How does the professional learn to practice?

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With an over emphasis on rational knowledge, primarily acquired at the beginning of the education process, how do professionals learn to practice? In today’s society professions have gained in number, power and status and increased their reliance on knowledge gained in Higher Education. However, this is in contradiction to what professionals suggest is important to enable them to practice in their everyday working lives (CIPD, 2006, Cheetham, 2001). This paper will explore the history and current status of professions, in order to understand the background to the current state of play. The paper will then focus on the Human Resource professional body; Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), discussing the changes in its entry requirements and education programme. Finally, throughout the paper the critical discussion will be illustrated using research from practising Human Resource (HR) students and their managers who are involved in a three year longitudinal, matched pair study.

Research Process

This research is based on information taken from two years of a three year longitudinal study. Annual in-depth paired interviews have been held with one trainee human resource practitioner and one manager in each organisation (see table 1). The study includes one manufacturing company, two multi-national fast food service providers and two local authorities. Table 1 illustrates the research phase and development process of the trainees.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>PHASE IN RESEARCH PROCESS</th>
<th>PHASE IN DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept-July 2004/5</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Trainee student at university and employed in workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept-July 2005/6</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Trainee practising in workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept-July 2006/7</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Trainee practising in workplace. Some may be at university studying MA HRM.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 1 – Research Phase

The three-dimensional model (figure 1) by (Brinberg and McGrath, 1985) informed the research process. In this model research has to operate in three different domains; a conceptual domain concerned with abstract ideas and theories about the nature of the world; a substantive domain associated with explicit empirically observable phenomena, problems or settings and a methodological domain associated with the procedures used to relate ideas from the conceptual domain to the ‘real world’.
Applying the model to this research, the conceptual domain reflects abstract ideas related to the process of becoming and developing oneself as a professional. This includes literature on professions, nature of knowledge and CIPD profession.

The substantive domain reflects the concerns of the student and manager in the workplace. This comprises feedback from students and managers on the process of professional development including what enables or constrain their practice, for example, level of support offered by organisation, career opportunities available to gain experience etc.

Finally, the methods domain is concerned with the methods used to capture the process. The methods fit with the author’s ontological perspective; that we are dealing with a subjective, irrational process. Such a process thus fits with a qualitative data to collecting research data. This research, in the author’s opinion, will provide ‘rich data’ that is more relevant and powerful information. While it may not be generalisable due to its small numbers, the diachronic nature and longitudinal process will provide important insights (Langley et al., 2003).

**History of Professions**

Professionalism was acknowledged in the twentieth century as a contribution to our ‘complex civilisation’ (Freidson, 1970). The professions have played an important role in the development of British society and the organization of work since pre-industrial times (Earle, 1989). The earliest and most powerful of the professions were Clergy, Law and Medicine: with law and medicine being perceived to be the ‘ideal type’ (Eraut, 1994a). The ‘ideal type’ referred to the way the earliest type of profession organized itself and it’s members. As a result other professions modeled themselves on this ‘ideal type’. However, professional
groups and the term ‘profession’ have developed in the last century. The development of the professions is more pronounced in Britain and America than in Europe where the State has a more interventionist role in the development of training and employment (Freidson, 1994). Nevertheless there is a slight difference between the UK and USA. In the UK older professions preceded ‘professional schools’, however, the opposite is the case in the USA (Wilensky, 1964).

There is confusion and much debate about the term profession. This is not surprising as there are overlapping connotations in the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford et al., 1971). The word profession has Latin roots with the oldest use associated with taking vows in relation to the clerical foundation and in the sixteenth century the word profession was applied to secular occupations as well as the clergy. The noun ‘profession’ referring to an occupation has elicited contradictory evaluations since the Sixteenth Century. At that time the professions included the university-educated occupations of divinity, law and medicine (but not surgery) and less commonly gentlemanly occupations of the military. Consequently, it was always for the ‘well born’ or privileged and there was a clear attachment to high status.

