



From Teacher to Manager: Hybridization as a Pathway Towards a New Profession

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Abstract

The concept of hybrid professionals refers to individuals who acquire skills and knowledge beyond their core area of expertise to navigate institutional complexity. It is often applied to public-sector professionals who extend their roles into managerial areas, requiring them to complement their original expertise with additional management knowledge. Through a historical case study of the education and training of Swedish school principals, this article examines the role of such additional knowledge in professional development over time, aiming to deepen our understanding of how hybrid professionalism evolves. Data were drawn from extant research, archival documents, and testimonies, and analyzed using a historical case study approach focusing on conditions, actions, and effects. Findings show that the introduction and evolution of the additional knowledge base initially fostered hybridization but eventually contributed to the emergence of a new, distinct profession separate from the original group. Three conditions facilitating this transition are identified: (1) a weakened original profession, (2) societal recognition of additional knowledge as valuable, and (3) supportive but not overly controlling governmental actions. Policy implications suggest that an ambivalent governmental stance—oscillating between support and strict control—can perpetuate a perception of weakness in the new profession, necessitating ongoing external reinforcement.

Practical Relevance

- The study provides valuable insights into how an ambivalent governmental stance—oscillating between professional support and strict control—can create a vicious cycle in which a profession is perceived as weak and in need of continuous reinforcement.
- The article highlights the importance of designing professional education and training based on abstract knowledge valued and recognized in society, so that it supports the development of the profession.
- The study sheds light on the conditions that allow a hybrid profession to become a profession in its own right, separate from the original group.

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Introduction

Hybridity has become a central concept in recent analyses of changes within the public sector. Concepts such as hybrid organizations (Alexius & Furusten, 2019; Pache & Santos, 2013), hybrid governance (Belloni, 2012; Makadok & Coff, 2009), and hybrid professionals (Alamaa et al., 2025; Breit et al., 2024; Giacomelli, 2020) are used to describe how different norms, institutional logics, and knowledge systems coexist within the same units.

This article focuses on hybrid professionals—professionals who acquire new sets of skills and knowledge beyond their core area of expertise in order to navigate institutional complexity (Breit et al., 2018; Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Noordegraaf, 2007; Kurunmäki, 2004). The concept is frequently applied to public-sector professionals such as healthcare workers (Leah, 2020; Currie et al., 2016), educators (Machin, 2014), social workers (Breit et al., 2018), and academics (Teelken, 2015), who expand their professional roles to include managerial responsibilities. As a result, they must complement their original expertise with management knowledge. In this article, I use the concept “additional knowledge” to refer to the managerial knowledge that supplements the professionals’ original expertise and supports their new role.

An extensive body of knowledge acquired through higher education has traditionally been considered one of the defining characteristics of professions (Nilsson & Blume, 2021; Saks, 2012; Freidson, 2001; Wilensky, 1964). This knowledge manifests in various forms, with abstract knowledge representing the profession’s core asset (Levay & Waks, 2009; Abbott, 1988). Abstract knowledge enables professionals to redefine problems, discover new tasks and domains, and thereby secure their long-term relevance and survival. It is essential that professions maintain control over this knowledge, as mastery of abstract knowledge affords greater autonomy and jurisdiction over their work. This type of knowledge is primarily acquired through extended formal education and training (Waring & Currie, 2009), which functions both as a status symbol and a barrier to entry—both of which are crucial for the professionalization of the group (Nilsson & Blume, 2021; Saks, 2012; Wilensky, 1964).

While studies on the nature and role of knowledge in professionalization processes generally have a long-standing tradition within the sociology of professions (Saks, 2016; Freidson, 2001; Torstendahl & Burrage, 1990), the management knowledge acquired by hybrid professionals during the process of hybridization is typically excluded from such analyses. Research on hybrid professionalism has primarily focused on explaining, defining, categorizing, and measuring hybrid professionalism as a phenomenon (Compagni et al., 2024; Giacomelli, 2020; Noordegraaf, 2015, 2007); exploring the changing identities and roles resulting from hybridity (Alamaa et al., 2025; Sirris, 2019; Currie et al., 2016; McGivern et al., 2015; Spyridonidis et al., 2015); and examining the evolving work practices and strategies of hybrid professionals (Breit et al., 2024; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016; Waring & Currie, 2009). However, more in-depth analyses of the management knowledge of hybrid professionals—specifically, what it entails, whether it is acquired through formal academic education and training, whether it is abstract, and who controls it—remain largely overlooked. Given that a profession’s knowledge base is its most valuable asset, it is striking how little we understand about the nature of management knowledge among hybrid professionals and its role in their professionalization and long-term development.

In this article, I address this research gap by analyzing the content, form, and control of a professional group’s training over time. Using a historical case study of the education program of Swedish school principals, I seek to answer the question of *what role additional management knowledge plays in the professionalization of a group over time*. The aim is to contribute to a deeper understanding of this additional knowledge and its function in the development of a profession.

As will be demonstrated, Swedish school principals have evolved from occupying a leading position within the teaching profession—as “first among equals” (*Primus inter pares*)—through a phase of hybridization in which their teaching degrees were complemented by administrative and leadership training, to a point where they have emerged as a professional group in its own right, distinct from the teaching profession.

