

Review

The Evolution of Professional Practice in the Digital Age: Transformations, Challenges, and Emerging Paradigms

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Abstract: The transformation of professional practices in the contemporary digital landscape represents a fundamental shift in how expertise is constructed, delivered, and validated across diverse sectors. This paper examines the evolution of professional practice through multiple disciplinary lenses, analyzing how digital technologies reshape traditional boundaries of expertise while creating new paradigms for knowledge application and service delivery. The investigation explores professionalization frameworks, technological integration patterns, and organizational adaptations that characterize modern professional environments. Through comprehensive analysis of various professional domains including performance optimization, software efficiency, project management, and post-pandemic adaptation strategies, this study reveals convergent trends in digitalization, efficiency optimization, and structural reconfiguration. The findings demonstrate that professional evolution transcends simple technological adoption, encompassing deeper transformations in organizational logic, knowledge management, and stakeholder relationships. This research contributes to understanding how professions navigate tensions between traditional expertise models and emerging digital imperatives, offering insights into sustainable pathways for professional development in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: professional evolution; digital transformation; technology integration; practice innovation; efficiency optimization; organizational adaptation

1. Introduction

Professional practice in contemporary society undergoes unprecedented transformation driven by technological advancement, organizational restructuring, and evolving stakeholder expectations. The traditional conceptualization of professions as stable, self-regulating communities governed by established knowledge bases faces significant challenges from digital disruption and market forces [1]. Understanding professional evolution requires examining both historical foundations and contemporary innovations that reshape how expertise develops and operates across diverse sectors. The digital age introduces fundamental questions about professional autonomy, knowledge validation, and service delivery mechanisms that demand comprehensive analytical frameworks.

The transformation of professional work extends beyond superficial technological adoption to encompass deeper structural changes in organizational forms, practice methodologies, and expertise validation mechanisms [2,3]. Professional communities historically relied on standardized training, certification systems, and peer-regulated quality control to maintain legitimacy and market position. However, digital technologies enable new forms of knowledge distribution, practice collaboration, and service delivery that challenge traditional professional boundaries [4]. The intersection of technological capa-

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bility and organizational innovation creates complex dynamics where established professions must adapt while maintaining core values of expertise and service quality. These tensions manifest across multiple professional domains, from performance optimization practices to technical specializations, each navigating unique challenges while sharing common patterns of digital integration and structural adaptation.

Contemporary research on professionalization highlights the multifaceted nature of professional work and the diverse pathways through which occupations establish and maintain professional status [5]. The analytical frameworks developed to understand professional evolution provide essential tools for examining how digital technologies reshape practice landscapes. Professional transformation occurs through deliberate organizational strategies, external market pressures, and internal community negotiations that collectively determine adaptation trajectories [3]. Understanding these processes requires attention to both macro-level structural changes and micro-level practice innovations that characterize professional work in the digital age.

2. Theoretical Foundations of Professional Practice

2.1. Professionalization Frameworks and Contemporary Analysis

The conceptual understanding of professions and professionalization processes provides essential groundwork for analyzing contemporary transformations in professional practice. Sociological analysis identifies professions as occupational groups characterized by specialized knowledge, ethical codes, autonomy in practice decisions, and service orientations that distinguish them from purely commercial enterprises [5]. The framework for understanding professional structuring encompasses multiple dimensions including knowledge development, institutional arrangements, market positioning, and internal governance mechanisms that collectively constitute professional identity [3]. These elements interact dynamically as professions respond to external pressures while maintaining internal coherence and legitimacy.

The evolution of professional practice reflects broader societal shifts in knowledge organization and service delivery expectations. Traditional professionalization models emphasized autonomy through exclusive knowledge domains and self-regulatory authority, creating clear boundaries between professional and non-professional work [6]. However, contemporary conditions challenge these boundaries through technological enablement of knowledge access, organizational restructuring that reconfigures professional roles, and market pressures that demand efficiency alongside expertise [1]. Performance optimization across various professional domains demonstrates how traditional pedagogical approaches evolve to incorporate contemporary methodologies while maintaining foundational principles of expertise development [6]. The analytical approach to understanding these changes recognizes both functional attributes that enable effective service delivery and power relations that shape professional jurisdictions within broader social structures [5]. Examining professional evolution across diverse contexts reveals common patterns of adaptation while highlighting sector-specific variations in how digital transformation unfolds. Table 1 presents key dimensions of professional transformation that characterize contemporary practice evolution across multiple domains.

