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Expert Power and Control in Late Modernity: An Empirical Review and Theoretical Synthesis

Michael I. Reed

Abstract

This paper provides an overview and evaluation of contemporary debates over the nature and significance of 'expert power' within 'late modernity'. It focuses on the changing relationship between expert power, organizational control and class formation within the wider context provided by the global shift towards more reflexive and flexible forms of capital accumulation. It concludes that the latter will have fateful consequences for the major forms of expertise, organizational design and class power taking shape in late modernity. In particular, it suggests that 'the politics of expertise' has become more intensely contested in contemporary conditions, and that this produces a more fragmented division of labour within and between the professional and managerial middle classes. Thus, expert groups are seen to play a strategic role in the radical restructuring of professional work organization and control occurring within the much more fragmented middle-class formations emerging in advanced capitalist societies.

Descriptors: experts, professionals, organizations, control, restructuring, class

Introduction

Expert power and control has re-emerged as a central theme within social and organizational analysis. It raises fundamental questions about the longer-term impact of contemporary socio-economic restructuring on the forms of organizational and class control taking shape in 'late modernity'. Giddens (1990, 1991, 1994) uses this latter term to refer to the various ways in which a culture of radical scepticism and uncertainty — accepting that all forms of knowledge are inevitably corrigible, provisional and prejudiced — has penetrated deep into the social fabric of everyday life in modern societies. This fundamental questioning of, and uncertainty over, the cognitive and social 'foundations' of everyday life, Giddens argues, has increased the 'institutional reflexivity' exhibited by modern institutions and organizations — that is, they systematically monitor and control their own performance in such a way that their strategic effectiveness and operational efficiency are greatly enhanced (Kumar 1995; Webster 1995). Indeed, organizations become *the* stra-

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tegic social units for generating, storing and manipulating knowledge so as to secure the planned reproduction of social systems.

Expert groups and systems play a central role in this process of enhanced institutional reflexivity by providing the cognitive, technical and organizational means through which much more extensive and intensive control technologies can be designed and implemented (Scarborough and Corbett 1992). Experts, Giddens suggests, 'provide the systems of technical accomplishment and professional expertise that organize large areas of the material and social environments in which we live today . . . the systems in which the knowledge of experts is integrating, influences many aspects of what we do in a *continuous way*' (Giddens 1991: 27). In particular, they provide the unobtrusive knowledge and skills through which time/space relations can be continuously manipulated and re-ordered — such as in international currency dealing or global telecommunications networking (Fulk and Steinfield 1990) — by modern organizations to control the economic and social behaviour of large populations. Thus, expert power and control injects the fundamental dynamism and mobility into modern organizations by providing the cognitive and technical instrumentation through which time/space constraints can be overcome. It facilitates the restructuring of social relations across vast time/space barriers so that the stable co-ordination and control of human activity can be realized on a global scale (Waters 1995). Experts become the crucial social groups for mediating radical doubt and uncertainty — and establishing some degree of collective trust and stability in highly mobile societies — to the extent that they provide the material and social technologies through which 'control at a distance' (Cooper 1992) can be routinely secured. In this sense, they are of vital importance in 'mapping out options and creating and legitimating consent' (Fincham et al. 1994: 238). Thus, the specialized knowledge and skill that experts provide plays a pivotal role in framing decision-making agendas and the substantive outcomes which flow from them. Expertise is one of the primary arenas in which struggles to control the organization and management of work are fought out in modern societies.

While differing on, not insignificant, points of empirical detail and theoretical interpretation, a number of commentators have developed an analysis of expert power and control in late modernity which echo many of Giddens' propositions (Harvey 1989; Castells 1989; Zuboff 1988; Beck 1992, 1994; Burris 1993; Lash and Urry 1994; Webster 1995). In their different ways, they highlight the strategic contribution that experts and expertise make to the much more sophisticated and pervasive systems of organizational surveillance and control crystallizing in (post) modern societies. They also serve to highlight the broader significance of these developments for corporate organizations, occupational forms and class structures in societies where the 'juggernaut' of capitalist restructuring seems to demand individual and collective sacrifice on a considerable scale.

This paper provides an overview and evaluation of contemporary research on and debates about the nature and significance of expert power and control for modern organizations and societies. It draws on a wide body of literature in social theory, the sociology of the professions, new technology, organization analysis and social-class analysis with the aim of assessing the major debates and positions that have emerged out of current reflection over the dynamics of institutional restructuring in advanced capitalist societies. By focusing on the changing relationship between expert power, organizational control and occupational/class structure, the paper highlights the interpenetration of global change and local re-ordering that is indelibly reshaping the 'landscapes of power' (Zukins 1991) characteristic of late modernity. In this respect, the analysis of changing forms of expert power and control which the paper formulates signals the broader theoretical and practical significance of incorporating a concern with both strategic action and structural constraint in the study of organizations (Reed 1995a).

Expert Power

Concern over the power of the expert has been a recurring theme in human history. As Schaffer comments in a recent book review on early modern science and alchemy, 'experts can gain authority if they can convince their society that they have access to estoeic matters only to be reached through their specialized skills and yet of general potential utility. This was the role of the tradition of secrets' (Schaffer 1994: 17). In this quote, Schaffer is identifying the interrelated dimensions of political, cognitive, technical and organizational power that define and legitimate the position of experts within traditional and modern societies. They must be able to carve out and control — ideally monopolize — an area of scarce knowledge and skill that contributes to socio-technical problem solving in such a way that it cannot be easily stolen or imitated by other groups (Derber et al. 1990). In short, the expertise of the expert must be storable, controllable, indeterminable (Boreham 1983) and protectable if it is to provide a reasonably stable cognitive and social base for the institutionalization of expert power (Larson 1990).