The findings contribute to the literature on hybrid professionalism in three ways. First, they offer detailed insights into the nature of the additional management knowledge that a profession

acquires as it hybridizes—an area that has received limited attention to date. Second, they shed light on the transitory nature of hybrid professionalism over time, contributing to a field that has largely focused on the emergence and meaning of hybrid professionalism once it is established (Breit et al., 2024; 2018; Noordegraaf, 2015; 2007; Kurunmäki, 2004; Llewellyn, 2001). Third, the findings support a more fundamental understanding of hybridization—not merely as a source of new roles (Sirris, 2019; Currie et al., 2016; McGivern et al., 2015; Spyridonidis et al., 2015), work strategies (Breit et al., 2024; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016; Waring & Currie, 2009), or innovation capacities (Burgess & Currie, 2013)—but as a potential springboard for a hybrid profession to evolve into a new and distinct profession in its own right. Finally, the study also has policy implications. It shows that when governmental actions toward a profession fluctuate between support and strict control, they may create a feedback loop in which the profession is perceived as weak and in ongoing need of external reinforcement.

Next, the article presents the theoretical framework, in which hybrid professionalism and professional knowledge are discussed. It concludes that the content, form, and control of the profession's knowledge are essential for understanding the role of knowledge in professional development. A section describing the approach to studying the role of a profession's additional knowledge in its professionalization process concludes the theoretical section. The historical case study methodology is then presented, with an emphasis on the conditions, actions, and effects of key historical events. This is followed by the empirical section, which provides a historical overview of the education and training of Swedish school principals. The overview is structured according to the main components of the historical case study approach. It begins with a description of the conditions leading up to the introduction of the principals' education program, followed by the actions of the government and other actors as various versions of the program were implemented. The analysis of the resulting effects is divided into two parts: the effects on principals' additional knowledge and the effects on principals' professionalization process. The article concludes with a discussion of the study's findings and implications.

Theoretical Framework

Hybrid professionalism

Although the concept of “hybrid” broadly refers to “... a combination or mixture of two or more different elements; something having a mixed origin, nature, or character” (Oxford University Press, n.d.), the concept of hybrid professionalism has more specific origins. The term can be traced to the relationship between bureaucratic organizations and professions (Breit et al., 2018).

Hybrid professionalism is distinct from both occupational professionalism and organizational professionalism (Evetts, 2013), which are also used to describe the interaction between professions and bureaucratic structures. Occupational professionalism is grounded in collegial authority, professional discretion, and occupational control over work, with regulation carried out by practitioners themselves. In contrast, organizational professionalism is rooted in managerialism and rational-legal authority, characterized by standardized procedures and closely aligned with Weberian models of bureaucracy.

In a sense, hybrid professionalism combines elements of both occupational and organizational professionalism, as it typically refers to occupational professionals who incorporate managerial responsibilities, tasks, and perspectives into their work. Noordegraaf (2007, p. 771) defines hybrid professionals as “reflective practitioners; their links with outside worlds are part of professionalism; they form a social category/class,” and argues that hybrid professionalism has become a natural aspect of both professional and managerial life. The term often applies to professionals who have transitioned into managerial roles and oversee the work of other professionals (Sirris, 2019; McGivern et al., 2015; Croft et al., 2015).

However, this should not be confused with a leadership position located solely within the traditional professional hierarchy (*Primus inter pares*), as hybrid professionals also operate within the organizational hierarchy. Rather, it is important to recognize that hybrid professionals in such roles require a *new type of knowledge and competence* that extends beyond their profession's core area of expertise (Breit et al., 2018; Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Kurunmäki, 2004). In this paper, this new type of knowledge is referred to as *the additional knowledge*, which complements the profession's original body of knowledge. For example, in the case of

medical managers, their original body of knowledge lies in medicine, while the management knowledge and competencies they acquire as they hybridize represent their additional knowledge.

A large share of the literature on hybrid professionals has focused on public-sector professionals who incorporate knowledge, values, and perspectives introduced by the New Public Management (NPM) reforms of the 1980s and beyond (Breit et al., 2018; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016; Blomgren & Waks, 2015; Hodgson et al., 2015). However, hybridization is not necessarily limited to professionals' engagement with NPM and may have begun earlier. Despite this, historical studies of hybrid professionalism—which could provide deeper insights into how hybridized professionalism evolves over time—remain scarce.

Professionals and their knowledge

An extensive knowledge system is widely regarded as the defining feature that unites all definitions of a profession (Torstendahl & Burrage, 1990). The profession's knowledge base plays a central role in the process of professionalization. Alongside criteria such as full-time employment in the occupation, membership in a professional association, legal protection of title or tasks, and adherence to codes of ethics, formal academic education is considered a fundamental component in establishing a profession (Nilsson & Blume, 2021; Wilensky, 1964).

While early functionalist analyses emphasized a comprehensive body of knowledge and expertise as a key trait of professionals, more recent perspectives have highlighted the role of knowledge in securing exclusionary closure vis-à-vis other occupational groups (Saks, 2016; 2012). It is essential that professionals maintain control over educational institutions and certification programs. By doing so, they can preserve their monopoly over professional practice and ensure that only those who have completed the requisite education and training are granted entry into the field (Freidson, 2001).