Table 1. Dimensions of Professional Practice Transformation.

Dimension	Traditional Characteristic	Contemporary Evolution
Knowledge Base	Exclusive expertise through formal training	Distributed knowledge with digital access
Service Delivery	Direct practitioner-client interaction	Hybrid models incorporating technology
Quality Control	Peer review and professional standards	Data-driven metrics and performance indicators

Organizational Form	Independent practice or partnerships	Corporate structures and platform integration
Innovation Pattern	Incremental refinement of established methods	Rapid adaptation through technological integration

2.2. Organizational Logic and Hybrid Professionalism

The transformation of professional practice involves fundamental shifts in organizational logic that govern how expertise is organized, delivered, and validated within institutional contexts. Contemporary professionalism increasingly operates within hybrid frameworks that combine traditional professional values with managerial imperatives and market orientations [7]. This hybrid professionalism emerges from institutional work performed by organizational actors who navigate tensions between professional autonomy and organizational efficiency demands. The reconfiguration of professional logic reflects broader transformations in how organizations structure knowledge work and allocate resources across competing priorities [8].

Professional organizations face distinct challenges in balancing traditional expertise models with contemporary efficiency demands and technological capabilities. Digital construction practices demonstrate how project management methodologies integrate technological tools to enhance progress monitoring and resource allocation while maintaining professional standards of quality and safety [8]. The tensions between professional autonomy and organizational control manifest through changes in work processes, performance evaluation systems, and resource allocation mechanisms that reshape daily practice realities [9]. Understanding these dynamics requires examining how professionals negotiate new organizational arrangements while maintaining commitment to expertise standards and service quality. The institutional work involved in managing these transitions reveals complex processes of professional identity reconstruction and organizational adaptation [7,9].

2.3. Professional Organizations and Market Dynamics

Professional organizations operate within increasingly complex market environments that challenge traditional service delivery models and competitive positioning strategies. The dynamics of diversification and market adaptation reflect broader patterns of organizational response to changing environmental conditions [10]. Professional service firms navigate tensions between maintaining specialized expertise and expanding service portfolios to capture new market opportunities. These strategic choices involve careful balancing of resource allocation, knowledge development, and organizational capacity building that determine long-term sustainability and competitive advantage [10].

The challenges facing professional organizations in digital transformation contexts reveal fundamental tensions between established practice patterns and emerging technological possibilities. Legal practices illustrate how ambidexterity requirements create difficulties when organizations attempt simultaneous exploitation of existing capabilities and exploration of new digital opportunities [10]. Professional firms must develop organizational structures and management processes that support both efficiency in current operations and innovation in future-oriented initiatives. The coordination of these competing demands requires sophisticated leadership and organizational design that transcends traditional professional partnership models [11]. Table 2 illustrates the strategic dimensions that characterize professional organizational adaptation in contemporary market environments.

Table 2. Strategic Dimensions of Professional Organizational Adaptation.

Strategic Dimension	Traditional Approach	Contemporary Requirement
Market Positioning	Specialized expertise focus	Diversified service portfolios
Knowledge Management	Individual practitioner expertise	Organizational knowledge systems
Technology Integration	Administrative support tools	Core practice transformation
Client Relationships	Long-term partnership stability	Dynamic engagement models
Competitive Strategy	Professional reputation emphasis	Market responsiveness and innovation

3. Digital Transformation and Practice Innovation

3.1. Technological Integration in Professional Work

The integration of digital technologies into professional practice represents a fundamental reconfiguration of work processes, knowledge application, and service delivery mechanisms. Software development practices exemplify how continuous integration and delivery methodologies enhance operational efficiency through automated testing, deployment processes, and quality assurance mechanisms [2]. These technological innovations transform not only technical capabilities but also organizational workflows, team collaboration patterns, and project management approaches that collectively constitute contemporary professional practice [2]. The adoption of digital tools extends beyond simple automation to enable new forms of problem-solving, client interaction, and knowledge creation that redefine professional expertise boundaries.

Professional domains across diverse sectors experience similar patterns of technological integration despite distinctive disciplinary contexts and practice requirements. The common elements include enhanced data analytics capabilities, automated routine processes, improved communication and collaboration tools, and integrated knowledge management systems that collectively transform how professionals perform core tasks [8]. Construction project management demonstrates how digital tools facilitate real-time progress monitoring, resource optimization, and stakeholder communication that significantly improve project outcomes and efficiency metrics [8]. These technological capabilities enable professionals to manage increasing complexity while maintaining quality standards and responding to dynamic environmental conditions. The successful integration of digital technologies requires not only technical infrastructure but also organizational learning, process redesign, and cultural adaptation that support new ways of working [1,2].