Any claim to expertise must be supported by a cognitive base from which claims to specialized knowledge, competency and skill can be mobilized within a wider social arena. This cognitive base needs to facilitate the fabrication and application of a technical instrumentation relevant to problem solving across a range of social situations. Such technical instrumentation and the territory in which its jurisdiction runs have to be effectively protected from incursion by predatory competitors if they are to remain the specialized preserve of a particular expert group (Abbott 1988). Finally, the political strategies and tactics through

which expert 'jurisdictional domains' are constructed and policed need to be supported by ideological resources and moral prohibitions that legitimate monopoly control for 'us' by de-legitimizing predatory incursions by 'them' (Crompton 1990). Thus, 'jurisdictional domains' are areas of task performance in which expert groups make 'more-or-less' exclusive claims to technical, social and cultural authority over the knowledge and skill that falls within their ambit (Abbott 1988).

This nexus of cognitive, technical, political and normative resources establishes a viable socio-technical and organizational base from which expert power and control can be mobilized within a 'contested terrain' of conflicting knowledge claims (Larson 1977; Abbott 1988; Drazin 1990). In traditional societies, claims to expertise tended to be based on and protected by arcane 'custom and practice' as the institutional repositories of valued and trusted collective wisdom (Derber et al. 1990; Giddens 1994). In modern societies, such claims are much more reliant on objective, impersonal and codified knowledge that is a prime institutional expression of the radical doubt and scepticism which pervades all social relationships. Indeed, it is the putative universality, codifiability, neutrality and mobility of modern expertise that sets it apart from the localism, particularism and stability characteristic of traditional expertise. Considered in these terms, modern expertise has a specific form and content that reflects the particular socio-technical conditions and organizational configurations that define 'late modernity'. That is, it becomes a, if not *the*, defining feature of 'the penetration of modern institutions into the tissue of day-to-day life' (Giddens 1994: 59) to the extent that it generates, applies and protects the codified specialized knowledge necessary for the reflexive monitoring of social activity on a global scale.

Modern expert groups provide the cognitive and technical means — as well as the supporting political strategies and legitimacy discourses — through which relatively sophisticated technologies of organizational surveillance and control can be mobilized in modern societies (Foucault 1979, 1991). The latter are designed and implemented in such a way that they permit the routine monitoring and correcting of 'system performance' in the light of changing material and social conditions. By possessing and controlling esoteric knowledge and skill relevant to the organization and management of everyday activity and institutional behaviour, expert groups put themselves in a potentially powerful position within the corporate, occupational and class structures of advanced capitalist political economies (Crompton 1992). At the same time, they often find themselves engaged in an intense political struggle to secure, close and exploit 'jurisdictional domains' of specialized knowledge and skill most relevant to the successful operation of corporate organizations (Armstrong 1984, 1985, 1986).

A number of recent empirical studies on the dynamics of intra-organizational and inter-occupational expert struggle serve to illustrate both the potential for and limitations of this form of power and control

within modern societies. During the 1980s and 1990s, a virtual tidal wave of innovative material and social technologies were designed and deployed within corporate organizations that initiated something of a 'control revolution' (Beringer 1986) in the conditions exploited and experienced by a range of expert groups in a number of different sectors. Research on new control initiative such as 'total quality management' (Hill 1991; Kirkpatrick and Lucio 1995; Wilkinson et al. 1992), 'new manufacturing systems' (Elger 1987; Delbridge and Turnbull 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992), 'customer control systems' (Fuller and Smith 1991; DuGay and Salaman 1992), 'business process re-engineering' (Grint 1994), 'performance appraisal' (Townley 1992, 1994), 'performance control' (Smith 1993) and 'information technology' (Child 1987; Fincham et al. 1994) suggests that expert power and control became an even more intensely contested terrain during this period. A number of expert groups — particularly in the private business, professional service and consultancy service sectors (Hinings et al. 1991; Crompton 1992; McNulty, Whittington and Whipp 1994; Clark and Salaman 1996) — benefited considerably from the new 'intellectual or governmental technologies' (Miller and Rose 1990: 9) developed and installed at this time. They enjoyed increased material advantage and enhanced socio-cultural status to the extent that the control systems which their expertise made possible increased their functional indispensability for the realization of longer-term corporate rationalization and capital accumulation within a much more volatile and unstable business environment. Expert groups provided the vital theoretical knowledge and operational techniques through which intellectual and technical mastery over an increasingly recalcitrant environment could be realized.