Moreover, when professional work is based on expert and exclusive knowledge, professionals are better positioned to claim autonomy and resist external control, direction, or evaluation (Levay & Waks, 2009; Waring & Currie, 2009; Freidson, 2001). Professional knowledge can take various forms, including “codified, abstract knowledge associated with formal training, but also esoteric, indeterminate, and experiential knowledge that is tacit in nature, situated in practice and embodied in practice” (Waring & Currie, 2009, p. 758). Among these, abstract knowledge is most frequently emphasized as critical for asserting professional claims (Spillman & Brophy, 2018; Evetts, 2013; Freidson, 2001). Professionals use abstract knowledge to redefine problems, uncover novel tasks and domains, and establish barriers to entry. In this context, abstract knowledge aligns with what Lam (2000, p. 492) terms “embrained knowledge,” referring to formal, theoretical and scientific knowledge that holds high societal status. Such knowledge typically requires extended periods of formal training (Waring & Currie, 2009; Abbott, 1988). Importantly, formal education and its resulting academic credentials also function as status symbols and entry of barriers, reinforcing claims for professionalization (Saks, 2012).

Understanding hybrid professionals' additional knowledge

Existing understandings of professional knowledge and expertise are derived almost exclusively from studies focused on professionals' relationship to their original body of knowledge. In contrast, our understanding of hybrid professionals' additional knowledge in management is far less developed. Notably, there is a lack of in-depth and systematic research on how hybrid professionals acquire this type of knowledge. As this has not been an explicit focus of studies on hybrid professionalism, current insights suggest that such knowledge is typically acquired through extended experience working in leadership roles (Blomgren & Waks, 2015), on-the-job training (Breit et al., 2024), and individual, self-directed learning (Kurunmäki, 2004), rather than through extensive formal education.

Furthermore, the understanding of both the content and form of the management knowledge that professionals acquire as they hybridize remains limited. The few studies that have analyzed this knowledge in depth have primarily focused on doctors, concluding that—compared to medical knowledge—management knowledge is typically complementary and technical, rather than abstract, in nature. For example, Llewellyn (2001) offered insights into hybrid

professional's knowledge by discussing how medical managers operate through "two-way windows," integrating both medical and managerial expertise. She argued that, unlike medical expertise, management expertise is not grounded in abstract knowledge, making it relatively easy for doctors to assimilate. Similarly, Kurunmäki (2004) demonstrated that it was primarily management accounting techniques that transferred to doctors and contributed to their hybridization, while the fundamental abstract knowledge underpinning those techniques played only a minor role. As she observed, clinicians' medical knowledge was "complemented by a new set of techniques that enabled them to prepare budgets, calculate costs, and set prices" (*ibid.*, p. 336). As both studies suggest, it is medical knowledge—not managerial knowledge—that forms the professional basis of medical managers, while management knowledge serves merely as a complement.

This depiction of hybrid professionals' additional knowledge—as acquired through informal means rather than extensive formal training, technical in character, and complementary to their original body of knowledge—may help explain why most studies on hybrid professionalism have not addressed this knowledge in relation to the group's professional ambitions. While research has shown that hybrid professionals' dual competencies have enabled them to assume new roles and identities (Alamaa et al., 2025; Sirris, 2019; Currie et al., 2016; McGivern et al., 2015; Spyridonidis et al., 2015), adopt alternative work strategies (Breit et al., 2024; Spyridonidis & Currie, 2016; Waring & Currie, 2009), and enhance innovation capacities (Burgess & Currie, 2013), the idea that their additional knowledge may significantly influence their professionalization process and long-term development has yet to be demonstrated. Moreover, given that professionalization is typically a long-term process, studies with a limited timeframe—which is common in research on hybrid professionalism—risk overlooking such gradual dynamics.

An approach to studying the role of a profession's additional knowledge

To address the limitations outlined above, this article adopts a historical case study approach to examine the management knowledge conveyed through the education program of Swedish principals over time, and what it reveals about their professionalization process. Medical doctors—often the focus of studies on the additional knowledge of hybrid professionals—are, along with lawyers, typically regarded as classical professions that embody all defining traits of a profession (Abbott, 1988; Wilensky, 1964). By focusing instead on a group whose professional status is less firmly established, this study offers an opportunity to explore whether the acquisition of an additional body of knowledge can play more than a complementary role in the development of a profession.

As outlined in the theoretical discussion above, the content, form, and control of the knowledge delivered through a group's education program are essential for understanding its potential role in professionalization processes. The content reflects the profession's area of jurisdiction, while the form and control of the knowledge determine the types of professionalization claims that can be made (*cf.* Saks, 2016, 2012; Abbott, 1988). An abstract body of knowledge that is controlled by the profession and delivered through formal academic training thus constitutes a strong foundation for professionalization claims.

Method

The empirical foundation of this paper is a historical case study (*cf.* Kirkpatrick et al., 2023; Kipping & Kirkpatrick, 2013) of the training of Swedish principals over time. Historical studies offer opportunity to explore "sequences of conditions, actions, and effects that have happened in natural settings, in sufficient detail to get signs of sequences that are causally connected" (Stinchcombe, 2005, p. 5). In this study, I investigate how specific historical circumstances surrounding Swedish principals and their training led to the introduction—and subsequent modifications—of an education program, and how these developments influenced the group's initial hybridization and their further evolution into a profession in its own right.

