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Developing a conceptual framework for independent professionals

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Abstract:

This paper is by way of being a tentative enquiry into how best to analyse and categorise a particular development - that of the rise of the independent professional (IPro). It explores in outline the nature of IPro working, be it for example, in journalism, medicine, various forms of consultancy, IT contracting or design work. A key focus of this paper is to explicitly acknowledge some of the many tensions and controversies around IPros, not least the difficulty in defining them for policy, regulatory and other purposes. One of the identified central tensions is how best to research, analyse and reflect on this way of working. From the issues investigated and discussion which follows, I suggest that perhaps the core challenge is determining whether they fit most appropriately into a business/entrepreneurship paradigm (as a 'business of one') or whether they are more accurately dealt with as a specialised part of the labour market. The paper reviews some existing research and literature, mainly drawn from the UK and EU, that appears of relevance and tests their appropriateness for being the natural academic 'home' for IPros and reaches some tentative conclusions.

Keywords Independent professionals (IPros); definitions, conceptual frameworks, entrepreneurship, professionalism, employment relations.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to reflect on the significant growth in most developed economies of those, be they, for example, designers, writers, engineers, lawyers, medical specialists or consultants, who have chosen to work for themselves as self-employed independents (IPros) but who aim to develop work outputs through their knowledge, skills and work quality rather than by employing others. It is clear that, at least in the EU, these self-employed professionals are the fastest growing group at work, seeing 45% growth in the last decade (Rapelli, 2012; Leighton, 2013; IPPR, 2015). Further, it appears that their numbers will continue to grow (NESTA, 2015). In this paper the group will be referred to as IPros (Independent professionals) as being a 'label' which is achieving wider recognition, though it remains the case that labels such as 'freelancers', 'contractors' and 'sole traders' or 'sole practitioners' etc. are frequently used.

It is argued here that providing an effective academic, policy and regulatory response to this group, such that they can effectively self-manage as well as work successfully for clients requires a clear understanding of who, precisely, they are. To do this there needs to be a more complete and convincing analysis of not just why and how they work but also their location within the most appropriate paradigm(s) so as to explore and, hopefully, clarify a range of issues connected with the key features of this increasingly important group.

SOME TENSIONS

A literature is emerging on independent professionals, who are, judging by research and the rise of interest groups, especially well represented in Australia, UK, Netherlands, France and several other EU states. To date, this literature has tended to focus on the motivation for IPro working, IPros' work experiences and levels of job satisfaction, giving a somewhat 'personalised' view of IPro working (McKeown, 2009-14; Witvilet et al, 2014). This, in turn, tends to locate IPro working within a possibly somewhat ephemeral framework comprising knowledge workers, portfolio career workers, 'elancers', co-workers, and other categories where the consistent driver is said to be a desire for an enhanced 'work-life balance'. Others, seeking perhaps a more tangible framework, suggest that IPros might be located within a nano/micro/ 'business of one' or entrepreneurship framework (see, for example, Kitching and Smallbone, 2011 and 2012; Burke, 2011; EC, 2012 and 2013) and yet others see IPros as properly a specialist area of the employment relations framework (EC, 2013a). It must also be borne in mind that many IPros are members of liberal (traditional) professions, such as in law, medicine and architecture, where they are subject to long standing regulation and traditions which strongly inform their sense of identity.

Whatever the approach, there is no broadly accepted definition of IPro working. This intensifies the reluctance to recognise the integrity of iPro working and there is a tendency to see IPros as simply a default or ill-defined category (Leighton, 2014). For example, the entrepreneurship literature which, unsurprisingly, focusses on economic growth and job creation (see, for example, GEM Reports), finds difficulty in accommodating IPros. This is because they tend to self-define as sole professionals (Leighton, 2013), providing specialist services to clients and do not wish to grow by employing others. However, IPros argue that they do, in fact, contribute to job creation and economic growth by improving their clients' performance such that they, the clients, can create new jobs (Burke, 2012; EC, 2014). Many IPros recognise that they need to acquire entrepreneurial skills, for example, in

marketing and financial management but reject the notion that they are entrepreneurs (Leighton, 2013).

Some of the resistance to acknowledge the growth and importance of IPro working is more deep seated and controversial. For example, despite evidence of the expansion and increased attraction of IPro working, especially for younger and older people (Rapelli, 2012; Deloitte, 2013; BIS, 2015), there is a literature that sees IPros as a problem, not least because they present challenges to institutions and regulation. This could be because some consider IPros as part of the atypical/vulnerable workforce unable to find employee work or because they are in 'sham'/'false'/'disguised' or even 'fraudulent' employment relationships (EF, 2015). The relationship can, it is argued, be a 'sham' either because IPros are forced into self-employment by employers on a 'take it or leave it' basis, or they collude with employers to avoid fiscal and other obligations (Muehlberger, 2007; Casale, 2012). Currently, this hostility, which is strongly felt by IPros themselves (Leighton, 2013), has translated into measures in many states to curb IPro working and other types of self-employment (BIS, 2014; TSO, 2014; Eurofound, 2015). This is despite a paucity of data that indicates significant numbers of IPros are, indeed, in 'sham' or fraudulent relationships. These claims regarding 'sham' relationships are heard in most developed economies and are loud in Australia (ICA).