Other expert groups — such as public-sector professionals and bureaucrats, as well as private-sector line managers — found themselves in a more precarious socio-political situation (Kirkpatrick and Lucio 1995; Scarbrough and Burrell 1994; Savage et al. 1992; Burris 1993; Casey 1995). This second category of expert groups were now faced with a new battery of control instruments and practices that strove to commodify, regulate or rationalize *their* claims to specialized knowledge and exercise of esoteric skills in such a way that their position within corporate, occupational and class power structures would be seriously undermined. The ensuing power struggle to dominate the fabrication, development and implementation of these innovative control technologies exemplifies Crozier's analysis of the dynamics of expert power and control within modern organizations:

'As long as the requirements of action create situations of uncertainty, the individuals who have to face them have power over those who are affected by the results of their choice. . . . Two types of power will develop out of these situations. First, will evolve the power of the expert, i.e. the power an individual will have over the people affected by his (*sic*) actions, through his (*sic*) ability to cope with a source of relevant uncertainty. Second, there will

emerge the power necessary to check the power of the expert . . . the expert's success is constantly self-defeating. The rationalization process give him (*sic*) power, but the end results of rationalization curtail this power. As soon as a field is well-covered, as soon as the first institutions and innovations can be translated into rules and programs, the expert's power disappears.' (Crozier 1964: 160–65)

There are a number of points that need to be made about Crozier's analysis and its implications for the sociology of expert power and control in modern organizations. First, it highlights the crucial importance of shifting domains of 'relevant uncertainty' within fields of collective action as the conditions under which they are organized and managed change and develop over time. Second, it emphasizes the importance of the detailed political tactics and strategies through which expert groups strive to establish effective closure of, and control over, 'jurisdictional domains' of expert technique and practice relevant to the changing pattern of socio-technical and economic uncertainties that face organizations (Pettigrew 1973; Pfeffer 1981).

Third, it stresses the 'Janus-faced' or dualistic nature of the political strategies and tactics through which expert power and control is won and lost, as well as the inherently self-defeating character of organizational rationalization as one of, if not *the*, major process(es) through which expert power bases are constructed and defended. Rationalization of technique and practice is a central route to expert power and control, but it inevitably 'turns back' on those expert groups that have benefited the most from its implementation once they allow it to impose codified rules and programmes on their own domains of jurisdictional closure and the autonomy that it previously afforded. As Zuboff's (1988) research shows, more advanced informational control systems can have a simultaneously 'enabling' and 'disabling' affect on the capacity of experts to manage complexity and uncertainty. The former enhance the 'control at a distance' capacity available to modern organizations, but that very distancing capacity can have a debilitating impact on the capability of management to negotiate everyday order on the shopfloor and in the office (Reed 1995b). The trick seems to be to strike the right — i.e. inevitably shifting — political balance between indeterminacy and formalization of knowledge and skill as a prerequisite to constructing expert power bases and action domains that will stand the test of time — especially when times are hard and unpredictable. As such, expert power and control is an unstable and contestable outcome of the interaction between social constructions and structural constraints as they respond to the dynamic of economic, technological and cultural change within advanced capitalist economies. Finally, Crozier's analysis also pinpoints the explanatory significance of the interorganizational or institutional level of analysis in accounting for the restructuring of the expert division of labour in (post)modern societies and its impact on organizational control systems. It shows that the analysis of intra-organizational power struggles between expert groups must be located within the polit-

ical economy of expertise as it finds institutional expression in labour markets, and in occupational and class structures within contemporary capitalism. The dynamic of expert (re)formation has to be related to the dynamic of occupational and class (re)formation taking place in late modernity.

It is to this changing relationship between expert power and new forms of organizational control that we turn in succeeding sections of this paper. In turn, this will lead us on to the restructuring of expert division of labour which has occurred in advanced capitalist societies and its longer-term impact on the (re)formation of class power and domination within the latter.

Expert Power and Organizational Control

If enhanced 'institutional reflexivity' is the hallmark of 'late modernity', then expert groups have played a strategic role in providing the cognitive, technical, organizational and cultural means through which the transition to the new forms of, simultaneously extensive(wide) and intensive(deep), control and surveillance has been made possible. At the same time, there has been a highly differentiated distribution of material, social and cultural rewards resulting from the construction and implementation of these new control systems — both within the matrix of groups that constitute the expert division of labour itself and the wider occupational and class structures within which it is institutionally located. Indeed, a number of influential commentators (Castells 1989; Davies 1990; Sassen 1991; Zukins 1991; Lash and Urry 1994; Webster 1995) have argued that these shifts in expert power and control within modern organizations and urban conurbations are producing a much more polarized distribution of occupational and class rewards within the 'service class' and between it and other class groupings such as the 'underclass'. They also see this more extreme form of economic, social and cultural polarization within and between class groupings as one of the major threats to socio-political order in advanced capitalist societies.

First, we need to examine in greater detail the specific forms of organizational control and surveillance that are taken to signal the movement towards 'late modernity' and the enhanced expert power — at least for certain expert groups — which the latter entails. This will provide a baseline from which internal restructuring within the expert division of labour and its impact on social class formation and power can be subsequently discussed.

In very broad terms, the considerably expanded powers of institutional reflexivity characteristic of high or late modernity depend on the development of systems of expert knowledge and control that establish the collective capacity for organizations to reflect on themselves and 'back on themselves' (Kumar 1995). This demands that expert systems pro-

vide the cognitive, technical and administrative capability required for modern organizations to monitor, on a continuing basis, both the condition of their internal operation and the state of their external environment in such a way that corrective action can be taken in the event of any threat to their survival. In this context, new informational and communication technologies — based on the highly specialized knowledge and skill of certain expert groups — become of strategic importance to the reproduction and transformation of modern organizations. These technologies establish the cognitive, technical and symbolic means through which modern organizations can overcome the barrier of time and space to exercise effective co-ordination between globalized networks and control over localized activities.