Swedish principals and teachers have, for most of history, been regarded as belonging to a single profession (Jarl et al. 2012; Ullman, 1997). As such, the group has traditionally been offered few career advancement opportunities, due in part to its flat hierarchical structure (Alvehus et al., 2020). Moreover, research has shown that Swedish teachers have undergone a

process of de-professionalization over time (ibid.; Stenlås, 2009). Given its relatively unclear professional status, the group provides a particularly interesting case for examining processes of hybridization and professionalization, as well as the role that additional management knowledge plays within these processes.

Case studies typically involve the use of multiple data collection methods and have the potential to yield rich material (Yin, 2003; Langley & Royer, 2006). The data for this study were drawn from three main sources: extant research on the training of Swedish principals, official archival documents on the subject, and written historical testimonies from leaders and developers involved in the education program over the years (see Table 1).

Table 1. Data sources

Extant research (See References for details)	Jacobsson et al. (2013, 2017); Jarl et al. (2012); Jarl (2013); Skott & Törnsén (2018); Ullman (1997)	Approx. 970 pages
Archival documents (See References for details)	Government Bill (1975/76:39); (1985/86:173); (1991/92:95); (1992/93:230); (1999/2000:135); (2022/23:54). Government Decision (2008-04-03, U2008/2648/S); (2022, U2022/02319); (2023-06-01, U2023/01870). Government Letter (2001/02:188). Committee directive (2016:76). Departmental series (2007:34). Public Commission Report (1974:53); (1999:63); (2004:116); (2018:17). Government of Sweden (2021) PM 2021-07-29 (U2021/03373) Swedish National Agency for Education NAE (2018); (2020); (2021); (2025).	Approx. 3800 pages
Testimonies (See References for details)	Ekholm (2008, 2016, 2017); Memo by civil servant at NAE	Approx. 160 pages

The extant research literature was accessed through searches in library databases using keywords related to the various names of the principals' education programs over the years (e.g., *rektorsprogrammet*, *rektorsutbildning* etc.). Studies selected for closer analysis were chosen based on their ability to provide comprehensive overviews of the field or in-depth insights into specific time periods in the history of Swedish principals' training. For example, Ullman (1997) was particularly valuable for understanding the early and middle stages of this development, while the work of Jacobsson et al. (2013) and Jacobsson & Svensson (2017) contributed to understanding the later stages. By combining insights from multiple studies, a preliminary timeline of the principals' education program and its evolution was constructed. This timeline was then verified and expanded using data from the other sources.

The second data source comprised official archival documents, including government bills, decisions, letters, directives, public commission reports, and reports from the Swedish National Agency for Education (NAE). These documents have been digitized and are publicly accessible through repositories such as the Swedish National Archives, the Swedish Parliament, and the NAE. The previously established timeline guided the search for relevant documents from specific years, while additional materials were gathered as new leads emerged. Documents were selected based on their relevance to formal decisions and preparatory work leading up to changes in the training of Swedish principals.

The third data source comprised written testimonies, which were selected based on the authors' active participation in developing and leading Swedish principals' education program from the 1970s onward. These accounts include writings by Ekholm (2008, 2016, 2017) and an anonymized, informal internal document authored by a civil servant at the NAE. Ekholm, a researcher and professor emeritus in pedagogy, played a key role in leading the training of Swedish principals during various periods. The anonymized author had extensive experience as a civil servant at the NAE, with a particular focus on principal education programs. All written testimonies are publicly available, with the exception of the anonymized NAE document.

Furthermore, none of the materials contain personal or sensitive information; therefore, the risk of ethical concerns is considered very low.

When analyzing the texts, I employed what Ventresca and Mohr (2002) refer to as the historiographic approach to archival analysis (see also Kipping & Kirkpatrick, 2013). This method involves carefully scrutinizing the materials—reading large volumes of documents in a disciplined way—to develop understanding, uncover new insights, and form well-founded evaluations of historical events and processes. In this study, the documents were primarily analyzed for their content—in other words, they were sourced for evidence, which is the most common approach to textual document analysis (Prior, 2014). However, this does not suggest that any single document offers an exhaustive or objective account of what occurred. To generate robust and valid findings, different types of documents were compared and cross-verified—an approach known as data triangulation (Flick et al., 2004). Because official archival documents such as government bills hold greater authority than other sources, they were given precedence when interpreting formal decisions regarding principals' education program and the investigations that preceded them. As for the extant research literature, these peer-reviewed academic studies generally carry a high degree of trustworthiness. They were used for comparisons, reflection, and validation in later stages of the research process (cf. Kipping & Kirkpatrick, 2013), particularly in relation to the role of principals' education program in the professionalization process. Lastly, the accounts by Ekholm (2008, 2016, 2017) and the informal internal document from NAE represent primary sources authored by individuals with first-hand experience (Coffey, 2014). These documents were also compared with the other types of sources and helped provide more detailed and contextual accounts of the events uncovered in the other materials.

Following the principles described above, the analysis focused on the three components commonly examined in historical studies: *conditions*, *actions*, and *effects* (see Kipping & Kirkpatrick, 2013; Stinchcombe, 2005). To facilitate the organization of the material, the studied time period was divided into segments corresponding to major changes in the education program: (-1976; 1976-1987; 1987-1993; 1993-2001; 2001-2009; 2009-) (see Table 2).