There has been a significant increase in the proportion of professionals in the UK workforce, although, due to differing definitions precise figures are not known. However, the proportion to be approximately ten per cent in the mid-1990s with forecasts of fourteen per cent (Church, 1995). One significant development is the “Professional-Managerial Class” created by Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1977). The ‘Professional Managerial Class’ was created in the last half of the nineteenth century as a method of control by the capitalist class to give higher status to the working-classes (Freidson, 2001). Occupations such as engineering, nursing, teaching, social work, law (lawyers) and accounting are included in this definition. At the same time as the increase in professions occurred there was a rise in the view of ‘rational-legal man’ and of the development of the bureaucratic formal organization (Legge, 1995). This was due, in part, to the shift in attitude in modern societies termed modernism to move away from “traditional belief systems in which the social order was simply preordained by the will of God.”(Grey, 2005) Much of pre-modernism had been challenged during the enlightenment period of the eighteenth century. In traditional pre-modern societies a substantial part of knowledge came from the repeated experience of generations and divine law, characterized by unquestioning belief (Legge, 1995). In modernism individuals could use their own reason as opposed to relying upon the authority of others. This meant that people could have a say in society, such as through voting for politicians and owning property. It also acknowledged individual freedom of thought and individual freedom of action. The focus changed to ‘I’ and individuals started to understand the real self as a complex human being. One of the consequences of these changes was the increase in management in organizations to create order and control. It can be argued that this became acceptable due to the change in belief from a higher order designed world to one that could be ordered according to the design and will of people (Grey, 2005). Assuming some legitimacy about this change it is necessary for occupations to be organised into special institutions that influence members conduct and commitment – a form of social control of professional behaviour. Notwithstanding these comments, one area that is not disputed is the significance of the knowledge base of professions.

**Professional Knowledge Base**

Most accounts of the ideology of professionalism give primacy of place to the professional knowledge and resulting social control of expertise. Experts provide services which others cannot do themselves and clients are protected through codes of practice. The power
differential is greater if the knowledge base is less accessible to ‘lay’ understanding. Professional advancement is based on ‘the capacity to claim esoteric and identifiable skills – that is to create and control a cognitive and technical basis’ in order to profess expertise and, preferably acquire social recognition and prestige (Larson, 1977). One of the extracts from the interviews conducted in this research highlighted the power of knowledge, albeit in a negative context. In this situation the student was trying to explain why they believe that some managers do not share their knowledge in the workplace. The view that there is relatively low use made of internal knowledge sharing is also supported by the results of the latest CIPD survey (CIPD, 2007).

“I think that some managers want to keep the knowledge to themselves. This is because knowledge is power to them” (Student 1)

However, before issues such as power of knowledge can be explored, what constitutes the knowledge itself. This is problematic because although it is generally agreed that professions gain their credibility from their knowledge base, there is no consensus on what the knowledge base is. Many authors have made distinctions between different types of knowledge. Aristotle differentiated ‘technical knowledge’ and ‘practical knowledge’. Ryle (1949) used terms ‘knowing that’ and ‘knowing how’. Ryle regards the skill of ‘knowing how’ as separate from knowledge itself. This restricts the meaning of the term ‘knowledge’ to propositional knowledge, for example a set of instructions but excludes practical know-how to perform the task. Narrower still is the term ‘knowledge’ used by Bloom and co-authors Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (1956) where knowledge is categorised as the lowest level suggesting by implication knowledge is something you have to remember but may not comprehend. A popular model of skill acquisition is that of Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986). In this model a classification system from novice to advanced to competent is used. However, the professional is expected to have and be able to apply this body of knowledge. Polanyi (1967) introduced the term ‘tacit knowledge’ to describe that which we know but cannot tell. (Eraut, 1994b) highlights the role of ‘public knowledge’ and ‘personal or tacit knowledge’ in professional work. There is some commonality in the writings to show the difference between explicit, codified knowledge, frequently taught at universities and tacit knowledge developed through practice. (Eraut, 1994b) suggests public knowledge is usually communicable and explicit and is classed as deliberate learning. This type of knowledge is taught on professional training programmes as it can be broken down into its component parts, for example, competency statements or knowledge or skills. However, personal or tacit knowledge is developed over time through practice (Eraut, 2000). It is more complex and more difficult to define than public knowledge. It is a process that involves the application of theoretical knowledge, as well as intuition, thus, enabling the professional to move from competence towards expertise. Tomlinson (1999) provides an example of how student teachers develop tacit knowledge through many years of schooling and implicitly ‘know what teachers do’. Implicit monitoring is a process that is used to appraise our feelings in relation to tacit knowledge, for example, ‘not feeling right’ about a judgement or situation. (Schon, 1987) highlighted value of reflection and raising awareness of tacit knowledge and transforming knowing in action into knowledge in action. However, there are limits to how such transformation is possible as critics may illuminate knowledge in music but not easily for a person to describe this knowledge in words.

