

## Dr. Jie Zhang



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Lawrence, B.C., Zhang, J.J. & Heineke, J. (2016). A Life-Cycle Perspective of Professional Services. *Journal of Operations Management, Special Issue on Professional Service Operations Management*. 42-43: 25-38.

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This research by Dr. Jie Zhang and her co-authors develops a professional service lifecycle model to detail changes in professional work over time. Professional services organizations can be characterized by a knowledge asymmetry between the professional and the client, i.e. where the professional has significantly more specialized knowledge on a topic than the client does.

Exploring a lifecycle model via a case study in the green building industry, this paper details the evolution of Leadership in Energy Environmental Design (LEED) consulting services. LEED was born from innovation but as the system developed, became more complex and adopted the use of technology, and as a result became more standardized.

The LEED rating systems are developed and updated by the United States Green Building Council, which was founded in 1993 to promote sustainability in design, building, maintenance and operation of buildings, homes and communities. LEED consulting services developed over a relatively short period: four iterations of the LEED rating systems have been released over the last 20 years, with the initial version released in 1998 and most recent released in 2013. This rapid evolution of the LEED industry made it an ideal environment in which to analyze the tensions arising from

evolving innovation and commodification—the researchers were able to observe several generations of LEED consulting work over a comparatively short period of time.

As this paper demonstrates, the professional service lifecycle model involves an iterative process that is driven by technological advancement and stakeholders constantly demanding validated, cost-effective and newer solutions. Driven by these demands, the professional work mix becomes more standardized as an initial innovation moves towards widespread adoption. Proactively responding to these demands requires continuously redesigning the work flow to facilitate collaboration and matching the type of work (idiosyncratic or routine) with the knowledge level of the worker, thus freeing those with the highest knowledge levels to continue to innovate. As adoption continues, the professional service work becomes more standardized and routine-based.

In applying a lifecycle lens to professional service work, the authors demonstrate that professional service work can and should be proactively managed along the lifecycle. Zhang summarizes the four insights from this study: “Embrace the lifecycle; understand the technology and market forces behind it; proactively manage the lifecycle; and recognize the value of coordination and collaboration among the dynamic mix of creative and standardized tasks.”

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