The material describing the first time period (up to 1976) was examined to identify the relevant *conditions* that preceded the introduction of the first version of the Swedish principals' education program. The aim was to understand the professional circumstances of Swedish principals at the time, including the development of their traditional teacher training and the factors that led to the establishment of an education program specifically for principals. The principals' traditional teacher training is considered equivalent to what I previously referred to as the professionals' "original body of knowledge," while the education program represents their "additional body of knowledge."

In terms of *actions*, the analysis focused on the various iterations of the principals' education program introduced over the years, with particular attention to the content, form, and control of the knowledge conveyed in these programs. Regarding content, I examined the material for information on the education program's goals and subject areas. When analyzing form I looked for indications of whether the education program was formally or informally structured, academic or non-academic in nature, and whether the knowledge imparted was abstract/theoretical or technical/practical. To assess control, I investigated whether the education program was governed by the profession itself or by external actors. While these three aspects—content, form, and control—were my primary focus, I also noted contextual developments that influenced the principals' professional trajectory. Examples included the removal of the teaching degree requirement and the introduction of ethical guidelines for principals' work.

The analysis of the *effects* of the education program was carried out in two steps. First, I focused on the program's content, form, and control, examining how each aspect evolved over time and whether it could be interpreted as constituting strong or weak claims for professionalization. In the second step, I summarized these findings, related them to other relevant contextual factors identified during the analysis, and assessed their overall significance for the principals' professional development.

Table 2. Swedish school principals' education program over the years

Time	Name	Format	Agency	Provided by	Goals/Content	Form/Pedagogy	Comments
- 1976	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1976 - 1987	Skolledar-utbildningen	Mandatory 25 days over 2 years. 2 Internships	National board of Education (NBE) Team in Linköping	Regions/ Municipalities	-The schools' goals -Deepened self-awareness -Active participation teamwork -Focus on real problems; the participants' own experiences and work situation	-Interviewing students, parents, teachers -Reflections on day-to-day pedagogy -Role playing -Joint decisions on literature -Internships	It was pointed out that each participant should actively participate in the forming and evaluation of the education program and its content and by doing so, practice a democratic way of working.
1987 - 1993	Skolledar-utbildningen	Mandatory 20-30 days over 3 years. 2 Internships	National board of Education (NBE) Team in Linköping	Regions/ Municipalities	-Societal aims of schools -Leadership -Governmental and local rules and systems -Psychosocial, relational, and democratic ways of working	-Individual/group supervision -Internship studying leadership -Literature studies -Project work -Reflections on one's own experiences	Strong proponents for integration into universities' normal course offerings. But not approved. It was emphasized that the training should not be too theoretical but based on the everyday life in schools.
1993 - 2001	Rektors-utbildningen	Voluntary 25-30 days over 2-3 years.	National Agency for Education (NAE)	Universities	-School goals -School control -Pedagogical development -Monitoring and evaluation	Contract teaching at university level No internships Less frequent meetings Literature studies	Experienced based learning important, but suggestions on academic points, degree and new academic subject.
2001 - 2009	Rektors-utbildningen (adapted)	Voluntary 25-30 days over 2-3 years.	NAE (2001-2002) Agency for School Development (2003-2007) NAE (2008-)	Universities	The school's national goals and mission; the school's control, monitoring and evaluation systems; the consequences of the schools' goals on practice	Contract teaching at university level. Principals could benchmark their accomplishments against academic standards to earn academic points No new academic subject	Working group found that certain measures needed to be taken to more firmly control the professional education program.
2009 -	Rektors-programmet	Mandatory 30 credits/ ECTS over 3 years.	NAE	Universities	-School law and exercise of authority -Management by objectives and results -School leadership	Less focus on developing conversations; more time writing and commenting on texts	It was pointed out that the training is a governmental control tool and it should be carried out in the form of contract education.

Swedish School Principals' Education in Historical Perspective

Conditions: Principals as *Primus inter pares* within the teaching group (-1976)

Throughout most of history, Swedish principals and teachers have been regarded as part of the same profession and shared a common knowledge base (cf. Ullman, 1997; Jarl et al., 2012). Traditionally, principals were recruited from among teachers and received little to no additional training. For the first 550 years of its existence (1290-1828), the principalship was a rotating, time-limited assignment held by teachers within the school, with the principal regarded as *Primus inter pares*—"first among equals" (Ullman, 1997, p. 58). By the mid-1880s, qualifications for principals at higher educational levels included teaching experience, academic merits (such as a PhD), and experience as a lecturer (Ullman, 1997). For principals at lower levels, required qualifications included a bachelor's degree and documented teaching skills. It was not until the 1930s that short courses in "school administration" were introduced, although not all school principals in Sweden participated (Ekholm, 2017).

In 1958, the title of principal (*rektor*) was expanded beyond its traditional association with higher school forms (*läroverken*) to also include the lower school forms (*folkskolorna*). However, this change was met with resistance, as leaders of higher school forms felt their title was being devalued (Ekholm, 2008). In contrast, leaders of lower school forms supported the idea of school leadership as a distinct occupation separate from teaching, advocating for "school administration" as its academic foundation (Ullman, 1997, p. 183). This notion was unfamiliar to principals at the higher school levels, who viewed their role as firmly grounded in the teaching community, with *Primus inter pares* as a fundamental principle (Ullman, 1997). For acceptance to grow among higher-level principals, a shift would be required—one that embraced more advanced administrative perspectives aligned with concepts such as "school leadership" and "strategic decision-making," going beyond the performance of simple administrative tasks.