Another useful framework to understand knowledge and practice is that developed by Victor and Boynton (1998) that charts the historical path of the organization of industrial production illustrated in figure 2. The benefit of this framework is the prominence given to the different types of knowledge and learning that need to be generated by different types of work, and the
progression to more valuable types of work through the leverage of knowledge (Warmington et al., 2004).

Figure 2  Historical path of production and knowledge

Craft work frequently requires knowledge that utilizes personal intuition and experience developed through practice. Such knowledge is often developed through conversations with colleagues but remains largely tacit. In many of the ‘ideal type’ professions this development of craft and, hence tacit knowledge, skills was developed, frequently informally, through practice (Cheetham, 2001). Mass production is the articulation of tacit knowledge. Through the manipulation, explanation and recording of practice coded knowledge is developed. Perhaps this also explains Eraut (2003:64) argument that there are two types of practice, firstly “the observable, socially constructed and approved practice (possibly evidence-based) and, secondly, the only partly observable, partly describable experience-based practice of the performer”. Primarily, practitioners need both the capability to obtain and interpret and the competence to perform. The first type of practice has now become codified, articulated knowledge, however, there is still an area of tacit knowledge that cannot easily be codified and, therefore, shared. Contact with practical problems and situations can ‘spark’ ideas that are later found to have theoretical value. It plays part in what we call ‘professional judgement’.

The following extract from one of the interviews illustrates how this respondent’s learning has been developed and shared in a social setting. The manager is discussing how others can get ideas to her via the trainee professional. It also shows the importance of the knowledge base and expertise that is expected of a professional. However, the comment also illustrates the personal, tacit nature of knowledge. It is because of the type and way the individual is perceived that they are accepted as an expert:-

This is shown by the number of people who regard her as a source of knowledge and expertise. They also and interestingly see it as a way of getting through views to people like
me because they know that there is a way through the system. They know that (name of the student) will bring up the issue or idea and will get through to us eventually, which is quite good. (Manager 3)

There are many differences between public (articulated) knowledge and practical knowledge, that is, knowledge used in practice by working professionals. An individual’s public knowledge base includes information that has been encountered, reflected upon and theorised to varying extents and varying significance to get to current practical knowledge base. Practical knowledge is formed from a mixture of professional education, reading, personal interest, experience and social interchange with fellow professionals. Only a portion of public knowledge will be used in practice. This portion comprises knowledge that has been sufficiently integrated or connected with personal practice or has been automatically or readily put into use. It is when problems are difficult and time available that individuals will need to develop this public knowledge further. Some aspects of practical knowledge will be thought out and used deliberately, other aspects will be used intuitively. Public knowledge that gets put into practical knowledge undergoes a process of personalisation. The importance of the development of practical knowledge was also mentioned by one of the students who commented:-

“I have learned a lot more here because it is practical hands on. She (the student’s manager) will say go and sit with some of the experienced managers to learn” (Student 1)

The student, in this situation, believed that they had learned a lot more at work, through practice, than university or possibly other workplaces that did not allow such autonomy.

However, the following extract from one of the interviews highlights how the development of knowledge and acceptance by others of the knowledge takes time. It also shows that the privileges of being accepted as a professional are not through the education per se. The student had completed the vast majority of three years of CIPD studies; however, some managers had still not accorded him the trust needed to enable him to practice.

“She trusts me a lot and she listens to me and thinks I have good points. But other managers find it difficult to take seriously what I am saying” (Student 2)

The education component of a professional training may give the trainee professional access to practice, however, it will not necessarily enable them, unless they are accepted and given authority by others, to practice.