To date, other attempts to categorise IPros have also proved unconvincing. Are they, for example, a distinctive and recognised sub-set of the self-employed in the labour market? Or, are they a specialised or unique group at work? And there are other confusions, for example as to whether the skilled craft workers, many of whom have long training periods and demanding qualifications are part of the IPro community. Interestingly, rarely are IPros analysed as being simply self-employed. Of course, for statistical purposes, IPros are generally subsumed under the heading 'self-employment' but many see the issue of skills and qualifications as very relevant and to simply merge IPros with, say, retailers, construction and agricultural workers is inappropriate (Leighton and Felstead, 1992; EIRO, 2012; IPPR, 2015). Many IPros are anyway members of long-established liberal professions that often provide them with a monopoly over certain types of work. These IPros seem far removed from the less skilled self-employed

The challenge to identify the key features of IPro working and locate them within an appropriate conceptual and policy framework is daunting. IPros are united by their skill levels, their sense of individualism and autonomy, their commitment to their skill and way of working and their desire to provide a professional service to clients. But some things divide them. Some have worked previously as employees; others not. Around 17% of IPros across the EU are members of liberal professions, but the rest are not. The latter are seen increasingly as 'new' professionals (Pederisini and Coletto, 2009). Some work through limited companies or other business structures; others strongly reject that. Some see self-reliance, even during major adversity such as serious illness or lack of work as the hallmark of being an IPro. By contrast, others, typically younger or more newly established, seek some basic protections from the state in times of adversity or change. Some welcome membership of professional associations; others see them as elitist and irrelevant to their work. The list could continue. This clearly indicates that although IPros have a core of important shared values, they are in many ways a heterogeneous group. Nonetheless they are now sufficiently numerous and important group to require analysis and policy development. How can this be done?

A way ahead?

There are some indicators of a growing awareness of IPros and their work (especially through the work of professional associations such as ICA,EFIP), and their explicit though sometimes limited participation in policy developments within the EU. Despite recent improvement, it is argued that progress can only be maintained through developing a coherent and compelling critique of IPro working. This is not least in order to counter common misconceptions by policy-makers and others. One such is that as you are working for yourself, and are exposed to economic risk and, perhaps, have to comply with fiscal procedures geared to businesses, IPros are simply part of the business community. Similarly, the fact that some IPro occupations have historic origins similar to those of craft occupations, such as by having their roots in medieval guilds, those two groups have a congruence of purpose and outlook.

Put succinctly, if we do want a better understanding of IPro working, what tools do we use and where do we look? Currently, research and publications on IPro working can feature in a wide range of publications associated with different academic disciplines. There is no obvious 'natural home' for publications or conferences on IPros. Typically, they are a minor aspect of other disciplines, such as business and management, especially HRM, entrepreneurship, employment relations, employment law, social psychology, organisational behaviour, professionalism and regulation. Nonetheless, it is argued that by exploring these different discourses and by posing the questions: 'Does this help me to understand the essential nature of IPro working? And: 'Is there one discourse or paradigm that provides the most convincing explanation and insights?'

What follows is a tentative investigation of some disciplines and discourses that could have relevance. Some are well established; others more recent and exploratory. Some provide a critique based mainly on origins and evolution. Some are well developed; others less so. Most have contemporary issues to respond to and a current literature. All are based on the world of work and some recent changes and challenges (Gratton, 2011; Johns and Gratton;2013,Quinlan,2012). This list is by no means exhaustive and the paper simply covers some of the more obvious 'candidates'.

Possible sources (1) New Power

This is a new theory, developed by Heimans and Timms(2014) which explores some of the radical changes largely brought about by the possibilities of new technology and new networks which is challenging some of the traditional ways in which business is undertaken and managed. Although designed to better understand business organisations and how they operate, especially multi-national ones, this theory does seem to resonate with much that we already know about IPro working.

The New Power theorists explore global changes and explain the emergence of New Power by contrasting it with Old Power. Old power is described as follows;

It is held by few. Once gained, it is jealously guarded and the powerful have a substantial store of it to spend. It is closed, inaccessible and leader-driven.(Heimans and Timms, 2014 at p.50)

Large multi-national organisations with hierarchical structures and an emphasis on growth by acquisition are cited as examples of Old Power. Apple is seen by many as successful Old Power, as it

continues to innovate but much of what it does is shrouded in secrecy- a typical indicator of Old Power. The so-called Bilderberg Group might also be cited as an example of an Old Power elite influencing world affairs (Richardson, Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2011). Organisations rely on continuing consumption by uninvolved consumers/clients. Old Power also relies on a strong sense of corporatism and an overriding organisational culture which leaves little space for individual action, personal innovation and, logically, the self-employed who value autonomy and choice

New Power is defined as;

It is open, participatory and peer-driven. It uploads and distributes. Like water or electricity, it's most forceful when it surges. The goal with new power is not to hoard but to channel it (Heimans and Timms, 2014 at p.50)

New power has some key elements, though all underpinned by participation ('the agency of the crowd'). They include sharing ideas and activities with others (co-working?), funding (crowd funding, for example, by Wefunder, creating content or products within a peer community (YouTube, Airbnb) and co-owning (Wikipedia, Linux, the Alpha Course). These developments are also underpinned by a change in values, to an extent, prompted by a growing distrust of typical old power institutions like banks and political parties.

New Power, it is argued, sees collaboration as a better business model than competition; places a high premium on transparency, democratic processes and networks. However, Heimans and Timms do not present the ideas of New Power as utopia. They see some dangers, not least that organisations develop the technological tools for change but do not embrace its values. They graft Twitter, Facebook etc onto existing structures and develop other apparently participatory strategies but without the necessary cultural changes.