In 1966, eight years after both groups were assigned the title of principal, they were united under a common association (*Sveriges skolledarförbund*). This transition prompted principals to leave their previous memberships in teachers' associations, further distancing them from the teaching profession (Ullman, 1997). Disputes over the *Primus inter pares* principle continued into the 1970s. Questions emerged regarding whether principals were required to hold academic teaching degrees (Public Commission Report 1974:53), with some arguing that other school professionals, such as psychologists and counselors, should also be eligible for principal positions. The earlier view of principals' duties as purely administrative was gradually abandoned and replaced by the notion that principals should serve as leaders—an expectation that required specialized training.

Actions: The introduction and development of the principals' education program

Version 1 (1976-1987): The first large-scale principals' education program was launched in 1976 (Ekholm, 2017). Concerns about workplace issues and the need for principals to engage with broader society prompted its introduction (Government Bill 1975/76:39, p. 311). The program comprised 25 days spread over two years, including lectures, group discussions, and two internships. A guiding principle was to address "...real problems with reference to the participants' own experiences and work situation" (Government Bill 1975/76:39, p. 312). The internships were to be carried out in "a line of business typical for the neighborhood" (Government Bill 1975/76:39, p. 312) and in "the municipality's children and youth activities" (ibid.). Although there were proposals to integrate the program into universities or teacher training colleges, this idea was abandoned, and the program was instead organized by the National Board of Education (NBE) (Ekholm, 2017).

In 1985, the Swedish government tasked the NBE with developing a new education program for principals based on earlier experiences (Ekholm, 2017). To accommodate principals who had already completed the mandatory program, it was proposed that the new program be divided into four types: recruitment, introduction, advanced, and further training (Government Bill 1985/86:173, p. 4). Although integration into universities was considered, it was rejected in favor of a more practice-oriented approach, rooted in the everyday realities of schools (Jacobsson et al., 2013; internal document). The broader shift toward management by objectives

and results in the public sector influenced the program's aims, which sought to provide principals with an understanding of the societal objectives of the school system, the conditions that promote goal attainment, and "a thorough understanding of the rules and systems governing school activities" (Government Bill 1985/86:173, p. 4).

Version 2 (1987-1993): The second version of the principals' education program was introduced in 1988 and remained under the jurisdiction of the NBE (Ekholm, 2016). It was mandatory, with advanced training similar in scope to the previous program, although the internship component was reduced and refocused to provide principals with leadership experiences in other industries (Jacobsson et al., 2013).

The early 1990s marked a period of profound transformation in the Swedish school system (Blomgren & Waks, 2017; Jarl et al., 2012). A sweeping decentralization reform was enacted in 1991, transferring responsibilities for staff, resource allocation, and the organization of school and teaching activities from the state to municipalities. Over the following years, the school system was reshaped into a competitive market for educational services through school choice and independent school reforms (Government Bill 1991/92:95; Government Bill 1992/93:230). These reforms were not unique to Sweden, but reflected a broader trend associated with New Public Management.

Version 3 (1993-2001): In 1993, the principals' education program underwent another reform. The NBE had been disbanded in 1991 and was replaced by the Swedish National Agency for Education (NAE). After several previous attempts, the program finally became an academic education, decentralized to six Swedish universities, with the NAE acting as the commissioning authority. The program also became less practice-oriented, as the internship was discontinued. As municipal authorities assumed greater responsibility for schooling, decisions regarding participation were delegated to them. The curriculum of this third iteration of the program encompassed school objectives, control mechanisms, pedagogical development, and performance evaluations (Public Commission Report 1999:63). The program increasingly aimed to support principals in planning, budgeting, and evaluating school outcomes, aligning with contemporary managerial trends.

As principals were assigned greater managerial functions under the NPM reforms, their separation from the teaching profession deepened. The principals' association (*Sveriges skollära*) also formulated its own ethical guidelines, further strengthening the principals' professionalization project (Jarl et al., 2012). The separation from the teachers peaked when a new school law came into effect in 1991. With this law, the final remnant of the *Primus inter pares* principle was abandoned, as a teaching degree was no longer required to become a principal (Ullman, 1997). Instead, principals were expected to acquire pedagogical insight "through training and experience" (Swedish Education Act, SFS 2010:800, Ch. 2, Sec.11). To date, no formal requirements exist for specific preparatory education for principals (Skott & Törnsén, 2018). This reform severed the formal connection between teachers and principals which had been established through their shared undergraduate training. Although a large majority of principals (87%) still hold a pedagogical university degree today (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2021, p. 21), they are no longer formally constructed as a hybrid profession combining a teaching degree with managerial responsibilities.

By the late 1990s, it was again deemed necessary to review the principals' education program (Ekholm, 2016). Recommendations included closer integration with universities, the introduction of a headmaster examination, and the creation of a new academic subject, "Educational Leadership". Advocates argued that such a subject should integrate research and provide a scientific foundation. However, the Swedish government opposed establishing a new scientific discipline, maintaining that such decisions were the prerogative of universities (Government Bill 1999/2000:135, p. 75). A fundamental disagreement persisted over whether the program should be a government-controlled education program or further integrated into the academic system with looser governmental control. The government favored the former, arguing that it would give it "the opportunity to delineate the roles and responsibilities of principals and related stakeholders in overseeing and developing the school system" (Government Bill 1999/2000:135, p. 74).

