

“(Under) managed professional service organisations”

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Abstract: An assumption found in much of the literature about professional services organisations in both the private and public sectors is that they are increasingly adopting 'more corporate and managerial modes of operation' that are 'less distinctive from for-profit business corporations' (Hinings, 2005, pp. 414, 419). In private law and accounting firms, this new mode of organising has been characterised as the 'Managed Professional Business' (MPB). In the public sector, it is also argued that the reorganisation of services to create more autonomous organisations such as hospital trusts, universities, civil service agencies and self-managed schools is having basically the same effect. However, while there is considerable research on the changing relationship between management and professions in the public sector, our understanding of how far distinctly new organisational forms, similar to the MPB, have emerged in this context remains limited.

In this paper we seek to address this deficiency focusing on the changing management profile of public hospitals in the English National Health Service (NHS). We draw on a range of sources from the management and organisation literature to discuss two key questions that will frame our analysis. First is whether increasing the formal autonomy of public agencies (such as trust hospitals) has led to the expansion of dedicated, specialised, management functions. A second, question regards the changing focus of management, from operational (reflecting the concerns of the professional operating core) or strategic? We address both of these questions drawing on a mix of official statistics on NHS employment (supplied by the Health and Social Care Information Centre) and a commercial database supplied by Binley and co.

The results of this analysis indicate that in the hospital sector as a whole, the proportion of managers relative to staff has decreased steadily since 2006. Against expectations, this trend is especially marked in foundation trusts which, despite their increased autonomy have fewer managers (relative to their staff) than non-foundation trusts. What the results also show is that foundation trusts are statistically more likely to have increased the size of their management functions in their strategic apex at the expense of middle tier. To conclude it is argued that in the public sector context, regulatory conditions are leading to the emergence of semi-autonomous professional service organisations, which, although appearing to be increasingly 'managed', have not yet developed their own general management functions.

Bio: Ian Kirkpatrick is Professor in Work and Organisation and Director of the Social Science Institute at the University of Leeds. His research interests include: management change in professional organisations and the restructuring of public services. Ian has published widely on these topics and is co-author of two books: *The New Managerialism and Public Service Professions*, and *The Management of Children's Residential Care*, both published by Palgrave Macmillan. He recently served as Management Committee Chair of European Cost Action ISO9003 (focusing of healthcare management) and a member of the senior editorial management team of the BSA journal, *Work Employment and Society*.