There are also many opportunities for conflicts between Old and New Power. The oft-cited example is that of Uber, the New Power ride sharing/taxi service. It relies on peer collaboration between the driver and passengers, supported by sophisticated software and a strong emphasis on trust between the parties. However, Uber is being challenged from a number of directions. There is growing competition from other service providers, such as Lyft and Airbnb that aim to achieve better results than Uber by stressing a new alignment between New Power models and New Power values. It is argued that Uber, in its ambition of achieving higher surpluses and therefore benefits to investors, is sliding back into Old Power territory.

In addition, Old Power in the form of regulated taxi drivers in major cities have hit back. They have protested at what they see as unfair competition. Taxi drivers are subject, typically, to knowledge and performance standards, and there are continuing calls for Uber and others to be regulated in the interests of consumer protection. Critics of the regulated taxi drivers point out that in many places entry to that occupation is tightly, though sometimes informally, regulated and there are small but effective cartels in existence designed to protect income levels and other matters. This will be an interesting battle to observe! Heimans and Timms have also generated a major debate within social media. Many contributors see the merit in their analysis, especially feminist writers who argue that two men have simply caught up with much feminist discourse! Others note the fragility in the model, and the ability of Old Power to regroup and sustain their position.

What is the relevance of this for IPro analysis? It is argued that there is much to ponder on in this Old Power/New Power debate. We know from research into IPros themselves that for many, the motivation for becoming self-employed is to move from hierarchical, formal employment structures into more autonomous, collaborative and networked ways of working. The growth in co-working is a clear example. We also suspect that another motivator of IPro working is the intention that individuals or groups of IPros can compete for work against large businesses, through a combination of speed, agility and cost (Witwilet, 2014). We also know that outside the liberal professions, IPros are not generally keen to be members of professional associations and work within traditional lines of communication and support and want to develop new networks and associations (Leighton, 2013). There is then the question of regulation which, again, outside the liberal professions and even sometimes within them, many do not welcome and some IPros seek looser, networked ways of association (SCOMO, 2013).

The New Power discourse does, therefore, help to explain some aspects of IPro working especially IPro working in the 'new professions' and developments such as co-working and other collaborative models. It is, though, a model that lacks robust research underpinning, is subject to constant change and does not respond to some of the really basic questions about IPro working. This is unsurprising, as the New Power discourse is geared to business behaviour. Individuals have different needs and interact with state as well as business structures. Much of the current debate around IPro working is regarding fiscal and social security issues and about training and skills development, much typically provided by the state. This constitutes the broad context of Ipro working, as opposed to their day to day work activity, where New Power does appear to have considerable relevance.

Further, insofar as New Power explains the changing values which have featured strongly in IPro research (McKeown, 2009-14), and its challenges to existing and often excluding organisational forms along with an emphasis on the power of the individual, it does reflect the spirit of much IPro working and does explain some contemporary developments. It sets IPro working into a wider developmental framework and suggests that the ways that many IPros work, eg collaboratively and autonomously are timely and probably effective. Should the New Power model have even greater impact, especially through the use of social media and technological advances more generally, it suggests that IPro working will have an expanded future.

But it also highlights some dangers. For example, if IPros do, indeed, want individualism and do not want to be a part of established market place 'players', they run the risk of being overwhelmed by continuous change and isolation. Change and fluctuations also contain seeds of a wider vulnerability, especially where power is so dispersed. New Power argues for process, perhaps rather than substance, though makes some valid and interesting points. Specifically, there is little said on sustaining a market base other than through using new tools and new circumstances to your benefit.

Overall, it is arguable that the New Power model is relevant and there are many useful ideas and experiences to draw from it. It gets us some way to understanding contemporary changes, not least, the rejection by many IPros of working in hierarchical organisations as employees (Leighton et al, 2007; 2013 and 2015), and the freedom and choice that they crave. However, looking at the highly skilled in terms of developing and sustaining their skills and giving them the ability to compete and thrive, possibly a more substantial model is needed to understand IPro working than New Power?

If New Power is very 'here and now' what might history have to offer?

Possible sources (2) History (of skilled work)

It is a truism, but there is nothing new about highly skilled people working for themselves. It is not a reaction to Taylorism, HRM or other developments in the last hundred years. It is simply a natural way to work for people who are not low or unskilled and therefore classed as labourers or manual workers in post- feudal societies. In some states these low skilled workers have been subject to statutory regulation(In the UK, the first Statute of Labourers, 1351 that required people to work and set maximum pay levels and the Apprentices Act, 1531. Both were poorly enforced. Indeed, these statutes can be seen as historic examples of Old Power).

However, it is the history of medieval guilds that appears to have most promise in explaining aspects of skilled and self-employed IPro working. There is a useful and developed literature on guilds (Epstein, 1991; Ward, 1997;Richardson, 2001) indicating that the setting up of organisations to support and protect the skilled worker has a long history going back to Roman times. Groups of skilled workers that banded together were then called ‘collegios’, a title that some professional organisations across Europe still retain today. Medieval guilds began to form across Europe from the 12th century with a high degree of commonality. (This reminds us that the aims of the EU in setting standards for professions, requiring mutual recognition of qualifications and freedom of movement is nothing new!). The aims of guild were to protect members from excessive taxation (a constant theme of independent working?) and to ensure the livelihood of their members. There were religious guilds, merchant guilds and craft guilds, the last being the most directly relevant for present purposes. Guilds had some defining features, not least relating to training, and status. Guilds were powerful, not least through their role in helping the setting up of some of the best known European universities, such as Bologna, Paris and Oxford.