One important element of the overall discussion is that professional knowledge cannot be characterized in a manner that is independent of how it is learned and how it is used. Essential nature is revealed through looking at contexts of acquisition and use. Although public knowledge is utilized, professional knowledge is constructed through experience and its nature depends on cumulative acquisition, selection and interpretation of that experience. However, new knowledge is created in research and the professional community is valued differently, although the latter is more difficult to quantify and generalize from. Not surprisingly researcher in artificial intelligence has tried, with difficulty, to represent professional expertise for many years. One of best established findings is that people do not know what they know.
Professional Preparation and Higher Education

In general, occupations, now claiming to be professions, use a number of options for training and preparation that includes:

- a period of pupillage to learn ‘craft’ from expert – learned through demonstration, practice and feedback and dependent upon master or expert.
- enrolment in a ‘professional college’ outside higher education system primarily in mode of part-time with focus on entry requirement to professions that regulate content.
- period of relevant study in higher education
- collection of evidence of practical competence

It was after higher education departments became established providers of initial training that they added roles in research and CPD (Continuing Professional Development). However, for financial and attitudinal reasons students generally prefer higher education modes because they form part of recognised international system with clearly understood modes of entry and universally valued awards; general education has become more valued in providing maturity, intellectual development and cosmopolitan attitudes; tuition generally subsidised by state, although this is changing and higher education has a recognised independent role in the creation and validation of knowledge.

One argument is that leading-edge professionals develop new knowledge in practice rather than through formally designed research. On this basis it is difficult to be both a professional educator and practitioner, but the professional educator role is likely to be preferred, as higher education favours discipline-based knowledge. Secondly, emphasis on discipline-based knowledge also affects post qualification courses for postgraduate level as the tendency is to focus on combining new knowledge with socialisation into new role. Hence there can be a focus on new and subtly devalue old knowledge. Thirdly, in higher education there has been increasing need to divide professional courses into separate credit bearing units to provide greater flexibility and access. Professions like law that operate multi-subject qualifying exams are less effected. But nursing and primary teachers that used to be based on ‘integrated code’ for relative small numbers have had to radically change to the ‘collection code’ system of disparate pieces of discipline or subject-based theoretical knowledge (Bernstein, 1971). Such segmentation and packaging of knowledge for credit based systems are inappropriate preparation for professional work that involves using several different types of knowledge in an integrated way; and the pedagogic approaches needed for linking book knowledge with practical experience are almost impossible to implement with little continuity of membership group. However, this is not reflected in the advertising of Business and Management programmes that can encourage the view and create expectations that the programme of study will “bring practical, skills-based advantages to the successful student which they can immediately put to work” (Turner, 2007).

Many organisations will pay for their staff to attend university for professionally accredited courses, however, this does not mean that they will support them in other ways as the following comment illustrates.

“You can go as long as it does NOT affect your work”
In this situation the trainee was working in human resources and was requesting support to attend the CIPD course. In this scenario it would appear that the manager possibly believes that education and work are separate. The student is ‘allowed’ and supported financially to go to university and attend the CIPD programme, however, they are not expected to use this information in the workplace, despite the fact that the course is specifically developed by the HR profession. The manager said the reason why there was little support was because everybody was too busy at work due to the high workload. Time is one issue for practitioners, however, there are also wider, general concerns.