This is achieved in two interrelated ways. First, as Giddens (1990: 1–21; 1991: 16–17; 1994: 92–93) argues, advanced informational and communication technologies allow social relations to be lifted out of their local contexts of interaction and restructured across time and space. Second, as Harvey (1989: 159–172) maintains, they facilitate the compression (rather than stretching or disembedding) of time/space relations in such a way that they can be drastically shortened or shrunk so that the volume and speed of information and decision flows are exponentially increased. Through time/space distancing and compression, Giddens and Harvey suggest, modern organizations — particularly in certain sectors such as finance, banking, media and telecommunications — are in a position to realize a form of 'institutional reflexivity' previously unavailable to their more slow moving and sclerotic bureaucratic forbears. By fully exploiting the stored and portable repositories of specialized socio-technical knowledge and skill that expert systems make available, modern organizations are able to achieve a speed, flexibility and reach in their operations simply undreamt of by earlier generations. In this sense, experts are seen to play a strategic role in what Webster (1995: 18–19; 217–218) refers to as the 'informatization' of social life in late modernity. They provide the socio-technical means and modes through which organizations are pervaded by sophisticated networks of informational control collapsing established temporal, spatial and political boundaries so that they penetrate deeply into the fabric of everyday and institutional life. In Castells' (1989) terms, we are moving towards an 'informational mode of development' in which there is:

'a growing concentration of knowledge-generation and decision-making processes in high-level organizations. . . . Networks, on the basis of the new information technologies, provide the organizational basis for the transformation of socially and spatially based relationships of production into flows of information and power that articulate the new flexible system of production and management.' (Castells 1989: 30–32)

These developments in inter-organizational expert-based control systems are seen to be mirrored by changes to intra-organizational dis-

plinary regimes in which the reach and penetration of the 'supervisory gaze' are considerably enhanced and refined (Dandeker 1990; Giddens 1991; Burris 1993; Lyon 1994). Within many work organizations, a more supple and subtle form of 'centralized decentralization' is emerging in which control over organizational behaviour is based on the informational and communication technologies that expert groups have developed. These technologies provide the cognitive and technical means for achieving a much higher degree of visibility and transparency in organizational operations, such that continuous monitoring and correcting of organizational behaviour can be realized in a relatively unobtrusive and indirect manner. This encourages organizational members to submit themselves to the more intimate and penetrative forms of discipline that 'centralized decentralization' makes available. Indeed, they are encouraged to internalize self-discipline and control within their own minds and bodies so that they naturally subject their thinking and behaviour to organizational norms of rationality, productivity and effectiveness. Thus, the expert-based informational and communication control systems increasingly evident in the financial, commercial, technological and organizational activities of modern corporations are taken to signify a move towards an integration of 'planning and control on a systematic and regularized basis . . . A key point about new technologies is their increasing pervasiveness and intrusiveness, their capacity to penetrate even deeper into physical, social and personal areas. And, by virtue of these characteristics, what the new technologies offer is more flexible forms of surveillance' (Webster and Robins 1993: 248–249).

These developments in material technologies of control which facilitate the closer integration of centralized strategic planning and decentralized operational control are paralleled by developments in social technologies of control focused on the manipulation of corporate culture (Kunda 1992; Alvesson 1993; Willmott 1993; Casey 1995). Much of the corporate effort dispensed in the area of cultural manipulation and control is focused on the construction of organizational narratives that will provide members with a shared collective identity in which 'the self' is transformed from a fractured and isolated entity into a unified and integrated whole. Experts in the cognitive, symbolic, linguistic and communication resources through which 'the management of meaning' can be pursued on a continuing basis — human resource development consultants, market researchers, public relations specialists and financial services consultants — provide the knowledge base from which employees can be resocialized into a high productivity and customer satisfaction culture. While employee and customer resistance, in all various forms, is an ever-present reality, the ability to combine material and cultural technologies of corporate control in a more integrated fashion establishes a formidable power base for various expert groups to exploit in their quest for upward 'collective mobility' within the modern corporation (Casey 1995).

Nonetheless, expert groups often find themselves subjected to the more unobtrusive and pervasive control systems which they have helped to design and introduce. Enhanced organizational transparency and visibility makes it very difficult for anybody to hide from the 'supervisory gaze'. Particular jurisdictional domains can become increasingly problematic as a basis for the stabilization and exploitation of expert power within the corporation and the wider society when more advanced socio-technical control systems exert such a strong and pervasive destabilizing impact on established practices and routines. Consequently, the 'technologists of control' may become even more divided amongst themselves as they struggle to come to terms with the radical organizational and institutional changes which they have played such a vital role in creating.

The Expert Division of Labour

Research (Larson 1990; Murphy 1990; Blackler et al. 1993; Bloor and Dawson 1994) on the new forms of expert power and control emerging in late modernity suggests that the 'politics of expertise' — that is, conflicts over the exclusionary jurisdictional domains arising out of the contested monopolization of abstract knowledge and technique — is becoming more intense and unpredictable during a period of radical change. As Drazin argues:

'during periods of upheaval, perhaps caused by the introduction of radically new technologies, and the concomitant emergence of new and competing occupational groups seeking to exploit these technologies, professionals may focus more on perceived external threats and opportunities, and respond to innovations in a more political mode.' (Drazin 1990: 259)