The main purposes of guilds were to provide protections for members, including through fixing prices for work, the prevention of illicit or unqualified trading, limiting entry and numbers and the regulation of working conditions. To an extent, therefore, the guild had some of the features of liberal professions but also of some trade unions today. The merits of guilds were that they provided quality assurance and accountability for clients/consumers along with investment in and protection of skills development. However, the history of guilds reveals often long-running battles with governments over taxation but also their autonomy and possible challenge to power bases. Interestingly, there were also tensions between the merchant guilds that represented the business and commercial interests of their members, and the craft guilds.

Guilds, typically, had three stages of membership. These were apprentice, journeyman and master. The first stage, often lasting many years was an unpaid learning stage, directed by a master. The second, as a journeyman following qualification in the skill, allowed the worker to practice their skill on a self-employed basis. The word ‘journeyman’ is said to be derived from the French ‘jour’ which referred to both payment by the day and to willingness to travel for work (A journey). A journeyman was not allowed to employ others and so learnt to be self-reliant. This practice of gaining experience through travel, working for a range of clients and developing business skills, as well as furthering technical skills has endured to today in some countries, especially Germany, and in some sectors, especially design and construction. It might be of interest that the guilds did not differentiate between men and women, with the latter often taking on a role, especially within the Guild structure, when their husband died.

From the seventeenth century, guilds began to decline across Europe, hastened by industrialisation but also by their own self-seeking and in many states they were abolished by law, especially during the nineteenth century. Nonetheless, there is much to take out of this necessarily brief overview.

First, the guild system brought structure, consistency and order to the delivery of skilled work. The individuals were both supported and subject to professional discipline.

Second, the system of training, mentoring and professional development was very impressive. Guilds, from an individual perspective, encouraged autonomy combining it with structure, status and some sense of collectivism. However, the natural heirs of the guilds are today the liberal professions that have continued the practices of vocational training, including through CPD, professional membership, codes of practice and the application of rules, including those that provide a monopoly that can be seen as protectionism.

Within the EU this perceived protectionism has led to legislation aimed to end practices if they inhibit or prevent both freedom of movement and competition. Such legislation has only been partially successful and there are current calls for re-enforcing the law (Macron, 2014; EC, 2014a). IPros are not directly involved in these issues, for it is thought that the majority of IPros, especially those in occupations such as design, marketing, IT, public relations, management consultancy, new health professions such as psychology, physiotherapy, dieticians, as well as trainers, translators etc are not members of liberal professions and if they are subject to regulation it tends to be relatively low level.

IPros appear to be generally hostile to protectionism and so-called 'red tape' and few seek membership of bodies that would facilitate it. Indeed, when undertaking interviews for the study into European IPros (Leighton, 2013) comments such as the following were typical of attitudes towards professional associations; *'It was a complete waste of time belonging. Mostly members were employees and their interests dominated. They wanted to be closed shops and they wanted recognition and control. I want to be free'* (UK management journalist); *(The association) 'was just a talking shop and everybody wanted power'* (French specialist engineer); *'They are just an elite, looking after themselves'* (Italian IT specialist). (Leighton, 2013 p. 33)

Third, the tensions that were absent when the guilds were at their height and were confident, professional and well organised but emerged when they were under threat are now much in evidence today. IPros now want autonomy, they want to be able to provide their professional services freely, and they want to be flexible and innovative. (One can contrast the position of the financial or tax advisor/consultant with that of the (Highly regulated) accountant). Yet there is a paradox. There is no obligation on most IPros to belong to and comply with the requirements of professional bodies. However, when undertaking research into their work and experiences, what emerged very strongly was that they *do* want a 'Voice'. They want policy-makers and others to be aware of them; they want advocates and they want systems to respond to their needs. The guilds were powerful organisations in both economic and political terms. Many IPros appreciate that they are a diverse and fragmented group of workers and that getting support is hard: *'It's a bit strange-you want to be independent so how can you get someone else to support you'* (Polish writer); *'We are fragmented so getting a Voice is hard'* (Dutch specialist Translator). Others were more positive; *'In reality, we are powerful. We need to stress the benefits we bring'* (German website designer) but others were quite sanguine; *'I don't think politicians are frightened by IPros-they would be more*

worried if trade unions supported them' (Polish conference interpreter). Others spoke of the most effective way to get a Voice is through collaboration. 'I think it's simple; we need to co-operate across Europe, we need to exchange best practices, to influence the European Parliament and generally get heard (A senior member of a body that represents Auto-entrepreneurs in France(Leighton 2013 Chap.5).

Fourth, the 'individualism versus collectivism' debate that today features so strongly was missing when the guilds were strong. Then there appeared to be no resistance to the idea that individuals can value autonomy yet come together for specific reasons. Since the medieval period and after the demise of guilds by the early nineteenth century, trade unions have evolved into legally recognised bodies that, broadly, just support employees and those within formal employment relationships. It may be oversimplifying it, but the model today is still very much one of 'us and them' (workers and then employers and governments) and although industrial relations have now metamorphosed into social dialogue and more of a shared approach, there remains huge hostility by most unions and in most countries to IPros.(But see Heery, 2005).

