical codes
- Financial issues with loss of professional self-management.
- The lack of a helpful buffer between consumers and state
- Increased bureaucracy and less professional collaboration.

The way forward

On balance, therefore, we should not be talking about ‘**the death of professions**’ in the modern age – in fact we may need them more than ever, albeit in a different form, in the modern age.



According to Leicht (2018) **new roles** for professions include:

- Risk managers in a risk society
- Trusted interpreters of information
- Positive carriers of values and ideology
- Promoters of institutional change.

The need for responsible leadership

If these roles are to be assumed, we need **responsible leadership** both within the professions and externally through smart regulation by governments and associated bodies.

What we mean by this is leadership with **integrity** in the interests of clients and the broader public.

This has a strong resonance with **corporate social responsibility** – focusing on developing a sustainable business model with social accountability to clients, the public and other stakeholders.

Grant Thornton Seminar

This leads me to reflect on a Grant Thornton event I attended earlier this year about **trust** and **transparency** in corporate life in the wake of the Oxfam prostitution scandal and exposures of corporate wrongdoing (reported in [The Sunday Times](#)).

None of the illustrious panellists from business had any knowledge of the reforms that had taken place in the professions over the past decade.

Responsible leadership has many dimensions, but one of these is not acting in a silo-based way and learning from governance experience elsewhere – including professions and other parties.

Conclusion

This session has charted the trend for professions to be increasingly attacked in the Western world. In the Q&A session I would like to prompt discussion about the role of responsible leadership in the reform of professions in the public/private sectors in rapidly changing and challenging times.

Potential questions for discussion include:

- Are professions self-interested or altruistic?
- Have they been too much maligned?
- Do they still need humanising?
- If so, how might such further reform occur?
- What is the role of responsible leadership?

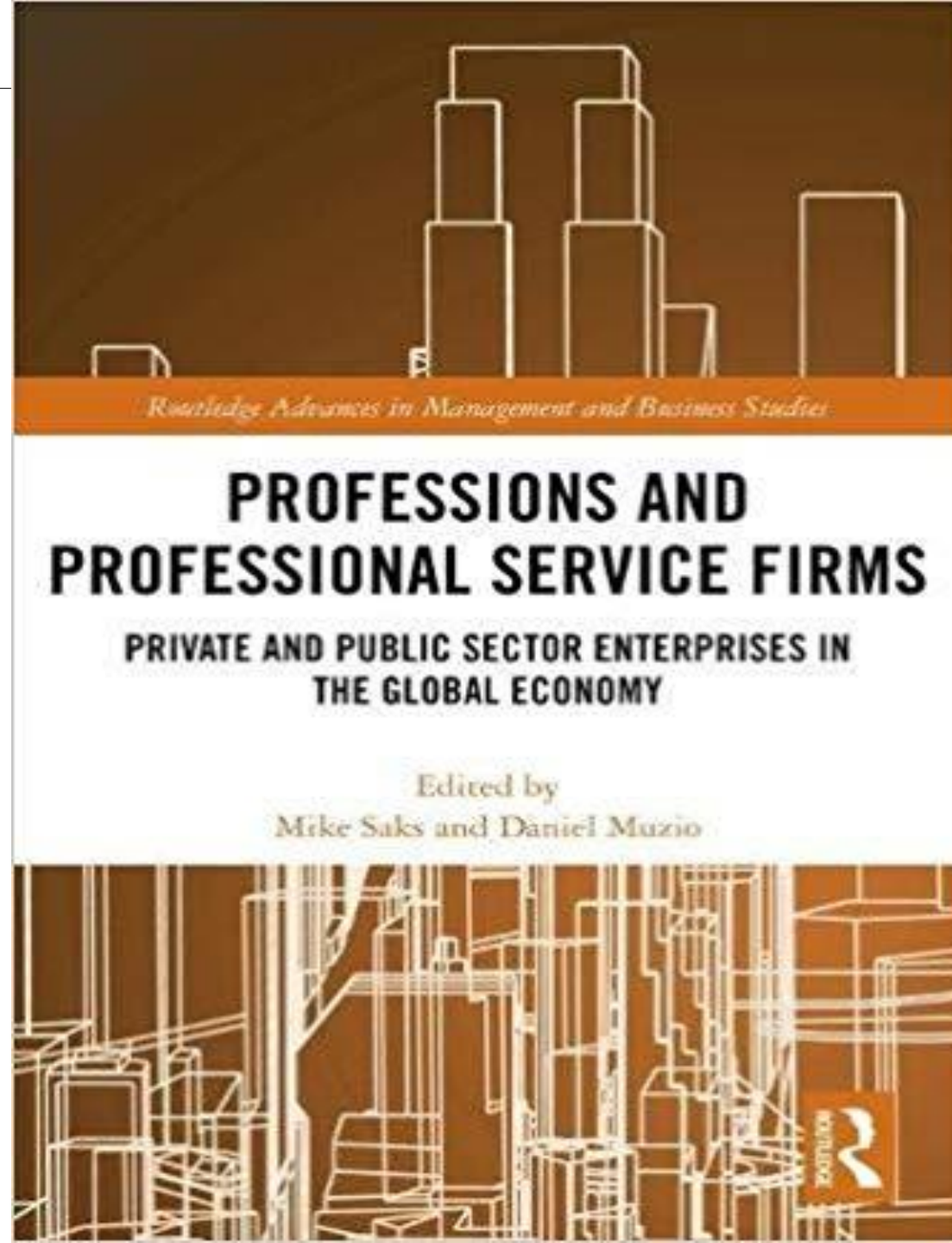
**I am not sure all these questions have definitive answers
but let's try...**