Within that broad category of occupational groups which constitutes the expert division of labour, three major groupings may be identified in relation to their respective knowledge bases, power strategies and organizational forms. Each of these expert groups has a rather different experience of how the distributional outcomes generated by radical economic, social and cultural change have impacted on them. First, we need to focus on the independent liberal professions of the typical 'Anglo-American' form and assess how they have fared during a period when the underlying dynamic of change within the wider political economy seems to threaten their very rationale and existence. Second, we turn to the organizational or managerial professions located in large private- and public-sector bureaucracies which have also experienced the full disruptive force of technological and economic restructuring over the last two decades. Finally, we come to a relatively new and, as yet, very loosely formed group of 'entrepreneurial professions' or 'knowledge workers' who seem to have benefited most from the eco-

conomic liberalization and socio-political deregulation that dominated governmental and corporate decision-making agendas for much of the 1980s and 1990s (Silver 1987; Harvey 1989; Keat and Abercrombie 1991; Zukins 1991; Lash and Urry 1994). Each of these groups will be discussed in relation to their respective knowledge bases, power strategies and organizational forms before proceeding to a more dynamic analysis of how they have fared in the rather more intense, not to say 'cut-throat', politics of expertise that have ensued in a number of advanced capitalist societies since the end of the 1970s.

Previous discussion has suggested that the politics of expertise revolves around four interrelated dimensions or themes: first, the cognitive or knowledge base on which claims to specialized skill and technique rest; second, the technical artefacts and practical accomplishments that result from the application of this knowledge; third, the political and economic strategies followed by various occupational groups to maximize their material and symbolic rewards from the effective control over and profitable exchange of their expertise; finally, the organizational forms through which control over contested jurisdictional domains attains a variable degree of institutional security and stability. Fincham et al. (1994: 310–314; 280) suggest that the most politically and economically successful expert groups are those who are able to 'blackbox' their expertise — that is, compartmentalize key elements of their knowledge base and technical instrumentation so that they become simplified and standardized in a more mobile and portable form (also see Latour 1987). In this way, they are better placed to optimize their possession of and control over *both* occupationally based knowledge/skill domains of a more formal/generic character and organizationally based knowledge/skill domains in which more informal, localized and contingent competencies are at a premium. As previous analysis has also indicated, this is particularly the case where the stabilization and portability of an expert group's knowledge/skill base makes a crucial contribution to the greatly enhanced reflexivity and flexibility characteristic of modern organizational control systems. This judicious mix of occupational and organizational expertise strikes the necessary balance between the indetermination and formalization required to walk the political tight-rope between autonomy and rationalization, as highlighted in the earlier discussion of Crozier's work.

The dominant occupational mode and organizational form for institutionalizing the provision and evaluation of expert services in modern capitalist societies has been the liberal/independent profession (Abbott 1988; Freidson 1994; Johnson 1993). Historically, it has been the most effective institutional means for 'blackboxing' highly specialized knowledge and skill in such a way as to maximize the latter's stability, portability, generality and legitimacy across a wide range of relatively secure and cohesive jurisdictional domains. By developing and controlling generic knowledge and skills that are transferable from one work setting to another (Freidson 1994: 42–43), the liberal/independent pro-

essions have been very successful in optimizing the political, economic and cultural advantage to be derived from striking the right balance between occupational and organizational expertise.

Thus, the cognitive base of the liberal/independent professions has always emphasized abstract, codifiable and generic knowledge allied to complex tacit skills derivable from, but not reducible to, rational scientific knowledge acquired by protracted periods of study in higher education institutions (Larson 1990: 36). In this way, they have been able to maintain the right balance between abstract formalization and effective practical intervention deemed so crucial to the successful annexation of areas of work through cognitive domination, social exclusion and political control (Abbott 1988: 102–103). As Weber puts it: 'Modern professionalism presupposes the systematic codification of a body of knowledge held to be relatively autonomous and self-contained. Such knowledge provides the basis for the delimitation of a *field* rendering possible an equally defined and codified form of practice. The kind of knowledge that informs this practice is held to have universal validity within the confines of the specific field' (Weber 1990: 45 — italics in original).

The basic power strategy of the liberal/independent professions has been one of monopolizing and policing abstract knowledge and related technical skills as they are applied to specific areas of work. They achieve this claim to technical and cultural authority through a deft combination of tight operational controls and more formalized occupational structures and associations (Freidson 1994). Thus, codified abstract knowledge of universal validity and applicability and a strategy of occupational closure and control based on effective monopolization of defined operational domains are brought together within a hybrid organizational form consisting of selected elements of collegiality and hierarchy (Freidson 1986). The inevitable tensions and conflicts between these contradictory organizational rationales are regulated through the deployment of various negotiating processes and more formalized judicial mechanisms for policing occupational divisions and work boundaries in such a way that internal stability is maintained (Strauss 1978).

The organizational professions (Child 1982) are unable to realize the degree of indetermination, monopolization and control of their knowledge base enjoyed by the liberal/independent professions. By its very nature, their knowledge/skill base is likely to be more 'organization-specific' or localized and to lack the degree of abstract codification and generic application typical of the established professions. As a result, the organizational professions are left with a more 'craft-like' knowledge base 'lacking the special legitimacy that is supplied by the connection of abstraction with general values' (Abbott 1988: 103). As Whitley (1989) argues, the organizational/managerial professions are forced to rely on a knowledge base and task repertoire that are inherently fragmented and diverse, depending as they do on the practice of

craft skills embedded in systematic, reflective understanding of particular situations.