Version 4 (2001-2009): The fourth iteration of the principals' education program began in 2001. This version emphasized its connection to the governmental control system and strengthening the alignment with national goals (Jacobsson et al., 2013). The academization of the program continued in parallel, as principals who wished could benchmark their accomplishments against academic standards to earn academic credits (Ekholm, 2016). The number of universities offering the program expanded from six to eight. In 2004, responsibility for the program was transferred to a new agency—The Agency for School Development (Government Letter 2001/02:188). This agency was short-lived; being disbanded in 2008, after which responsibility for the program was transferred back to the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Version 5 (2009-): In 2007, a Department of Education working group proposed a new framework for principals' education (Departmental Series 2007:34), which became the foundation of today's program. It was structured around three subjects: school law and the exercise of authority, management by objectives and results, and school leadership. The first subject introduced principals to the school's mission, governance, and legal frameworks, emphasizing their governmental mandate. The second addressed the assessment of student and school performance against national objectives, including organizational control methods such as management accounting and quality assurance (Jacobsson & Svensson, 2017). The third offered practice-oriented leadership training linked to daily managerial responsibilities (Departmental Series 2007:34, p. 58). The working group stressed that the program should serve as "a governmental control tool" (ibid., p. 6), delivered as contract education through universities. In 2008, the program was further formalized and integrated into the academic system: it became mandatory, carried 30 credits (ECTS) at an advanced level, and could be incorporated into a master's degree.

The Professions Program (2022-). Although principals' education program has remained largely unchanged since 2009, the issue of Swedish principals' education has continued to attract policy attention. In 2022, a new competence development initiative (Government Bill 2022/23:54), known as the *Professions Program*, was introduced. The program targets Swedish principals, teachers, and preschool teachers. It does not replace the principals' education program but functions as a professional development initiative designed to strengthen teaching quality, professional status, and the attractiveness of the profession. In June 2023, the government further specified the mandate to procure continuing education for Swedish principals, which may form part of a master's degree in school leadership (Government Decision 2023-06-01, p. 2). The *Professions Program* combines academic courses, collegial learning, and practice-related research (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2025).

Effects on principals' additional knowledge—content, form, and control

From psychosocial to managerial content

During the period studied, changes in principals' training signaled a shift from an emphasis on social-psychological theories, self-reflection, and local school development issues toward a perspective requiring principals to understand national expectations of their role as school managers. This reflected broader societal and public-sector transformations. Managerialism gained ground in the 1980s with the rise of "management by objectives and performance" in the public sector, gaining further momentum during the marketization of schools in the early 1990s. The shift toward more managerial content in the program supported a transition in which principals gradually established a clearer jurisdiction over their tasks, taking on fewer teaching duties while assuming greater managerial responsibilities (cf. Arora-Jonsson et al., 2018; Jarl et al., 2012).

From informal to academic training

Over time, the education program for principals became more formalized and academic. Initially conceived as a loose, non-academic education that emphasized active participant involvement in its design, content, and evaluation—and with a strong practical orientation—it gradually transitioned into a mandatory, conventional academic program with fixed curriculum, positioned at the advanced level within the university system.

From practical to abstract knowledge

The tension concerning turning the Swedish principals' education program into an academic program and making it "too theoretical" has always been present. However, compared to the initial situation, the practical elements of the training have gradually decreased in favor of more abstract and theoretical knowledge. In the beginning, there was no set curriculum, and the focus lay primarily on informal discussions and internships. Today, the internships have been discontinued, and the training has been integrated in an academic framework, where informal discussions are largely replaced by a stronger emphasis on textual analysis and writing (Ekholm, 2016).

The ongoing effort to incorporate more abstract knowledge into principals' overall training—while maintaining its connection to practice—is reflected in the recently introduced *Professions Program*, which combines academic courses with practice-based research.

Increased government control over principals' training

While policymakers' focus in the earliest version of the education program was primarily on its procedural aspects (emphasizing its democratic nature), the goals and content of the education have since become more clearly specified and controlled. The Swedish government has also explicitly stated that it regards the principals' education program as a "control tool for the state" (Departmental Series 2007:34, p. 36). Ekholm (2016) argues that the leaders of education programs for principals do exercise influence over their teaching, but he also notes that the government's interest in controlling the education has grown over time. Overall, it seems that the Swedish principal profession still has some way to go before it can be said to exert strong control over its education program and the knowledge provided.

Effects on principals' professionalization processes

The rise and decline of a hybridization process

With the introduction of the education program for principals in 1976, the hybridization of Swedish principals' role began in earnest. The program was initially conceived as a supplement to their original body of knowledge in teaching. The additional knowledge provided through the program was strongly practice-oriented and informally structured. Over time, however, the program gained prominence, evolving from a supplementary initiative into the sole unifying and mandatory program for all principals, as the requirement for a teaching degree was abandoned. Gradually, the education program became formalized and was transformed into an academic form of education, while its knowledge base grew more abstract with an increasing emphasis on management. This shift marked the end of the hybridization that had begun in the mid-1970s, as principals no longer shared the same combination of original and additional knowledge. With the growing importance of the latter—and the abandonment of the previous requirement for the former—the last vestige of the *Primus inter pares* principle, in which principals were regarded as "first among equals" within the teaching profession, disappeared.

