Professionals in Higher Education

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Structure

1. Introduction
2. Research and Definitions
3. Occupational versus Organisational Professionalization
4. Tensions and Reciprocal Influences
5. Conclusions

1. Introduction

- Topic emerged in the mid-2000s as a result of growing complexity and differentiation of functions, tasks and roles

- Growing need for specific knowledge and continuously updated information as well as competences no longer available to all actors

2. Research and Definitions

- From the mid-2000s onwards several smaller scale and pilot studies describing and analysing the phenomenon of HEPROs

- Professionalization processes were described as either up-skilling and up-grading or recruting younger and highly qualified persons (a „silent managerial revolution")

- Teichler (2005) identified four basic tasks: (a) preparation of and support for management decisions, (b) professionalised services, (c) new hybrid sphere between management and teaching/research, (d) differentiation of teaching and research functions

- A number of different names: administrators, mid-level leaders, para-academics, manager-academics
- Breakthrough with Celia Whitchurch's study (2008) calling them „third space professionals" and EUROAC study (2013) calling them „new higher education professionals" (HEPROs)

3. Occupational versus Organisational Professionalization

Classical sociological theories of professionalization have described the process as a development in 7 stages:

1. Scientification of the knolwedge base
2. Regulation of training and job titles
3. Academisation
4. Establishment of an exclusive professional organisation
5. Linkage to professional ethos
6. Self-governance through members of the group
7. Monopolisation (closure) of professional practice

- In recent years processes of professionalization have been characterised as leading to a blurring of boundaries or tending towwards hybridisation

- Noordegraf (2007: 763): „ ... Instead of **status** professions, modern professions have turned into **occupational** and perhaps into **organisational** professions ...“

- Rhoades (1998: 116): „It is time to overcome the simple dichotomy of administrative versus academic staff.“

- Evetts (2012: 5) distinguishes between professionalization „from within" and „from without" and argues that in „most contemporary service occupations professionalism is being imposed „from above" by the amployers and managers

- Occupational control is increasingly being replaced by organisational objectives which are imposed to facilitate change and limit discretion

- The shift from occupational to organisational professionalism turns academics into „managed professionals" (Rhoades 1998)

4. Tensions and Reciprocal Influences

- EUROAC study (2009-2012) analysed the changes affecting the academic profession and leading to new settings for the roles and functions, career patterns and employment and working conditions

- If organisational professionalization is happening, all groups have to professionalise

- Two forms of professionalization can be found: through job enrichment and through a division of labour

- For the most part HEPRO roles are not yet etsbalished as stable occupations

- Each of the three groups analysed in the EUROAC study (institutional management, HEPROs, academic staff) is professionalising in a distinct way

- Institutional management professionalises through HEPROs, HEPROs professionalise through job enrichment and academics professionalise through a division of labour

- The effects of these professionalisation processes lead to some tensions

- Academics find HEPRO activities useful when they unburden them from unloved administrative tasks, but they resent HEPRO activities when the latter add to their workload

- Conflicts arise when HEPROs assume controlling and monitoring functions rather than support functions

- Management and leadership (responsible for organisational professionalization) opt for increasing the number of HEPRO roles within the institution, often at the expense of clerical and routine administrative tasks which then tend to be shifted onto the academic profession

5. Conclusions

- The self-understanding of HEPROs as professionals is still waek and professional identities vary

- HEPROs tend to see themselves as mediators between hierarchical levels or as providers of services and support for particular groups of (internal) clients

- They are generalists and experts rather than specialists and academics

- HEPROs work at interfaces and have a high mixture of job tasks, often with no clear demarcation

- HEPROs often shape new fields of professional activity within higher education institutions: e.g. alumni work, fundraising, graduate surveys, research support

- Their facilitative functions are appreciated but additional layers of bureaucracy lead to tensions

- HEPRO work creates new configurations of power within the institutions and has implications for the ways in which professionalization is happening

Thank you for your attention.

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