Born into bureaucracy, the organizational professions have the cognitive and technical capacity, limited and constrained though this may be, to turn their contingent and localized knowledge to their political advantage through strategies of partial occupational closure and control. In this context, credentialism stands at the core of their power strategy. By constituting their expertise through educational and bureaucratic credentials, the organizational professions attempt to mobilize the localized and contingent cognitive resources available to them in order to secure relatively powerful and privileged positions within technical and status hierarchies (Murphy 1990; Crompton 1992; Fincham et al. 1994). They are both the creatures and beneficiaries of bureaucratic rationalization and the extension of formalized control systems which the latter inevitably entails. They benefit from bureaucratic rationalization to the extent that it generates new control systems, dependent on local knowledge and skill, which can be deployed in the furtherance of their sectional interests. At the same time, the formalization and standardization of operations which bureaucratic rationalization necessarily entails threatens the hard-won 'areas of uncertainty' opened up through the skilful deployment of craft expertise.

The entrepreneurial professions or 'knowledge workers' depend on a highly esoteric and intangible knowledge base for mobilizing claims to expertise and the control over areas of work which the latter make available. They are less concerned with formal occupational or organizational credentialism and more focused on the extensively specialized cognitive and technical skills that will give them the political advantage in a wide range of task domains (Blackler et al. 1993; Fincham et al. 1994: 265–280). They rely on a sophisticated combination of theoretical knowledge, analytical tools and tacit or judgmental skills that are very difficult, but not impossible, to standardize, replicate and incorporate within formalized organizational routines (Reich 1991; Hinings et al. 1991; Starbuck 1992). They pursue a power strategy geared to the defence and enhancement of their exceptional expertise by means of extensive specialization in complex task domains inherently resistant to incursions by the carriers of bureaucratic rationalization and control. In addition, they maximize the political and economic advantages to be gained from the extensive deregulation and commodification of specialized services which have occurred over the last decade or so (Abbott 1988; Fincham et al. 1994; Webster 1995) by aggressively marketing their highly refined and portable knowledge/skill base.

Entrepreneurial professions/knowledge workers feed off corporate capitalism and public sector bureaucracies for work and status. However, the power strategy which they follow exhibits a very strong emphasis on the relative political autonomy to be derived from the more extensive liberalization and commodification of experts' services and products. Consequently, they tend to be found in sectors — such as research

and development, information services, media and communication, and professional/business services — where there is an economic premium on uniqueness, innovation and expertise directed to the future value, rather than immediate payoff, of knowledge creation and development (Machlup 1980; Starbuck 1992). This pushes knowledge workers towards an organic or network type of organizational form in which a logic of decentralized flexibility and autonomy — most typically found in professional and business service organizations (Hinings et al. 1991; Starbuck 1992; McNulty et al. 1994) — move them away from the administrative structures typically associated with both the liberal and organizational professions.

Figure 1. summarizes the major cognitive, political and structural characteristics of these three expert groups.

Figure 1
Expert Division
of Labour in
'Late Modernity'

Expert Groups	Knowledge Base	Power Strategy	Organizational Form	Occupational Types
Independent/liberal professions	abstract; codified; cosmopolitan; rational	monopolization	collegiate	doctors; architects; lawyers
Organizational professions	technical; tacit; local; political	credentialism;	bureaucracy	managers; administrators; technicians
Knowledge workers	esoteric; non-substitutable; global; analytical	marketization	network	financial/business consultants; project/R&D engineers; computer/I.T. analysts

The Politics of Expertise

As we have already seen, the politics of expertise has become more intense and complex within the extreme economic, political and cultural uncertainties prevailing under late modernity. Expert groups have found themselves operating within an institutional environment characterized by economic and fiscal crises of the state, political ideologies and policies highly suspicious of, if not downright hostile to, professional power, technological transformations leading to much more insecure labour markets and organizational careers, and the development of organizational control and surveillance systems in which mobility, transparency and predictability are the dominant motifs. Research suggests that these conditions are encouraging a much more fragmented, indeed polarized, expert division of labour within and between the three

major expert groups identified in the previous section of this paper. While there are significant national and sectoral differences in the nature and extensiveness of intensified political conflict within and between expert groups — and indeed between the latter and ‘non-experts’ — the overall pattern seems to indicate a general movement towards a more aggressively contested and irreparably fragmented expert domain. These developments also raise important questions about the relationship between ‘expert formation’ and ‘class formation’ within advanced capitalist societies as they struggle to come to terms with the much more dynamic and uncertain conditions that they face.

The liberal/independent professions have been under severe pressure from political, economic and technological changes reshaping the established institutional and organizational structures of advanced capitalist societies in the 1980s and 1990s (Rueschmeyer 1986; Abbott 1988; Burrage and Torstendahl 1990; Burris 1993; Freidson 1994). Some commentators (Haug 1973, 1975; Johnson 1972; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979; Clegg et al. 1986) have suggested that they may be in terminal decline as a result of political, organizational and technological changes leading to an irreversible process of ‘proletarianization’ or ‘deprofessionalization’ in which their knowledge base is effectively rationalized out of business by the state and large corporations.

However, a more balanced appreciation of their position indicates that the substantial internal fragmentation and rationalization generated by a more volatile economic environment, hostile political climate and intrusive organizational control systems are leading to increased intra-group stratification and polarization (Burris 1993; Freidson 1994). Thus, Freidson (1994: 128–146) argues that the liberal/independent professions are neither so liberal nor independent as they once were; instead, they are being restructured into more hierarchically controlled occupational associations and groups in which there is a much clearer stratification division between an administrative élite and a rank-and-file mass of routine ‘workers’. This latter group find themselves located in much more insecure labour markets and organizational locales where the once dominant strategy of occupational closure and control, based on the virtual monopolization of specialized knowledge and skill directly linked to defined work domains, is increasingly difficult to impose.