And yet research shows that IPros do want representation, a representation that is sensitive to their needs and characteristics. Can trade unions welcome IPros and support them? There are some unions, especially in the creative industries that have done just that, for example, Equity in the UK, and freelancers unions in the Netherlands, Finland, Germany and USA. Yet many tensions remain, not least around allegations of 'sham' relationships, concerns around IPros de-stabilising industrial relations and, of course, the lack of any clear political support.

There is some evidence that employment agencies, the relatively new umbrella organisations and recently established professional associations/bodies are providing protections and moving beyond just administrative and fiscal support for individuals. Umbrellas are contentious, as they explicitly aim to minimise fiscal liability for IPros. These various bodies may or may not provide the level of support of the medieval guilds. Of course, at that time the world of work was less complex, but competition in a highly integrated European and Asian marketplace was considerable and one can perhaps learn much from a study of the guilds when thinking how best to cater for the needs and successful use of IPros.

Possible sources (3) Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship, with its connotations of innovation, growth, job creation and business heroes is a seductive model. These qualities make entrepreneurs attractive to politicians and policy-makers and in recent years we have seen a raft of public measures in most developed economies to support entrepreneurship (EC,2013). The entrepreneur, through the media as well as public policies, is generally an object of admiration , being seen as dynamic, a risk taker, an innovator and, perhaps, most importantly, a major player in national competitiveness and growth. This impression can be strongly contrasted with typical attitudes towards IPros, often treated with suspicion and sometimes met with allegations of tax avoidance, especially through 'sham' employment contracts. It is unsurprising, therefore, that many supporters and analysts of IPro working see merit is allying themselves with the entrepreneurship agenda and culture.

Therefore, for present purposes, it would seem that setting IPros within the micro enterprise, nano-entrepreneurship framework would make sense. There are clear links between the work of many

IPros in creative, innovative and fast-moving areas of work and, and yet, are IPros truly a part of this model? Is the simple answer to refer to IPros as 'businesses of one'? And then promote IPro working within the business community, drawing on that community's strength and support structures? The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor(GEM), perhaps the world's leading researchers and analysts of entrepreneurship appears to include the self-employed, though as the data provided by GEM does not disaggregate data by businesses and sole self-employed we are unsure.

The study of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurism emerged during the eighteenth century, initially studying simply 'starting one's own business' with Richard Cantillon (Cantillon,1755) the initiator. His approach was to see the key characteristics of entrepreneurs as being attitudes to risk-taking and uncertainty. Entrepreneurism was born in an age of challenge and change, an age when the individual was important, rather than religions or states. One feels that many of today's IPros, with their strong sense of autonomy and creativity but their rejection of elites and bureaucratic institutions and polices would have been comfortable in this period. It was the age of ideas, with the likes of Kant, Locke, Hume, and Voltaire arguing for democracy, participation and individuals. These early writers saw privilege and protectionist structures, including the guilds, as barriers to change and development.

Over the next two centuries, the analysis of entrepreneurship evolved, with Schumpeter developing ideas of creative destruction in order to create the ideal conditions for business development and an increasing emphasis on not just starting a business but expanding it(Ahmad and Seymour,2007). Peter Drucker aimed to somewhat re-balance this approach by stressing micro- economic theory (Knight and Drucker,1959)rather than just macro, and also to focus on the personal characteristics of successful entrepreneurs. These include creativity, dedication, determination, flexibility, passion, self-confidence, smart, having diverse social ties, having experience of work already and being motivated to greater or lesser extent by money (Drucker, 1959).

Interestingly, both Drucker and other writers (For example, Cooper,2006) explicitly included knowledge workers in their entrepreneurship categories. They foresaw the shift from manufacturing to service work, the increasing importance of communication systems and the opportunities this gave rise to. IPros are generally seen as knowledge workers, albeit in a very wide range of professions or under the general headings of 'consultant', 'advisor' and the like, often typical of the role of liberal professionals.

So; is this the most appropriate model for IPros? There is no doubt that the entrepreneurship discourses have relevance for IPro working, especially in terms of personal characteristics and motivations of those who work this way. Indeed, many writers envisage that their analyses as well as their practical advice is just as appropriate for IPros as for those aiming to set up and grow a small firm. Kim, Longest and Aldrich, for example, have provided useful advice for the self-employed start-up. Many of these self-employed start-ups are anyway by knowledge workers. Other writers muse whether, for example, freelance workers, typically in the creative industries, are in reality small businesses (Kitching and Smallbone,2012), as they have many similarities and do not fit easily elsewhere. Similarly, other writers highlight the role that IPros play in contributing to growth and efficiency in larger firms, this time in the UK construction industry. They are appreciated for their flexibility, innovation and skills (Burke, 2011,2012)

But are IPros really best located within the entrepreneurship model? The first point that perhaps needs to be made is that, just as with IPros themselves, there are many problems in defining entrepreneurship. Some definitions stress the management skills of entrepreneurs, others leadership, other risk-taking and innovation. Ahmad and Seymour(2007), in reflecting on the problem of defining entrepreneurship, see Schumpeter's approach as critical, but are wary of the tendency to support definitions and analyses that are essentially 'top-down'. They see 'bottom-up' approaches as preferable in order to better measure performance. Other and recent research indicates growing concerns about productivity, including by apparently innovative start-ups (NESTA, 2014). So, if entrepreneurship is seen as the most appropriate 'home' for IPros they would still be surrounded important issues and challenges.

