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Special issue call for papers

Inserting professionals and professional organizations in studies of wrongdoing: The nature, antecedents, and consequences of professional misconduct

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Please refer to the full Call for Papers here:

http://www.tavinstitute.org/humanrelations/special_issues/Professional%20misconduct.html

Submission deadline: 30 April 2017 (submissions will not be considered before 1 April 2017)

Special issue objective and scope

Fuelled by recent and historical scandals, there has been long standing and growing interest in corruption and wrongdoing (Palmer et al., 2016). Whilst it is well established that corruption is a collective rather than an individual endeavour, requiring the complicity if not contribution from a multiplicity of actors (Mitchell and Sikka, 2011; Palmer, 2013, Sikka and Wilmott, 2013), relatively little attention has been paid to the role played by different actors in these broader ecologies of wrongdoing (Muzio et al., 2016). Some particularly important and under-researched actors are the professions and their organizations. Indeed, to paraphrase Mitchell and Sikka (2011: 8), scratch the surface of any major case of wrongdoing and you will find the invisible hands of several professional occupations and organizations.

The notion that professions are in theory distinguished from regular businesses and trades by their superior moral fibre is well established in the academic literature (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Durkheim, 1957; Parson, 1954). For Durkheim (1957) the civic sense of the professions was a key component within the system of moral restraints that could address the anomie of modernity, and for Carr-Saunders and Wilson (1933) the established professions were even a bastion against the barbarities of Nazism and Stalinism. More recently, the labour market privileges of the professions have been connected to their role as 'gate-keepers' (Coffee, 2006) whereby they constitute an important component of the regulatory systems which guarantee the integrity of key societal institutions such as the delivery of healthcare, the administration of justice and the operation of financial markets.

The recent and historical cases of professional misconduct have, however, severely challenged the view of the professions as inherently good and altruistic. High level cases of corruption such as Enron and Parmalat revealed how these were facilitated and sustained by extensive professional networks including auditors, accountants, lawyers, credit/security analysts and management consultants, usually employed in large professional organizations (Coffee, 2005; 2006; Gabbioneta et al., 2013; 2014; Muzio et al., 2016). Similarly, the case of high infant mortality and the cover up of a quality problem following heart surgery (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2003), and the recent case of child abuse in the UK health care system (Dixon-Woods et al., 2011) tragically highlights the gap between the taken-for-granted view of doctors as the embodiment of ethical and altruistic values and the reality of professional misconduct. Indeed healthcare settings appear particularly prone to professional misconduct – witness high level inquiries regarding attacks upon children by a nurse (Brown, 2000) and poor quality care for older persons (Francis, 2013) within UK hospitals. Of course, we should not exclude our own practices and priorities as academics from examination, given the number of high profile cases of academic misconduct which have recently been reported in response to publication pressures in particular (Honig et al., forthcoming).

These cases of professional misconduct are particularly puzzling as they contradict the public role that we recognize to the professions (and that they claim for themselves) and undermine traditional theoretical understandings of professionalism as an occupational ideology and work organization method (Freidson, 2001). These cases also raise interesting questions, such as: How can we understand misconduct by professionals and professional organizations? What are its causes? And what are its consequences?

Answering these questions is important for a range of debates. First, it may contribute to the literature on professions as it helps to understand why professional misconduct persists in spite of increasing regulation and efforts by professional associations and organizations, and how this problem could be addressed. Second, it may make an important contribution to the broader literature on organizational wrongdoing by focusing our attention on the broader sets of stakeholder relationships which frame and make possible systemic forms of wrongdoing within both private and public sector organizations. As such, it also may help us to develop more holistic regulatory frameworks to better manage the risks of wrongdoing. Finally it may help to bring together debates across a number of specialist literatures, such as law, business ethics, accountancy, healthcare and finance where cases of professional misconduct are located.

Our general interest in professional misconduct can be further articulated around three main research themes, as detailed below.

The nature of professional misconduct

The literature identifies a series of factors which increase the risk of professional misconduct. The reliance on an increasingly small number of large clients exposes professionals to the risk of 'client capture', whilst the employment of professionals in large organizations exposes them to the prescriptions of managerial and commercial logics and therefore weakens the hold of their fiduciary obligations (Anderson-Gough et al., 1998; Cooper and Robson, 2006; Grey, 1998; Gunz and Gunz, 2002). The recent introduction of public ownership of professional firms is also thought to increase the tension between professional and commercial values, as professionals may be asked to shift priorities and preferences (Markle, 2014; Parker, 2004; Rayne, 2014). In this context, an organization's size and prestige may also guarantee a degree of 'structural assurance' convincing individuals that its objectives and practices are fair and proper (Smets et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2008). Cross border operations – such as those run by global professional service firms – may also facilitate misconduct as they expose professionals to the ambiguities of 'double deontology', that is to say to the uncertainty over which sets of rule apply to a given situation (Etherington and Lee, 2007; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2012; Nicolson and Webb, 1999). Although most of these factors have been investigated, we still have a limited understanding of why some professionals engage in misconduct compared to others. A number of questions still remain open:

- How can we conceptualize professional misconduct?
- Is professional misconduct different from other forms of wrongdoing (e.g. corporate wrongdoing)?
- What are the differences – and the similarities – across different types of professional misconduct?
- Are some professions more likely to engage in professional misconduct than others?
- How does professional misconduct relate to broader field-level or societal patterns (e.g. globalization)?
- How do practitioners themselves understand the challenges of professional misconduct?