Research on the restructuring of the liberal/independent professions in the U.S.A. (Abbott 1988; Derber et al. 1990, Burris 1993) and the U.K. (Burrage and Torstendahl 1990; Crompton 1990; Savage et al. 1992; Johnson 1993; Kirkpatrick and Lucio 1995) broadly supports Freidson’s analysis. In both countries, the liberal/independent professions are seen to have been badly shaken by the commodification, rationalization and deregulation of the services that they provide. In turn, these developments have seriously questioned the political and cultural authority that the liberal/independent professions have traditionally derived from their wider contribution to the maintenance of social integration and moral

order within increasingly fissile and unstable societies (Parsons 1939; Halmos 1966). Once the 'sacred' quality of professional practice is seriously questioned, then the sectional economic and political interests that lie behind public protestations of technical neutrality and professional disinterestedness may become much more difficult to disguise within the rhetoric of expert objectivity and necessity (Johnson 1993). Professional practice has traditionally distinguished itself from 'business' practice through the authoritative claim to 'disinterested universalism' in which the liberal professions portray their activities as fulfilling natural and social needs (Weber 1990: 45). Once they become 'tainted' through a much closer incorporation into business practice, this disinterested claim to moral and cultural authority is increasingly difficult to sustain.

Some researchers (e.g. Savage et al. 1992) have suggested that key groups of liberal/independent professionals located in the British public sector have been better placed to deflect the adverse consequences of politically inspired economic restructuring onto other social groups within the organization. However, this is countered by other research on British (and American) public-sector professionals (e.g. Cousins 1987, 1988; Coombs 1987; Pollitt 1993; Reed and Anthony 1993) which indicates that economic insecurity, technological rationalization and managerial control may have had a more long-lasting and damaging impact.

Indeed, there is growing evidence to suggest that the liberal/independent professions find themselves under attack from the organizational/managerial professions on the one side and entrepreneurial professions/knowledge workers on the other. The organizational/managerial professions have undoubtedly benefited from the policies and programmes of technological and organizational rationalization which large corporations in both the private and public sectors have engaged in over the last decade or so (Crompton 1990; Burriss 1993; Scarbrough and Burrell 1994). They have provided the 'firm-specific' bureaucratic knowledge and skills from which more extensive and intensive programmes of organizational surveillance and control have been mounted. At the same time, though, their 'organization assets' have been in decline as large private- and public-sector corporations have become less dependent on the cognitive and technical expertise that they once provided because it can now be more easily accumulated, stored and dispensed by advanced information and communication control systems. This is particularly the case in the 'Anglo-American' economies where corporate downsizing, delayering and rationalization have cut through vast swathes of lower and middle management functions and jobs (Savage et al. 1992; Scarbrough and Burrell 1994).

Again, there are significant national differences in the present position of the organizational and managerial professions. Research in several European countries (Boltanski 1987; Rojot 1989; Lane 1989; Torstendahl 1990) indicates that the comparative historical stability and state-

sponsored institutional power of the organizational/managerial professions in these countries (Urry 1995) has protected them from the worst ravages of restructuring. Nonetheless, 'organization-specific' expertise may become increasingly problematic as an effective power base when movements within the wider international political economy seem to push inexorably towards generality, mobility and flexibility.

It is in these terms that the, predominantly private sector, entrepreneurial professions/knowledge workers have been the real 'winners' in the economic, technological, political and cultural restructuring generated by the shift to a more globalized and flexible regime of capital accumulation. Research suggests that the 'occupationally-owned' assets of the liberal/independent professions and the 'organizationally-controlled' resources of the organizational/managerial professions are both under threat, if not in terminal decline. If this is the case, then it offers a golden opportunity to the entrepreneurial professions/knowledge workers to exploit the potential for cognitive expansion, material advancement and socio-political enhancement that these developments present. As Savage et al. (1992) argue, in an admittedly British context, it encourages 'a new division within the middle classes between a public sector, professional, increasingly female middle class, on the one hand, opposed to an entrepreneurial, private sector, propertied middle class on the other' (Savage et al. 1992: 218).

This interpretation finds a very strong resonance in the work of those researchers who have identified the increasing power and status of a 'post-industrial middle class' of knowledge workers. The latter design, implement and evaluate the informational, symbolic and communication control systems through which a much more reflexive and flexible form of capital accumulation becomes established on a global scale (Sassen 1991; Lash and Urry 1994). Indeed, they may be promoting a form of professionalism which is a hybrid of the liberal and managerial types. This becomes a possibility insofar as entrepreneurial professionalism dilutes the conventional institutional and occupational supports of independent professionalism, but compensates for these by turning to a more broadly based form of specialization and the decision-making prerogatives it facilitates in specific organizational contexts.

This also raises some crucial questions about the link between 'expert' and 'class' formation within the economic, social and political structures taking shape in late modernity.

Experts and Classes

The restructuring of expert division of labour between the various professional and managerial groups discussed in previous sections of this paper has major implications for class formation in advanced capitalist societies. This is the case in relation to internal restructuring within the middle class itself and in relation to the relationship between it and the

upper class on the one hand and the working class on the other (Crompton 1992; Savage et al. 1992; Lash and Urry 1994; Webster 1995).