But is it even the most appropriate? Most research and writing on entrepreneurship focusses on development and growth. There is an emphasis on accessing finance, establishing the most useful business structure, developing ideas into viable commercial outputs, effective marketing and recruiting and managing staff. The GEM project and data is a good example of these priorities. Success is measured in terms of economic performance, growth and job creation (GEM,2014).

Research indicates that IPros do not see success in this way. They are providing skills to a client on a B2B or B2C basis, skills that can equally be provided in most cases by an employee or, indeed, through an intermediary. A journalist can be a 'staff' reporter or freelance; a doctor can work for a state health service as an employee or be in private practice; an ITC specialist can work in- house or as a contractor. So; IPro working is very much about choice and what informs that choice. The research into IPros themselves provides clear indicators of motivation and the data is consistent across different countries, suggesting that cultural factors and varying regulatory frameworks do not have major impact.

This research indicates that the main drivers of IPro working are autonomy, choice, flexibility, opportunity and a strong commitment to a particular skill(s) (IPro Index, 2009-14; Mckeown,2000). Success is judged not so much by expanding the business but by the quality of work, variety and nature of clients as well, of course, as income and derived status. IPros are essentially high skill, professional workers who do not wish to be employees and who have rejected the hierarchies, cue seeking and, as they see it, much of the negativity of contemporary people management. Comments by IPros for the 2013 European Study (Leighton, 2013) and into Dutch IPros (Witvilet et al, 2014) confirm the issues of choice and rejection of standard employment. Typical comments were; '*As an employee I had become a manager and had ceased being the specialist medical writer that I am. I wanted to get back to that (UK; medical writer);' As I lived in France the choice was simple-being an employee in agriculture or freelancing. I wanted to be my own boss, so.....(French agricultural engineer);'I had just got fed up with the burden and boredom (as an employee)'(UK lawyer);'When I worked as an employee I felt like a robot and was undervalued' (German designer)Leighton,2013Chap.4).*

When interview respondents were asked to self-define, for example, as a 'contractor, 'self-employed', sole trader' professional' etc not one IPro considered themselves an entrepreneur. They associated entrepreneurship with business growth, creating jobs, aiming to become a big business and that was not how they saw themselves. The most typical comment from many respondents was '*Well, I am not an entrepreneur, though I do have to be entrepreneurial*'. Indeed, there is no doubt

that business skills are essential; for most IPros. The EU has recognised this in terms of the business skills of liberal professions (EC, 2014). Interestingly, the scope of the EU's intervention is far wider than the traditional liberal professions and extends into 'new' professions, such as in real estate, consultants and advisors and a range of health professionals.

Further, many argue that the essence of entrepreneurship is being risk tolerant and not seeking external support for business owners when things go wrong. This might not just be in financial terms but health problems and accidents as well as being pregnant and unable to work. Ipros tend not to see themselves as separate from or excluded from social systems and support structures. It is always important to bear in mind that the Ipro community is a very broad one. There are, of course some, such as engineers, accountants and ITC specialists who will have significant incomes, limited company, and who typically insure themselves privately or have personal finances. However, others, especially younger Ipros often struggle financially, many being in already competitive industries, such as the media, design and some types of consultancies. They tend not to have reserves, insurances and when they cannot work, they struggle to survive. The picture is very varied but in most countries Ipros do make significant social security contributions but in many countries their ability to claim for support when they are ill, injured etc is very limited or impossible. Interviews suggest that most Ipros do take the idea of independence seriously, and do expect to be self-reliant, but they are aggrieved by the levels of contributions they make contrasted with their limited access to benefits (Leighton, 2013).

The entrepreneurship discourse clearly has much of relevance for IPros and research suggests that, with reservations, they identify with some of the attributes of entrepreneurs. However, in the light of their attitudes towards entrepreneurship, their departure from the norms of economic growth through job creation and their often less than wholehearted tolerance of risk, especially in the parts of the EU dominated by the so-called European Social Model there must be some reservations about simply seeing IPro as a 'businesses of one', nano- businesses or, indeed, entrepreneurs.

Possible source 4 Professionalism

The use of the term 'independent professionals' indicates that individuals within the group we are considering consider themselves 'professional'. Being a professional differentiates you from other groups at work and bestows status, indicating knowledge and skills and, increasingly, those professional skills are characterised as being in knowledge work (Gorman and Sandufer, 2011). But this topic is also highly complex and subject to many controversies.

If there is some difficulty in defining entrepreneurship, this pales into insignificance compared with the problems surrounding 'professionalism'. At one level, 'professional' simply connotes combining skills and knowledge with certain standards of behaviour, often referred to as ethics. At another level, the term connotes being a member of a highly structured and regulated body which, if not having monopoly powers over certain activities, is certainly able to dominate a market (Abbott, 1988; Cullen, 1978).

The groups with the greatest powers and organisations are the liberal professions of law, medicine and more recently accountancy, architecture, engineering etc. (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933). There is therefore a close relationship between some professional groups and regulation. The liberal professions have been both generally self-regulating but within a regulatory and often statutory

framework that generally guarantees protection. They are, of course, the heirs of the guilds that have been previously considered.