Current Challenges of Professions

One important element of professionalism is the relational and socially constructed features that develop through client relationships. Professionals employ a rhetoric to persuade clients of their legitimacy and expert knowledge through the following of standards and ethics, for example independence, autonomy and discretion. It is through the ongoing, complex problem solving relationships between the client and professional that the legitimacy of the professional is accepted. The importance of this is that professionals are learning continuously as they discuss, deal with issues and learn from others. Hence, it is perhaps logical to expect that informal, practice based knowledge is an important part of professional education and development. However, this does not seem to be the case as there is relatively low use made of internal knowledge sharing events, job rotation, job secondments or action learning sets (CIPD, 2007). Also included in this CIPD report is the lack of development activities, recognition and reward for line management, although in the CIPD learning and development survey 96% of the respondents said that line managers were ‘very important’ or ‘important’ to supporting learning and development in the organization. Nevertheless, the professional is given legitimacy through the development of the client and professional relationship and so too is the professional organization who seeks to protect this status and the benefits that ensue. One of the significance changes to the traditional ideology of professionalism is the changing attitudes of clients. In the traditional ideology there was a relationship of patronage. Wealthy clients required expertise, confidentiality and social acceptance primarily available to the elite. This traditional ideology of professionalism assumed that the professional was the expert and thus the only one who could understand the needs of the client. However, the client professional role has changed and professionals are expected to be client centered. The notion of supremacy of knowledge has increasingly been challenged by individuals who are more willing to question and critically comment on decisions and have higher expectations of results that meet the individual needs of the client. One of the knock on effects of individual expectation is that there has been an increasing distrust, cynicism an suspicion of authority figures and this includes professionals (Gold et al., 2002). As a result of the increased power of the professions, change in the role of the client and notion of distrust some argue that the professions cannot be responsible for self regulation (Edwards and Nicoll, 2004). Consequently, the degree of regulation has significantly increased in professional work. To the extent that relationships between professionals and clients are increasingly being framed by a complex web of state regulation. Cynics may argue that whereas previously the state protected clients from unqualified practitioners, now they protect clients from the qualified. Therefore, experts are expected to be publicly accountable which in itself is not unreasonable. However, there is a possible threat to all professions if the public can criticize professionalism per se, as could be illustrated by the number of compensation claims against professionals. An example taken from anecdotal evidence is of a medical Doctor who, whilst on holiday, used his medical knowledge to help someone involved in an accident. Unfortunately, the individual who was helped litigated against the Doctor as they suffered a later infection from this action.
Some have argued that the changes in professions can have negative consequences on the attitude of the professional themselves which will impact on their practice. For example, there has been concern that the traditional GP in medicine, sought work in this area because it was perceived as vocational professionalism, however, they are now more likely to hold a constrained view looking for a ‘pure job’ (Allen, 1997). (Jones and Green, 2006) acknowledge the change that in ‘new professionalism’ the term vocation is not valued as highly, but that it does not mean negative consequences on practice. Instead they found that new professionalism is “demonstrated through a commitment to constantly improve technical quality, as judged by professional peers, rather than with reference to relationships with a community of clients” (Jones and Green, 2006). They continue that this new professional ethic will not, therefore, impact negatively on patient care.

### Human Resource Professional Body

The earlier parts of the paper have dealt with professions in general but the rest of the paper will focus specifically on the human resource professional body: Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). In general, most CIPD education programmes consist of two-three years of part-time study. Students could either gain access to the programme via A’levels or other suitable qualification or via personnel experience. Although personnel experience was never overtly required, it was preferred. A common view for students entering the CIPD programme is the desire to gain employment in Personnel, as it is generally accepted that for entry to the profession, personnel practitioners are expected to attain the CIPD qualification (CIPD, 2005, Losey, 2005). However, in the late 1980’s and 1990’s CIPD membership and the CIPD qualification was not essential but ‘desirable’ in employment terms. Evidence for this comes from the author’s work experience when none of her colleagues at Siemens or GEC had either HR experience or the HR qualification. This has since changed and it is now essential to have the qualification for entry into the profession (CIPD, 2005). As a consequence, there are higher numbers of qualified practitioners in the Personnel field.

During the 1980’s, students could gain access to the CIPD course in Higher Education via previously acquired prescribed qualifications or experience in the personnel profession. However, there has been a number changes to the content and entry requirements of the CIPD course. The CIPD programme today appears more academically orientated with no residential requirement but the inclusion of a final year management report or dissertation for MA programmes. The following extracts from the prospectus of Bournemouth University 1993 and Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) in 2006 illustrate the difference:-

> “The course is designed to qualify participants for a career in personnel management. It takes account of the need for training in the increasingly important specialisms within personnel management, particularly training and development and industrial relations”. (Bournemouth, 1993)

> “This one year part time programme is based on the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development’s revised leadership and management standards. It is both a stand alone management programme which leads to the JMU Certificate in Business Management and Licentiate Membership of the CIPD, as well as being a possible entry route onto other JMU degree or professional programmes in business studies, personnel and development, public sector management or information systems.” (LJMU, 2006)
The comparison is between the literature for the three year programme at Bournemouth University in 1993 and the first year of the three year programme at Liverpool John Moores University. In 1993 students were expecting to learn and develop specific skills in Personnel and Development, however, in 2006 the first year of the course is more general, nevertheless, an entry requirement for the next two years.