3.2. Performance Optimization and Methodological Evolution

Professional practice evolution increasingly emphasizes performance optimization through systematic methodology refinement and evidence-based practice development. The evolution of pedagogical approaches in performance-oriented disciplines illustrates how traditional and contemporary methods integrate to create hybrid frameworks that leverage historical wisdom while incorporating modern insights [6]. This methodological evolution reflects broader patterns of professional knowledge development where practitioners balance respect for established principles with openness to innovation and experimentation. Performance optimization requires careful attention to both technical skill development and holistic understanding of practice contexts that shape effective expertise application [6].

The systematic approach to performance enhancement draws on multiple knowledge sources including empirical research, practitioner experience, and technological capabilities that collectively inform practice refinement. Professional domains ranging

from creative performance to technical specializations demonstrate convergent trends in adopting data-driven assessment methods, structured feedback mechanisms, and iterative improvement processes that characterize contemporary excellence standards [2]. These methodologies enable professionals to achieve higher levels of consistent performance while adapting to individual variation and contextual specificity that influence practice outcomes. The integration of traditional expertise with contemporary optimization techniques creates robust frameworks for professional development that support both novice learning and expert refinement [6]. Table 3 presents key elements of performance optimization frameworks that characterize contemporary professional practice across multiple domains.

Table 3. Performance Optimization Framework Elements.

Framework Element	Traditional Foundation	Contemporary Enhancement
Skill Assessment	Subjective expert evaluation	Data-driven performance metrics
Training Methods	Apprenticeship and repetition	Structured progressive development
Feedback Mechanisms	Periodic mentor review	Continuous performance monitoring
Knowledge Integration	Experience-based learning	Evidence-based practice synthesis
Quality Standards	Professional consensus norms	Empirically validated benchmarks

3.3. Post-Pandemic Adaptation and Professional Resilience

The global pandemic experience catalyzed accelerated transformation in professional practice across multiple sectors, forcing rapid adaptation to unprecedented constraints and opportunities. Post-pandemic architectural design demonstrates how public building planning evolved to address health concerns, spatial requirements, and functional flexibility demands that emerged from pandemic experiences [4]. These adaptations reflect broader patterns of professional responsiveness to environmental disruption, revealing both the resilience and vulnerability of established practice models when confronted with fundamental operating condition changes [4]. The lessons learned from pandemic adaptation inform ongoing professional evolution as organizations integrate temporary innovations into permanent practice improvements.

Professional adaptation to pandemic conditions involved simultaneous attention to immediate crisis response and longer-term strategic repositioning for changed operational environments. The rapid adoption of remote work technologies, virtual service delivery models, and digital collaboration platforms demonstrated professional capacity for innovation under pressure while also revealing limitations of purely technological solutions to complex practice challenges [1]. Organizations that successfully navigated pandemic disruption typically combined technological adoption with organizational culture development, leadership communication, and stakeholder engagement strategies that maintained professional identity and service quality despite operational upheaval [4]. The post-pandemic period offers opportunities for professionals to consolidate adaptive innovations while critically evaluating which changes represent genuine improvements versus temporary expedients necessitated by crisis conditions [7].

4. Corporate Professionalization and Organizational Transformation

4.1. Structural Changes in Professional Service Delivery

The evolution toward corporate professionalization represents a significant departure from traditional professional organization models based on partnerships and individual practitioner autonomy. Contemporary professional work increasingly occurs

within corporate structures that prioritize organizational efficiency, standardized processes, and hierarchical management systems over traditional professional self-governance [12]. This transformation reflects broader economic pressures toward service industrialization, capital concentration, and market consolidation that reshape professional practice landscapes across multiple sectors. The implications of corporate professionalization extend beyond organizational structure to encompass fundamental changes in professional identity, knowledge control, and service delivery philosophies [11,12].

Project management, consultancy, and technical specializations exemplify how corporate forms reshape professional work through standardized methodologies, branded service offerings, and organizational knowledge systems that transcend individual practitioner expertise [12]. These developments create tensions between professional values emphasizing judgment, autonomy, and client service and organizational imperatives prioritizing efficiency, profitability, and scalability. The resolution of these tensions varies across professional contexts but generally involves some accommodation between professional and corporate logics that produces hybrid organizational forms [9]. Understanding contemporary professional practice requires recognizing how corporate structures both enable and constrain professional expertise application in ways that differ fundamentally from traditional practice models [11]. Table 4 compares traditional and corporate models of professional organization across key dimensions that shape practice realities.