Several writers trace the evolution of professions, highlighting the combination of competence and monopoly powers, which was probably at its height in the early nineteenth century, with the rise of new occupations seeking these monopoly powers (Larsen, 2012). This gave rise to 'turf wars' between groups such as physicians and pharmacists, doctors and various para-medics, lawyers and accountants. Later there was the rise of what Etzioni (1969) referred to as the 'semi-professions', typically skilled but without monopoly powers. The last fifty years, especially within the EU, there has been an on-going battle to wrest some of the powers from the liberal professions and open up work to a wider range of people. In other words, increasingly, some professions have had to justify their privileged status. For a detailed study of how this process has impacted on one profession, law, see Fish, 2004.

The last few years have seen a revival of interest in professions. Gorman and Sands (2011) argue that we have seen a wider range of occupations described as 'professions'. This includes many of the groups covered by Pederisini and Coletto(2009) when defining the 'new 'professions which can be seen as professional so long as they meet certain criteria. Gorman and Sands state that these are having expert knowledge, autonomy, a normative expectation grounded in community, high status and high rewards.

All of this is contested, with some wanting to limit professional status to a few, traditional occupations and others arguing that there should be few rules and few protections applying to professions (Clementi, 2005). Today, perhaps for the first time for many decades we have a new issue. This is the calls for *increased* regulation, greater protections, all in the interests of patient/consumer/client safety and well- being (Alliance for Patient Safety, 2014).

Does this help us to see whether the analyses and critiques of professionalism provide a useful framework for IPros? As referred to earlier, we think that around 17%-20% of those deemed to be IPros in the EU (Rapelli,2012) are members of liberal professions. Therefore most IPros are not. They may, of course be subject to regulatory controls, for example, as financial advisors, translators, brokers etc. but most IPros are not obliged to and it seems are not especially keen to join professional bodies (Leighton,2013). Interestingly, they see such bodies as archetypical 'old power'-hierarchical, elitist, closed and concerned primarily with protectionism.

Does this mean the issues around professions and professional development are not relevant? For the 80% of IPros the answer is both Yes and No. Yes, because the debates around professionalism still seem focussed on the liberal professions who guard their status tenaciously. But No, in that what we have seen in recent years has been the creation or evolution of professional associations whereby through a range of measures the value of formal professional recognition is highlighted. These measures in the UK include bodies seeking chartered status, providing gradations of membership, such as Fellows and senior Fellows, prizes and awards. These bodies, as well as providing status, often provide a social arena that can offset the isolation that some IPros feel, along with networking opportunities. If the definition of 'profession' is widened so as to focus on high skill, following the Gorman and Sands definition above, and there are organisations that aim to support them, be they associations supporting specialist work work, such as journalism, public relations, para -medicine and training, or associations that contain a wide range of IPro working the professionalism

paradigm seems helpful. Indeed, umbrella organisations and other professional networks can be relevant. This topic of an expanded view of professions and professional bodies merits further research.

However, the complexity of notions of 'professionalism', the relatively recent development of new types of support structures for 'non-liberal' IPros suggest that although this could and should be a relevant paradigm the professionalism discourse does not yet provide enough insight so as to be the major tool with which to analyse IPros.

Clearly, a related issue for a paradigm based on notions of professionalism is that of regulation itself, with trends towards de-regulation and increased possibilities for competition but also growing concerns for consumer protection. The possible changes make professionalism, with its emphasis on knowledge, skills and a client focus, an intriguing topic but perhaps not yet one that can yet provide answers to the riddle of understanding IPros.

Possible source (5) Employment relationships

The last few decades have seen increasing diversification in employment relationship, such that although standard working with a full-time, contract of employment remains the dominant employment form, people are engaged in increasingly different and sometimes complex relationships. Included here are job-sharing, homeworking, flexi hours, annualised hours which are, in effect, variations on (or, it can be argued, a concession from) the standard contract (Leighton and Syrett, 1989). At the same time, other employee relationships involve a high degree of risk but also opportunity, such as commission-based working and the provision of large bonuses typical of the financial services sector. Some see these changes as indicative of a new type working-the 'entrepreneurial employee' (GEM, 2012). It can then be argued that that these practices illustrate that opportunity and risk are by no means confined to the self-employed or SMEs.

More recently, new types of employment have emerged or grown significantly (Freedland and Kountouris,(2011), including, of course, the significant growth in IPro working. The change is that many of the newer forms of employment have broken the umbilical cord with a single employer. People are supplied to a client/employer by an intermediary and complex skills supply chains have developed. Umbrella companies have the contractual link with the employer/client rather than the individual supplied to the client to work for them. And people themselves are working on an associative or co-operative basis, such as co-working. Even within traditional areas of work, such as law, medicine, banking and health-care new forms of relationships have evolved, involving IPros on an associative basis (SCOMO in Leighton,2013). These changes have put considerable pressure on the legal framework common to virtually all jurisdictions, which is still overwhelmingly geared to standard working. Even the gradual development of flexible working, such as part-time work and job sharing has not been easily accommodated (Lewis, 1997;Juidiesch and Lyness,1999; Perlow and Kelly(2014);WERS,2014) and this is despite considerable legal efforts to support various forms of flexible working, especially from the EU(EU Directive of Part-time Work, 1997, Fixed Tern Work (1999)and Agency Working(2008)).