At Bournemouth University in 1993 A’level or equivalent qualifications were required, however, in 2006 students are expected to have a degree. See comparisons below:

‘GCE/GCSE with passes in five different subjects of which at least two must be at A-level OR an equivalent of higher level award from nationally recognized UK educational or professional bodies OR in exceptional circumstances, aged 23 years and at least 24 month’s personnel experience.’ (Bournemouth, 1993)

‘Entrance will normally possess a first degree or equivalent academic qualification and/or significant human resource management interest and experience.’ (LJMU, 2006)

The entry requirement changes reflect the shift in focus from Personnel Management and Human Resource Management with its emphasis strategy and line management involvement. Also, the CIPD professional standards are being upgraded to wholly postgraduate master’s level. As a result of these changes, one could argue that the initial CIPD course aimed to offer both the theoretical underpinning and practical grounding in Personnel work, however, today it appears more theoretically orientated. However, this is also reflected in other educational environments. During the 1990’s subsequent governments have ‘played with’ vocational education in the United Kingdom. Practical, professionally focused education has changed significantly, for example, engineering apprenticeships and Nursing. Engineering students in the late 80’s typically studied City and Guilds or BTec’s, as opposed to A’levels, to gain access to apprenticeships. They were then given both practical and financial support to progress, primarily attending day release from a permanent apprenticeship to attain academic qualifications. There was a clear acknowledgement of craft work to cultivate tacit knowledge through personal intuition and experience developed through practice. Craft work is classified as tacit knowledge in the production of knowledge framework (Victor and Boynton, 1998). Tacit knowledge is developed over time through practice. Today, the majority of United Kingdom students, currently 48% of the population, are in Higher Education. The shift from practical to knowledge base workers has possibly meant a shift from the responsibility of the employer to the State. This has emphasized articulated knowledge. Articulated knowledge classified as Mass Production and Public knowledge is communicable and explicit (Victor and Boynton, 1998). Public knowledge is classed as deliberate learning and is the type of knowledge that is taught on professional educational programmes. However, it can be argued that, it is difficult to capture tacit knowledge through articulated knowledge and that theory cannot replace practice. The CIPD programme in late 1980 had some similarities; the students were part-time, preferably employed in Personnel and, frequently, supported practically and financially by an organization. Clearly, there is an emphasis on rational, front loaded knowledge that is taught in higher education (HE) and with syllabus largely developed and controlled by the CIPD and, in part, HE. The consequences are that there is less emphasis on the development of tacit knowledge and less employer involvement. In practice what this means is debatable and beyond the scope of this paper, but, nevertheless a cause of concern. Anecdotal evidence of the difficulty that students have with applying theory to practice is illustrated by the comment below:
“In real life theory doesn’t always fit. People are just so unpredictable. A lot of the time you just have to react. A lot of Human Resources work is grey areas.”

A common complaint and concern was the difficulty that some of students found in applying what was learned at University in the workplace. However, students that had participated in practical activities, for example, an assignment that required them to put theory into practice appeared to learn more and felt more comfortable applying this knowledge. Equally, if the student had been involved in a skills development exercise, for example, role play union negotiations they could recall this more easily and appeared to have learned more. The importance of the connection of theory and practice concerned the author in the CIPD programme due to the methods deployed for skills development. One example is in 1988 a number of CIPD programmes required a minimum of a two day residential for skills development, for example:

“Students are required to attend a Residential weekend during each year of the course.”
(Bournemouth, 1993)

However, one day workshops held in the university appear to have replaced residential courses frequently held off site. For example, at Liverpool John Moores University students do not attend a residential but do have skills development workshops. A similar change can be found at Salford, Kingston and Bournemouth Universities. Importantly, a skills element still exists; however, the author is concerned that this change may have altered the experience. Could the less time (one day rather than weekend) and the venue (at university or off site) impact on the type of learning acquired? Certainly, the author would argue that a one day skills development course is not the same experience as having time, for example, in the evening to reflect and discuss the experience over a longer period. One view given by lecturers at Liverpool John Moores and Salford Universities, when asked about the reasons for this change, is the demographic changes, for example, working parents who do not wish to be away from home overnight. However, while plausible, it might be argued that there are other reasons. In the mass production process, there is less emphasis on practical skills and experience but more on theoretical knowledge, for example, the Government target that 50% of the student population will attend university. Other reasons could include financial and time pressures as the UK has the longest working hours in Europe and competition has increased significantly with global expansion during the past decade.