Table 4. Traditional versus Corporate Professional Organization Models.

Organizational Dimension	Traditional Model	Corporate Model
Authority Structure	Partnership consensus	Hierarchical management
Knowledge Control	Individual practitioner	Organizational systems
Revenue Model	Professional fees	Corporate profitability
Quality Assurance	Peer professional review	Management performance metrics
Career Development	Apprenticeship progression	Corporate advancement paths

4.2. Professional Identity and Organizational Context

The relationship between professional identity and organizational context undergoes significant reconfiguration as professionals increasingly work within corporate structures that impose distinctive cultural norms and operational requirements. Professional identity traditionally derived from disciplinary socialization, peer community membership, and commitment to service ideals that transcended organizational affiliations [13]. However, corporate employment contexts create competing identity claims based on organizational membership, strategic priorities, and performance expectations that may conflict with traditional professional values [12]. Navigating these competing identity demands requires professionals to develop sophisticated boundary management strategies that preserve core professional commitments while accommodating organizational realities.

The concept of profession itself becomes problematic when applied to contemporary work arrangements that blur traditional boundaries between professional and non-professional labor [13-15]. Sociological analysis reveals how profession functions as both an analytical category for understanding occupational organization and a normative ideal that shapes practitioner aspirations and public expectations [15]. The utility of profession as a conceptual tool depends on recognizing both its historical specificity and its continued relevance for analyzing power relations, knowledge control, and service delivery arrangements in contemporary contexts [13]. Understanding professional evolution requires critical examination of how profession operates as a social construct that legitimates

particular forms of expertise organization while potentially obscuring alternative arrangements [5,15].

4.3. Knowledge Management and Organizational Learning

Professional organizations increasingly invest in formal knowledge management systems that capture, codify, and distribute expertise beyond individual practitioners to organizational repositories accessible across the workforce. These systems represent attempts to transform tacit professional knowledge into explicit organizational assets that support consistent service delivery, reduced dependence on individual experts, and enhanced scalability of professional services [11]. The effectiveness of knowledge management initiatives varies considerably depending on the nature of professional work, organizational culture, and technological infrastructure that collectively shape knowledge sharing patterns. Successful knowledge management requires balancing standardization benefits with preservation of professional judgment and contextual adaptation capabilities that characterize effective expertise application [3].

The relationship between individual professional learning and organizational knowledge development creates complex dynamics in contemporary professional settings. Professionals must simultaneously maintain individual expertise currency through continuing education and contribute to organizational knowledge systems that benefit collective capability development [1]. This dual responsibility creates potential tensions around knowledge ownership, competitive advantage, and career development that organizations must address through appropriate incentive structures and cultural norms. The evolution toward organizational knowledge systems reflects broader shifts in how professional work is conceived, valued, and rewarded within contemporary institutional contexts [11]. Table 5 illustrates key components of organizational knowledge management systems that characterize contemporary professional practice environments.

Table 5. Organizational Knowledge Management System Components.

System Component	Function	Implementation Challenge
Knowledge Capture	Document expert insights	Converting tacit to explicit knowledge
Knowledge Organization	Structure information access	Creating usable taxonomies
Knowledge Distribution	Share across workforce	Overcoming sharing barriers
Knowledge Application	Support practice decisions	Ensuring contextual relevance
Knowledge Update	Maintain currency	Sustaining contribution motivation

5. Challenges and Future Trajectories

5.1. Tensions in Professional Practice Evolution

The evolution of professional practice generates multiple tensions that professionals and organizations must navigate to achieve sustainable adaptation to contemporary conditions. The fundamental tension between professional autonomy and organizational control manifests across diverse practice contexts as corporate structures impose standardized processes and performance metrics that may conflict with professional judgment prerogatives [9]. Additionally, tensions arise between efficiency demands that prioritize cost reduction and speed optimization and quality imperatives that emphasize thoroughness and expert deliberation in complex cases [7]. These competing pressures create difficult choices for professionals and organizations about resource allocation, practice standards, and service delivery models that shape competitive positioning and professional identity [10].