Accommodating IPros within an employment relations framework has proved a very difficult task. The reasons are not hard to find. First, there is difficulty is defining IPro working itself, and the intrinsic heterogeneity within the IPro population. Second, there is the close link between both HRM

and Industrial relations as disciplines defining employment as closely structured and interdependent. This has been compounded by an innate reluctance to accept change, especially that of increasing flexibility and autonomy in employment relations more generally. In a sense both HRM and traditional industrial relations are strong examples of the 'Old Power' considered earlier. Third, there is the increasing suspicion regarding independent working and the desire of many policy-makers within the EU, in particular, to restore traditional, organised and apparently more stable work and social forms.

The concerns have come to head in many jurisdictions over 'sham' employment relationships whereby it is alleged that people are coerced into 'false' self-employment or collude with an employer to become self-employed so as to avoid fiscal, employment and social responsibilities (OTS,2014/15). This is a very familiar and global story, not helped by the lack of data confirming or rebutting the extent of these alleged 'sham' relationships. There is no question but that this issue hangs over the analysis and policy development of IPros, and there is no sign of its abatement.

These three factors make it difficult to argue that IPros are simply a special sub-group within employment relationships, employment law and for social security purposes. Many, especially younger IPros, see themselves as being a part of the labour market, rather than the business community.(Leighton,2013). They seek ways in which a balance can be found between them having independence , mobility, choice and autonomy on the one hand, but provided with appropriate levels of protections from adversity, such as illness and accidents, maternity and basic family rights, equal opportunity at work and the protection of their human rights on the other. Some refer to the protections as a 'floor of rights' (EC, 2006) and should a clear model emerge of what rights would be appreciated by IPros and governments, this could be a way forward.

To achieve this, much needs to be done. We need much more extensive data on the priorities, work experiences and implications of seeing IPros as a part of labour markets, but most importantly we need improved trust and the campaigns need to be ended aiming to marginalise at best and demonise at worst IPro working through alleged sham relationships need to be ended.

REFLECTIONS

The growth and to an extent, the institutionalisation of IPro working, is a new and challenging feature of many developed economies. Unsurprisingly, the discourse around them is limited, though growing. Yet, in many ways IPros have a long history, especially in terms of the contributions of medieval guilds to the training and development of autonomous working. The background and work of journeymen merits further probing, as much resonates with research into the day to day experiences of Europe's IPros especially for the 2013 project(Leighton, 2013). There is much of value to draw on from the literature that traces both the rise and the fall of guilds and the ideas that they spawned.

Interestingly, the other source of ideas is the recent and fascinating Old Power: New Power discourse that explains the new contexts within which businesses make decisions and operate but which also resonates with what we know about how individual IPros are influenced and make choices. Of particular interest are the 'Old Power' vertical work relationships within hierarchical employing organisations that Timms and Heimans describe, whereby 'Old Power' work relationships have been forged through notions of interdependency, HRM's psychological contract and the

crushing of 'differentness'. Their characterisation of 'New Power' as working in a more 'horizontal', collaborative and networked basis was published after the field work for the 2013 research. Nonetheless, their thesis goes a long way to explaining why an increasing number of especially young people are attracted by collaborative, networked, co-working environments. One senses that this is not a temporary phase or one generated by the recession since 2008. It seems there is a genuine wish for autonomy, self-reliance and collaborative ways of working.

Second, an exploration of the historical development of independent working does yield other important insights, not least that the current tensions between different groups in the labour market and the battle between competition and protectionism are not new. These tensions have been and remain features of the role of liberal professions and their attempts to retain supremacy within professional working. At the same time, history tells us about the importance of not only developing skills but sustaining and supporting them. Where guilds and powerful liberal professions provided the training and support structures, we know that some forms of IPro working are able to be sustained. But, what of the 'new' professionals who are rejected by liberal professionals but also not provided for by the state? If the highly skilled are integrated effectively into communities they can be a powerful force for economic development and influence.

Third, that 'professionalism' itself has always been a complex and unstable concept, though professionalism has often been closely guarded and remains a defining feature of some areas of work. This is an important topic today when the mantra of 'de-regulation/removing red tape' is for the first time in many years being scrutinised. It seems that the value of professionalism should not be disregarded as being 'red tape' and anti-competitive. The guild and the emerging professions from the nineteenth century well understood the need for quality assurance and customer care. De-regulation is a mantra that has benefits in its encouragement of competition and rejection of monopolies. But, history also tells us that client and consumer protection is vital and without it, IPros may well suffer. Some IPros see the advantages of competition today and the removal of protectionism. But, where might this lead? Regulation remains a very important topic to study. It seems also that traditional 'lines in the sand' between different groups-with the liberal professional clearly separated from 'new' professionals and craft workers are breaking down. This will require urgent policy re-consideration within many organisations.

Fourth, that entrepreneurship, although it has obvious attractions is also an unstable yet inflexible concept, with notions of risk and opportunity that appear inherently in need of reconsideration, given that not only IPros but employees are subject to increasing levels of risk. Recent research is also indicating that the traditional approaches to entrepreneurship are not necessarily producing successful and sustained businesses and this may be one explanation for the reluctance of so many IPros to see themselves as entrepreneurs.

Finally, we have tended to see entrepreneurship and employment as intrinsically opposites-you are either subject to control and patronage as an employee or tolerated at best as self-employed or you are free as an entrepreneur. This needs re-assessment. Although it is possible to see that IPros may fit 'best' within the employment relations paradigm, there is also a real need to re-assess many aspects of it. These relate to notions of careers, reward, development, often linked to skills development and well as accommodating IPros' need for a Voice.

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