One way to ensure that professionals continue to learn is through Continuing Professional Development’s (CPD), a process that is growing in importance in even the oldest professions, for example, law and medicine. CPD has been introduced as a way of continuing the development of the practice of the professional and monitoring standards. Evidence would suggest, that at least notionally, it has become a part of professional working life for many UK professionals (Friedman and Phillips, 2004). However, disappointingly Friedman and Phillips found that few professional associations’ had a clear vision for CPD and there was little agreement on the objectives of CPD and steps needed to achieve them. It is apparent that CPD is as difficult as the term ‘profession’ to define with no clear articulation of what it is, why it is done and how it is done (Peel, 2005). Moreover the author has issues with the language of CPD that assumes competence. To explain further, the words ‘Continuing Professional Development’ infer that the person has achieved professional status and the next stage is to develop or maintain that status. There appears to be limited need to prove the individual’s ability to practice as this is ‘assumed’ to happen. However, perhaps there needs to be an ‘in-between’ stage. While not disputing the value of CPD in some form perhaps there is a stage missing in the process. Take, for example, the driving test. There has been a
change in the process for those learning to drive. Individuals, by law, must display learner plates on their car when they are learning to drive. In addition, newly qualified drivers can choose to display a different colored learner plate to illustrate to other drivers that they are ‘newly’ qualified and that they have only recently passed their driving test. This acknowledges to the driver and other drivers the practice that is required in order to become proficient. It acknowledges the tacit development of knowledge over time of the driving process. It does not assume immediate competence. The way that the CIPD have tried to address this issue is through the different membership grades as follows:-

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<th>LEVEL</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>DESIGNATION</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chartered membership</td>
<td>Chartered Companion</td>
<td>Chartered CCIPD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chartered Fellow</td>
<td>Chartered FCIPD</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Chartered Member</td>
<td>Chartered MCIPD</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-chartered grades</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Licentiate</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Associate</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Affiliate (studying and non-Studying)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organizational membership</td>
<td>None</td>
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Although this is laudable the author suggests that the degree of understanding is not necessarily so in the workplace. That is, on completion of the qualification process managers in some organizations may not recognize this interim stage of development expecting the individual to be competent both in terms of knowledge and practical skills. Nevertheless, as discussed earlier the completion of an education programme is meaningless until the individual is deemed by others to be a professional.

**Conclusion**

There has been a significant growth in occupations claiming to be professions and trying primarily to emulate the ‘ideal type’ original professions. However, this is an extremely difficult task, not least due to the lack of agreement over the term profession. The three earliest and most powerful professions are frequently emulated by other professions, however, this is not always possible or necessary. Nevertheless, like the term profession there is no agreement over how to define a profession, although many theorists have tried. What is known is that there has been a significant increase in the proportion of professionals in the UK (Gold et al., 2007). There is also clear evidence that expert knowledge is the foundation of a profession, although this is what is being challenged with increased individualism and criticism of power. It could be argued by the author that if the expert knowledge is being challenged there is perhaps an opportunity to focus on what the professional does, that is, their practice. There is evidence that the professional, once in employment, places greater emphasis on the development of practice and, therefore, tacit knowledge (Gold et al., 2007, Eraut, 2003, Cheetham, 2001, CIPD, 2006). Although CPD possibly has been introduced to serve this purpose and fill this gap there are inconsistencies in the organization and structure. Although it is apparent that many professions have CPD schemes, however, the author would suggest that the language, that is Continuing Professional Development can be misleading. The language possibly infers that the professional is expert, although there are many hurdles to climb, possibly least being the acceptance and recognition by those in the workplace.
A separate possible issue is that, for some professions, there is an over reliance on explicit knowledge developed by the professional body and HE in both the initial education programme and CPD. In the author’s view there is little importance placed on the relational and socially constructed features of professional development and how professionals develop practice. Sadly, neither is there organizational support for the informal learning opportunities that help to develop professional practice (CIPD, 2007). There a number of possible consequences of this proposition. One result could be that education is served as a useful purpose for entry to professions only but not make a difference to practice. Another result could be that the more the development of knowledge is moved away from the employer and, therefore, practice the less they are willing and able to participate in the development of knowledge in the future.

Finally another area for research, again beyond the scope of this paper, is the need to fully introduce and support a level of development that fully recognizes what it is to be able to practice in a profession as there is little importance placed on the relational and socially constructed features of professional development and how professionals develop practice.

This paper in some ways raises more questions than answers, possibly because the results are from the second year of a three year research programme. Nevertheless, the questions are important in order for industry to fully benefit from professional practice in the workplace.

CIPD (2005) HR: Where is your career heading?, CIPD.