The challenges of maintaining professional values within transformed organizational and technological contexts require ongoing negotiation and institutional work by professionals at all organizational levels [9]. Frontline practitioners face daily decisions about when to follow standardized procedures versus exercise independent judgment based on

situational specifics that automated systems cannot fully capture [7]. Professional managers engage in institutional work to reconcile professional logics with organizational imperatives through hybrid arrangements that preserve core professional values while accommodating legitimate efficiency and accountability concerns [9]. The resolution of these tensions remains incomplete and contested, with ongoing evolution in how professions balance competing demands in ways that maintain public trust and professional legitimacy [5,13].

5.2. Digital Capabilities and Professional Boundaries

The expansion of digital capabilities creates both opportunities and threats for established professional boundaries and jurisdictional claims. Professional authority traditionally rested on exclusive access to specialized knowledge and skills that required extensive training and certification to master [15]. However, digital technologies enable broader access to professional knowledge through online resources, automated decision tools, and platform-based service delivery that potentially undermine professional exclusivity claims [1]. Professions must adapt their knowledge bases, service delivery models, and value propositions to maintain relevance in environments where technological substitution threatens traditional expertise monopolies [10]. The successful adaptation involves identifying dimensions of professional work where human judgment, contextual understanding, and relationship-building capabilities provide value beyond what technology alone can deliver [4].

The reconfiguration of professional boundaries occurs through complex processes of negotiation among professionals, organizations, clients, and regulatory authorities about appropriate divisions of labor between human expertise and technological capabilities [3]. Some professional domains successfully integrate digital tools to enhance rather than replace human expertise, creating hybrid practice models that leverage technological efficiency while preserving professional judgment in critical decisions [2,8]. Other domains face more fundamental challenges where technological capabilities enable non-professionals to perform tasks previously requiring professional expertise, forcing redefinition of professional roles and value propositions [1]. Understanding these dynamics requires attention to specific characteristics of professional knowledge and practice that determine substitutability and complementarity patterns with technological alternatives [15].

5.3. Sustainability and Professional Development

The long-term sustainability of professional practice models depends on effective professional development systems that prepare practitioners for evolving practice environments while maintaining commitment to core professional values and expertise standards. Traditional professional education emphasized disciplinary knowledge acquisition through formal academic programs followed by supervised practice experience leading to certification [5]. Contemporary professional development increasingly recognizes the need for continuous learning throughout professional careers as knowledge evolves, technologies advance, and practice contexts change in ways that require ongoing capability development [6]. Professional organizations and educational institutions collaborate to design continuing education programs, competency frameworks, and career development pathways that support professional adaptation while preserving expertise quality [3].

The evolution of professional development approaches reflects broader changes in how learning and expertise are conceptualized in contemporary knowledge societies. The integration of traditional and contemporary pedagogical methods demonstrates how professional education adapts to incorporate new insights while respecting established wisdom and foundational principles [6]. Effective professional development balances technical skill advancement with critical thinking capabilities, ethical reasoning, and interpersonal competencies that collectively constitute professional expertise in complex practice

environments [5]. The future of professional practice depends substantially on the capacity of professional communities and organizations to develop robust development systems that prepare practitioners for uncertain futures while maintaining professional identity and public service commitments that justify professional privilege and authority [13,15].

6. Conclusion

The evolution of professional practice in the digital age encompasses fundamental transformations in how expertise is organized, delivered, and validated across diverse professional domains. This examination reveals convergent patterns of digital integration, organizational restructuring, and methodological innovation that characterize contemporary professional work while acknowledging significant variation in how these patterns manifest across specific practice contexts. Professional evolution transcends simple technological adoption to involve deeper changes in organizational logic, knowledge management, and stakeholder relationships that collectively reshape professional landscapes. The tensions between traditional professional values emphasizing autonomy and judgment and contemporary imperatives prioritizing efficiency and accountability create ongoing challenges that professionals and organizations navigate through hybrid arrangements and institutional work.

The sustainability of professional practice models depends on successful adaptation to digital capabilities, market pressures, and social expectations while maintaining core commitments to expertise quality and public service that justify professional authority. Professional development systems must evolve to support continuous learning and capability enhancement throughout professional careers as practice environments change in ways that demand ongoing adaptation. The future trajectory of professional practice remains uncertain but will likely involve continued negotiation between professional and organizational logics, human expertise and technological capabilities, and traditional values and contemporary innovations. Understanding these dynamics provides essential insights for professionals, organizations, educators, and policymakers working to ensure professional practice serves both practitioner interests and broader social needs in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

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