Explanations for professional misconduct

Existing explanations on the causes of professional misconduct vary depending on the level of analysis and the disciplinary focus adopted. Scholars in psychology and organization behaviour have focused on individuals through the notion of the 'moral self-licensing' (Merritt et al., 2010) and the view that individual practitioners through the belief in their own professionalism may become desensitised to their own actions (Kouchaki, 2014). Scholars in accounting, law and economics have focused on the pressures of commercialization (Dinovitzer et al., 2015; Faulconbridge and Muzio, 2009; Hanlon, 1999), misaligned incentives (Coffee, 2005; Covaleski et al., 1998; Grey, 2003) or poorly designed oversight systems (Dixon-Woods and Ashcroft, 2008; Jost, 1995; Yeung and Dixon-Woods, 2010). Scholars working within an organization studies tradition have focused on the development of external accountability regimes and their consequences (Power, 1997). In particular Adler et al. (2015) have argued how accountability regimes undermine the sentiment of responsibility

assumed by professionals and tend to perpetuate the likelihood of professional misconduct. Considerable strain between managers and professionals about bureaucratic and professional standards of evaluation is likely to remain (Raelin, 1985), with professional aspiration to enact a sentiment of responsibility confronted by workplace performance pressures and organizational bureaucracy, particularly in healthcare settings (Apesoa-Varano and Varano, 2014). Paradoxically, such attempts to manage professionals may undermine the defining characteristic of professionals, i.e. their moral or ethical imperative, whereby the professional must sacrifice self-interest and accept responsibility for the client (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Parsons, 1954). Connecting all these factors, Muzio et al. (2016) tied professional misconduct to the risks, uncertainties and opportunities created by shifting boundaries in increasingly complex professional ecologies. This contribution is particularly important in the context of this special issue, as it highlighted the risks originating from the increasing organizational dimension of professional work, by emphasizing the tensions between professional obligations and organizational practices and priorities. Yet, as most of this work is based on conceptual frameworks or on individual case studies, it is important to ask:

- To what extent do these theoretical accounts of professional misconduct stand up to closer empirical testing?
- What are the boundary conditions of these accounts of professional misconduct?
- To what extent can these accounts of professional misconduct be generalized across different professional settings?
- To what extent is professional misconduct affected by the national and/or transnational context(s) in question?
- How can we integrate different levels of analysis (individual, group, organizational, occupational and ecological) to provide more compelling understandings of professional misconduct?

Consequences of professional misconduct

Professionals, like everyone else, are subjected to the provisions of civil and criminal law and violating these can ultimately have fatal consequences, as illustrated by the Arthur Anderson's involvement in the Enron debacle. But due to their professional status and privileged labour market position, professions are also exposed to higher standards than other types of occupations and organizations. These stem from the professions' fiduciary obligations and are often embodied in professional codes of conduct. Violation of these codes exposes firms to industry level disciplinary procedures which are more extensive and intrusive than in other parts of the economy. Finally, professions owing to their institutionalised gate-keeping role and to the privileges that derive from this, are subjected to much higher public expectations and obligations. Failing to conform to these, by engaging in or assisting types of behaviour such as tax evasion which may be technically legal but counter-normative to their public role, may expose the professions to high levels of public condemnation. Although the consequences of professional misconduct may be rather severe, scholars have not analysed them in detail. This may also have implications for how professional organizations can recover from misconduct, as this may also vary from other types of organizations. Notwithstanding possibilities for whistleblowing, the limits of which are all apparent (Kaptain, 2011; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005; Miller and Thomas, 2005; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2003), alternative models of managing and regulating professionals may need to be considered to prevent misconduct (Adler et al., 2015). In this context, the following questions may be particularly relevant:

- What are the main consequences of professional misconduct?
- What are the relationships between individual professional and organizational level sanctions for professional misconduct?
- Does misconduct within one profession affect other professions? And, if yes, how?
- Does professional misconduct affect individuals and organizations outside the profession? And, if yes, how?
- How can professional organizations and occupations recover from cases of misconduct?
- Does the likelihood of recovery vary according to the type of misconduct or the profession in question?

These themes and questions are only indicative and we are open to a range of contributions which extend our knowledge of professional misconduct and its nature, antecedents and consequences. Papers may take varying methodologies and approaches: conceptual, theory building, meta-analytical, and empirical. Recognizing the multi-disciplinary character of this area, submissions

may draw on a wider range of disciplines such as accountancy, business ethics, economics, healthcare, management, psychology, sociology and socio-legal studies. Indeed one of the aims of the special issue is to foster and consolidate debates across multiple disciplines relevant to the study of professional misconduct. Given the extremely fluid state of the field, we are also keen to consider speculative and thinking pieces.

Contributors should note:

- This call is open and competitive, and the submitted papers will be double-blind reviewed by experienced scholars in the field.
- Submitted papers must be based on original material not accepted by, or under consideration with, any other journal or outlet.
- For empirical papers based on data sets from which multiple papers have been generated, authors must provide the Guest Editors with copies of all other papers based on the same data.
- The guest editors will select a limited number of papers to be included in the special issue. Other papers submitted to the special issue may be considered for publication in other issues of the journal at the discretion of the Editor-in-Chief.
- To be considered for this special issue, submissions must fit with the Aims and Scope of *Human Relations*: http://www.tavainstitute.org/humanrelations/about_journal/aims.html as well as this call for papers.
- Papers should be submitted online in accordance with our submission guidelines: http://www.tavainstitute.org/humanrelations/submit_paper.html.
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- Please indicate in your covering letter that the paper is intended for this Special issue.

Please direct questions about the submission process, or any administrative matter, to the Editorial Office: humanrelationsjournal@tavainstitute.org.

The guest editors of this special issue would be happy to be contacted directly with queries relating to potential submissions:

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