The establishment of a profession in its own right

While it is difficult—some would even argue unfruitful—to discuss in detail whether an occupational group should be considered a profession (Brante 2011; Abbott, 1988), there is much to suggest that Swedish principals, as a group, have today transformed into a profession in its own right. Of the attributes normally regarded as fundamental to the establishment of a profession—full-time employment within the occupation, participation in a professional association, legal protection of work or title, codes of ethics, and a formal academic education and training (Nilsson & Blume, 2021; Wilensky, 1964)—Swedish principals possess them all. The introduction of the principals' education program, and particularly its subsequent transformation into a formal academic education with a managerial orientation, has been fundamental to their professionalization process. Through this program, principals have developed a distinct knowledge base that enables them to make jurisdictional claims in the areas of school management and leadership, thereby further distancing themselves from the teaching profession (cf. Jarl et al., 2012).

However, as important as the education program has been for their recognition as a profession, it still has weaknesses that appear to limit their position. Government control over

the program remains strong. Although it now contains more abstract and theoretical knowledge, efforts to further increase principals' competence and strengthen their professional standing continue.

Concluding Discussion

The aim of this study is to contribute to a deeper understanding of hybrid professionals' additional knowledge and its role in their professional development over time. The purpose of this concluding section is to discuss how the results of the study contribute to the literature on hybrid professionalism, under which conditions the findings are likely to be most valid, and what implications can be drawn from the study.

In this article, the overall effects of introducing and modifying a profession's additional knowledge base have, over time, been shown to contribute to both the rise and decline of professional hybridity and, ultimately, to the formation of a new and distinct profession, separate from the group from which it originally emerged. These findings enhance our understanding of how hybrid professionalism develops and is cultivated over time—an area that has so far received limited attention (Hellqvist & Kurkkio, 2025; Breit et al., 2024; Giacomelli, 2020).

While several researchers have explored how hybrid professionalism and related work practices, roles, and strategies emerge (Breit et al., 2024; 2018; Leah, 2020; Noordegraaf, 2015; 2007; Kurunmäki, 2004; Llewellyn, 2001), less attention has been given to how hybrid professionalism evolves over time. By applying a historical case study approach, which allows for the investigation of a longer time period than is typically possible, the findings of this study demonstrate that hybridization can have more far-reaching consequences than previously described. Hybridization not only leads to new roles and identities, as previously shown, but can eventually result in the formation of a new and distinct profession in its own right.

There appear, however, to be some conditions that enable the hybridization process to lead to the formation of a new profession. These conditions are important to consider if we want to understand when this type of professional trajectory is most likely to occur. First, the study suggests that hybridization is more likely to result in a new and separate profession if the original profession from which the new profession evolved has been de-professionalized and weakened. Professions compete with each other for control over tasks, roles, and responsibilities (Saks, 2012; Freidson, 2001), and because they exist in a "system of professions," a change in one part of the system has ripple effects throughout the rest of it (Abbott, 1988). In this case, the original profession—teachers—had been de-professionalized and weakened for a prolonged period (Stenlås, 2009), and its declining professional status and lack of career paths served as an impetus for a shift toward more managerial positions (see Alvehus et al., 2020; Jarl et al., 2012).

This ties into the second condition, which suggests that the additional management knowledge of hybrid professionals needs to be recognized in society to serve as a foundation for their transition into a new and separate profession. For a profession to be considered legitimate, it must command knowledge that is regarded as essential for the functioning of society (Freidson, 2001; Abbott, 1988). The field of management gained institutional momentum in public governance during the 1980s and 1990s, as evidenced by the large-scale introduction of the New Public Management (NPM) reforms. For many professional groups, this marked the starting point of their hybridization process. As this study has shown, this era was also crucial for professionals whose hybridization had begun earlier, as it provided them with a stronger managerial mandate, supporting their transition into a new profession. At this point, it was not only possible but also desirable for Swedish principals to transform into managers. Since then, management knowledge and expertise have continued to be a lucrative arena for professionalization claims by various groups.

Third, the study suggests that hybridization is more likely to result in the formation of a new profession if the process is supported by governmental actions. This condition is particularly relevant in a European context, as previous research has shown that nation-state support has been especially crucial to the development of professions in the European system of professions (Evetts, 2013; Burrage & Torstendahl, 1990). Governmental support has been fundamental in such areas as creating legal frameworks for regulating professional licensing and credentialing,

establishing state-sponsored training programs and institutions, and providing public sector employment within state bureaucracies.

However, the study also shows that governmental support can be detrimental to professional development if it becomes overly controlling. An important implication is that if the government promotes training primarily based on practice- and experienced-based knowledge rather than abstract knowledge, it will impede professional development. Professions need to be allowed to develop and maintain control over an abstract body of knowledge in order to thrive and make decisions based on professional expertise (Spillman & Brophy, 2018; Evetts, 2013). If this is not allowed, they may function more as state agents tasked with implementing governmental policies than as independent professionals who base their judgment on professional knowledge. An ambivalent governmental position—oscillating between support and strict control—is likely to create a loop in which the profession is seen as weak and in need of continuous reinforcement, as reflected in the case of the Swedish principal profession.

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