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How many ways are there to be professional? Four discourses among management consultant



The present study, as a result of Lara Maestriperi's doctoral thesis, addresses the types of management consultants, that is, the professional past of many of today's CEOs and a key experience for the development of a professional discourse among management professionals. Mestriperi determines four variants of consultants (the 'yuppie', the 'unwilling' consultant, the 'self'-employed and the 'professional' consultant), according to their *modus vivendi* and *operandi* and according to the working of the organizations where they exercise as such, since it is a relatively new place of work, not regulated nor institutionalized unlike other traditional disciplines.

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Management consultants are one of the key persons of the post-industrial and financial transformation of the advanced capitalist societies. The majority of the CEOs of the big companies have a past as consultant and their impact on contemporary economy is enormous and under-valued. Nevertheless, their career is not defined: there are no university degrees to become a consultant, nor orders and bars for them, nor the institutional and regulative barriers

which traditionally we associate to professions, like the one possessed by doctors, architects or lawyers.

El [article](#) published in the *Journal of Professions&Organization* by [Lara Ivana Maestripieri](#) explores the discourses that consultants associated with their professions, the implicit norms of this social word and the different trajectories that brought 55 Italian management consultants to be what they are. The interviews – conducted in the frame of her doctoral thesis (2009-2010) – define four main trajectories: ‘yuppie’, the ‘unwilling’ consultant, the ‘self’-employed, the ‘professional’ consultant. And to those four profiles there are four different ways of living their condition as consultant, that is, four different professionalism. ‘Professionalism’ is the keyword of this research: it indicates the discourse trough which a person defines his/her professions and presents to other her/his way to live it. Normally, professionalism is defined and shared through professional associations, orders or bars; but, in an emerging profession like management consultancy where there is still no strong professional association, the study demonstrates that these discourses are defined within organization and in plural forms as long as the organizations in which consultants work are different.

The ‘yuppies’ are the youngest: they aspire to achieve a career in the financial and managerial elites. In order to get this, they conform to the norms of the global corporation in which they work, renouncing to their private life with the hope of achieving a position as CEO tomorrow. The ‘unwilling’ are the losers of the postindustrial transformation: they have a past as manager of a manufacturing company, but they had to reinvent themselves as self-employed consultants and they live with nostalgia their past as managers. The ‘SELF’-employed are consultant just because this is what they are asked by the market: the most important for them is to survive in the market as freelance in freedom. Consultancy is just one activity among the others. Finally, there are the ‘professional’ consultant: they live with passion their profession and they build their professional discourses in everyday collaborations with their teams, defining the ethics and the content of their profession in the frame of the organization in which they work. They are not passive as the ‘yuppie’; they enliven their organizations.

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