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A micro-level model to investigate change in professions

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Professional work as configurations: A micro-level model to investigate change in professions

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In the recent decade, the relation between the professional and the organizational has drawn much interest, focusing on how professional work is increasingly interconnected with the organizational setting. Empirically, professionals increasingly take on managerial responsibilities, engage in cross disciplinary collaborations, and are subjugated to organizational scrutiny through various accountability measures. Along with professional values, knowledge and skills, professionals have, so to speak, an organizational responsibility and role to play. An inseparable part of professional work is to develop routines, prioritize cases and share knowledge, all of which involve organizing. Hence, organizing is not merely imposed on professional work from outside, but also come from within.

It has been suggested by Noordegraaf¹ that professional work can be perceived as a configuration, in which professional and organizational aspects are interconnected in an institutional pattern. However, this idea of professional work as a configuration has not yet been theorized at micro-level. The purpose of the article is to present a theoretical model of professional work as a configuration. The model shows how professional and organizational aspects of professional work are coordinated around the core task of the profession. The main idea of this approach is to determine how changing aspects of the configuration is affecting connected aspects of the institutional pattern, altering how the core task of the profession is performed. It is argued that the model offers a new approach to examine changes of professional work, which is open to changes both from outside and from within the profession.

The article is structured in three sections. In the first section the model of a configuration of professional work is developed. Drawing from organizational and institutional theory, the model consists of a dimension of institutional meaning, informing the dimension of practice. The aspects of institutional meaning are professional values, professional knowledge, and formal structure, while aspects of practice are professional routines and professional roles. In the second section, the theoretical model is applied in a case study of teachers work in a Danish municipal school system. The purpose of this case study is to show how the theoretical model can be employed to examine changes of professional work. The third section discusses the novelty of the model and what avenues it opens for the literature on profession and organization.

¹ Noordegraaf, M. (2013). Reconfiguring Professional Work: Changing Forms of Professionalism in Public Services. *Administration and Society*, 48(7), 783–810.