Three general interpretations of the changing intra-class and inter-class dynamics of middle-class formation can be identified. First, there is the 'new service class' thesis, which, essentially, is a continuation of the relatively optimistic scenario set out in the 1970s and 1980s by writers such as Drucker (1969, 1993), Bell (1973), Gouldner (1979) and Goldthorpe (1982). Second, there is a much more pessimistic 'new technocracy' thesis that emphasizes increasing socio-economic polarization between a 'knowledge élite' within the middle class (now much more closely aligned with the dominant owning class) and a dispossessed and alienated 'underclass' (Derber et al. 1990; Sassen 1991; Zukin 1991; Burris 1993; Castells 1994; Lash and Urry 1994). Third, there is a 'class fragmentation' thesis, which suggests that the middle class is becoming so internally fragmented and diffused — as a result of developments reviewed in earlier sections of this paper — that it is now in a much weaker position to mobilize its resources behind any collective action or 'mobility project' (Child 1987; Bauman 1987; Savage et al. 1992; Crompton 1992; Beck 1994).

Supporters of the 'new service class' thesis maintain that the restructuring of expert work taking place in the 1980s and 1990s should be seen as a continuation of the matured integration of a more cohesive and powerful professional/managerial class set in motion by the economic, technological and organizational rationalizations of the 1960s and 1970s. The growing predominance of service employment — particularly in professional technical services — and 'theoretical knowledge' within post-industrial societies is seen to produce a situation in which professionals, scientists, engineers and managers emerge as the key social group. Over the last two decades, their occupational power, economic position and social status have reached a level where they have become much more institutionally secure and politically stable within a meritocratic class system dominated by strategic technical knowledge and skill. As a result, this established group of middle-class experts and professionals provides the primary source of economic inclusion and social cohesion within societies in which information and communication technologies are the pivotal source of material and social progress (Kumar 1978, 1995; Webster 1995).

However, the 'new technocracy' view argues that this reworking of the 'service class' thesis seriously underestimates both the extent to which expert/professional groups within the middle class are divided amongst themselves, and the extent to which some of them are playing an exclusionary, rather than inclusionary, political game. Indeed, exponents of this view perceive a deepening split between various expert fractions of the middle class as they struggle to exert effective control over scarce knowledge and skill as a basis for occupational exclusion and organizational subordination. At the same time, they highlight the emergence of a new 'technocratic élite' within the advanced technological, economic

and cultural sectors of global capitalism. This forms a highly effective 'exclusionary coalition' with the structurally dominant owning class and consigns increasing numbers of the deskilled, delayed and dispossessed ranks of managers, technicians and bureaucrats to 'semi-underclass' status. Thus, it is class exclusion and polarization between an 'advanced service sector' middle-class fraction and a 'routine or low-level service' middle-class fraction (dominated in employment terms by women, ethnic minorities, and deskilled men) which supporters of the 'new technocracy' thesis identify as the underlying dynamic of expert restructuring. In turn, they see these developments as reinforcing a broader process of class polarization between a relatively small and privileged upper/middle class coalition and the swelling ranks of a socially and organizationally excluded underclass.

Finally, the 'class fragmentation' view contends that the intensity of expert power struggle within the middle class has become so severe and pervasive that it has irreparably damaged the capacity of any of its constituent fractions to act as a social collectivity or to form viable alliances with other groups in superordinate or subordinate positions within the class structure. It suggests that the internal social heterogeneity of the contemporary middle class has reached a point where the mobilization of collective power and organization in pursuit of general economic and political objectives, over and above the relatively narrow self-defence of sectional jurisdictional domains, becomes very difficult if not impossible to envisage. Far from taking on the mantle of a dynamic 'service class' or a reactionary 'technocratic élite', power struggles between expert groups within the middle class are seen to have taken on a logic of their own that prevent any constituent fraction — liberal/independent professions or organizational/managerial professions or entrepreneurial professions/knowledge workers — from developing a more inclusive political strategy. Thus, the 'crippled monstrosities' of the working class that Marx once identified as the product of earlier phases of capitalist restructuring now have their counterparts in the contemporary middle class as its constituent expert groups seem to be crippled and neutered by the very forces that produced them (Anthony 1977: 297). The dynamic of global restructuring, in which the cognitive, technical, organizational and cultural expertise of the professional and managerial middle class have played such a vital role, 'turns back' on its creators in such a way that they can no longer control the very forces they have helped to unleash. They become so internally fragmented and divided, that their social reproduction and power as a cohesive and viable class grouping is seriously called into question.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a general overview and evaluation of the changing relationship between expert power, organizational control and

occupational/class formation in late modernity. It has argued that this restructuring process will continue to have fateful consequences for the major forms of expertise, organizational control and class power developing in advanced industrial societies. Indeed, it has suggested that the severe internal fragmentation of the professional and managerial middle class into warring expert groups may have reached a point where the former's capacity to exercise its strategic technical, economic and organizational power as a unified and cohesive social-class grouping may be seriously called into question. As such, the 'technologists of control' have to 'ride the tiger' of capitalist restructuring in late modernity, along with the rest of us. That they have made such a vital contribution to the underlying instability and uncertainty that this process of restructuring has generated may just turn out to be one of history's more poignant and significant ironies.

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