**"I had a miraculous dream in which
our list of questions all had answers."**

SELECTED READING

- Brock, D. and Saks, M. (2016) 'Professions and organizations: A European perspective', European Management Journal 34(1): 1-6.
- Chamberlain, M. J., Dent, M. and Saks, M. (eds) (2018) Professional Health Regulation and the Public Interest. Bristol: Policy Press.
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- Saks, M. (2016) 'Review of theories of professions, organizations and society: Neo-Weberianism, neo-institutionalism and eclecticism', Journal of Professions and Organization 3(2): 170-87.
- Saks, M. and Muzio, D. (eds) (2018) Professions and Professional Service Firms. Abingdon: Routledge.



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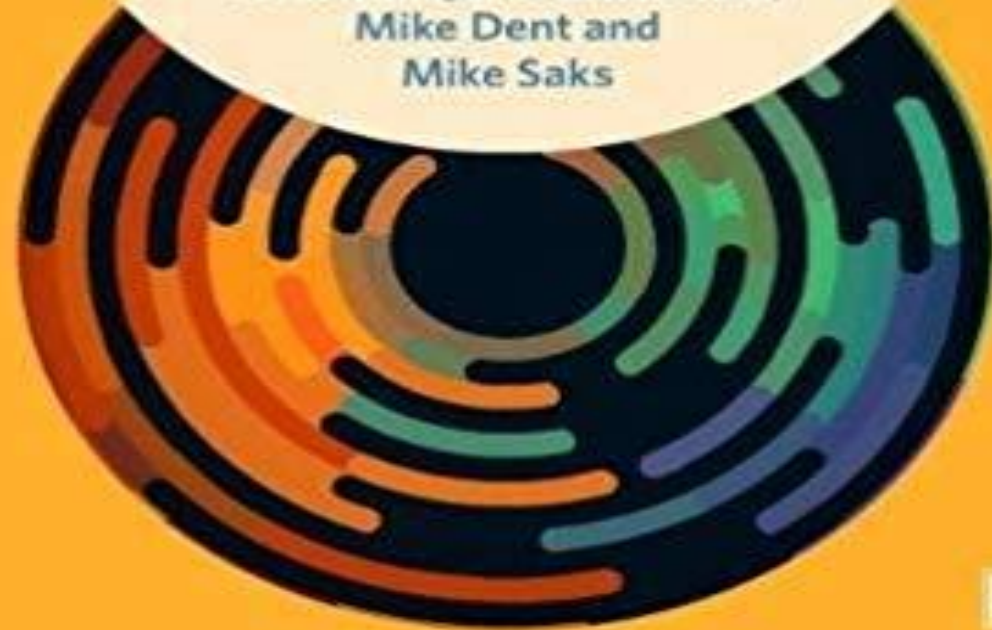
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- Formed with HQ in London to promote leadership integrity resonant with CSR/Sustainability in the public/private sector.
- Located under the umbrella of CSRFi led by Michael Hopkins.
- Offers courses/seminars, mentoring, coaching and consultancy in responsible leadership.
- Provides high quality IRL input and facilitation through founding members and senior associates.
- Honours and publicises key examples of responsible leadership through award of Fellowships of IRL.

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RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

12 noon - 7.00pm Thursday 18 October 2018

National Liberal Club, Whitehall Place, London, SW1A 2HE

This certificated event will start with lunch (from 12 noon to 2pm), followed by our afternoon session (from 2pm to 5pm) and end with evening drinks (5pm to 7pm).



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It will cost **£500** for CEOs with a special discounted rate of **£300** for other participants. Places are strictly limited to first comers.

INSTITUTE OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP: SEMINAR

The participants will reflect on what responsible leadership means, sharing/enriching their perceptions with each other.

The lunch will be hosted by the founding members of IRL and in the afternoon session they will share three case studies:

- Mike Eldon will offer a perspective from Africa and focus on emotional intelligence
- Mike Hopkins will discuss CSR/Sustainability and their links to the SDGs
- Mike Saks will speak about leadership in the public sector, with particular focus on the health sector.

INSTITUTE OF RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP: SEMINAR

- The session will conclude by having the participants reflect informally on the afternoon discussions
- Participants will emerge with not only thoughts on what they can and should do more and less of to enhance their responsible leadership, but with specific personal commitments to making such changes.

Payment may be made securely online at the following website:

www.csrfi.com/?csrfi_course=responsible-leadership-courses

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