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System Of Professions: Essay On The Division Of Expert Labour



Synopsis

In *The System of Professions* Andrew Abbott explores central questions about the role of professions in modern life: Why should there be occupational groups controlling expert knowledge? Where and why did groups such as law and medicine achieve their power? Will professionalism spread throughout the occupational world? While most inquiries in this field study one profession at a time, Abbott here considers the system of professions as a whole. Through comparative and historical study of the professions in nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, France, and America, Abbott builds a general theory of how and why professionals evolve. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Andrew Abbott is the Ralph Lewis Professor and Chairman of the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Almost 30 years after first publication, this essay remains relevant as to how professions develop over time and in different countries. It is written in a highly academic manner, so it is a bit challenging to stay engaged in reading the book, but it's a fascinating look at the history of the accounting, legal, and medical professions in particular. Abbott compares how those professions developed differently in the US, UK, and France and offers potential explanations for these differences.

The context is very interesting and useful for sociology students working on this field. I bought a

used version from which I expected better quality.

When I was thinking about writing the history of a professional society, I was urged to do some reading on professions. It was discouraging. The authorities had been going in circles for years, until Abbott came along and clarified the topic. His book was well-received; as I recall he was a visiting professor in New Jersey before it was published, and a full professor at Chicago soon afterwards. Actually, there are several new ideas. One them is that professions restrict their markets when they attempt to raise their fees by adding barriers to entry. Since demand is stable or rising, this creates opportunity for other groups to move in "below." As physicians' time becomes ever more valuable, RNs achieve the status of practitioners and LPNs fill in. Aides are now certified, and so on. This seminal idea was published in 1988. Almost ten years later, Clayton Christensen described in his well-regarded *Innovators' Dilemma* how a corporate fixation on upselling existing customers assured that less lucrative markets would be neglected, providing rich opportunities for new entrants. The parallel is striking. Whether you have any interest in his topic, Abbott's exposition is worth studying as a model of effective rhetoric. And the writing is vivid; he worked for years in a large mental hospital, "After five years, . . . I had helped administer several tons of thorazine, mellaril and their cousins . . ."

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