

Journal of Professions and Organization (JPO) Special Issue

Opening up the meanings of “the professional,” professional organizations, and professionalism in communication studies

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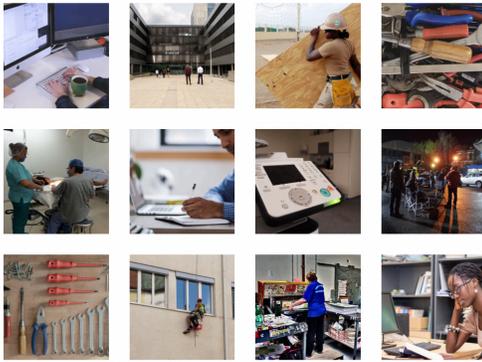
Call For Papers

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Research literature on the professions documents a discursive shift from professionalism as a noun (“being a professional”) to an adjective (“being professional”) which generates important changes in how different types of workers and work are valued.

Professionalism, then, focuses on how individuals carry out types of work with knowledge and skill rather than limiting the “professions” to particular types of work (Caza & Creary, 2016). In a similar vein, others have argued that professionalism entails carrying out one’s activities with a “professional spirit” (Hodgson, 2002, p. 805) or “conducting and constituting oneself in an appropriate manner” (Fournier, 1999, p. 287).

Joining this rich body of interdisciplinary work, communication scholarship aims to understand the formation, negotiation, and presentation of professional identities through communication and the navigation of communication difficulties in professional work. Communication research has emphasized the links between professionalism, career trajectories, and self-branding (Ashcraft, 2013; Ashcraft et al., 2012; Berkelaar et al., 2016; Lair et al., 2005); the rhetorical construction of contested professional identities in “new” and “old” professional fields (Ashcraft, 2007; Garcia &



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Barbour, 2018; Meisenbach, 2008; Miller, 1998; Mitra & Buzzanell, 2018; Norander et al., 2011), blended domains (e.g., science journalists), or occupational groups traditionally held to be non-professional (e.g., para-professional workers, volunteers/amateurs, see Ganesh & McAllum, 2012; McAllum, 2018). Communication scholarship is particularly concerned with how professionalism acts as a mechanism for occupational inclusion and exclusion, with intersectional identities such as race, class, gender, age, caste, and sexuality shaping who can or should be a professional, and how attachments to the profession affect and encompass other life domains (Barbour et al., 2020; Ferguson Jnr. & Dougherty, 2021; Sullivan, 2012).

Communication scholarship focused on communication problems that recur in professional work includes the study of (a) specific communication practices common to particular professions such as interaction with clients, patients, and constituencies distinctive to each profession (Cullinan et al., 2020; Real et al., 2019; Wittenberg-Lyles et al., 2012); (b) communication within and across professional boundaries in the context of interprofessional and interdisciplinary work (Bucher et al., 2016; Fox & Brummans, 2019; Fox et al., 2019); and (c) the evaluation and regulation of others' expertise (Barley, 2015; Barley et al., 2012; Treem & Leonardi, 2016). Communication scholars interested in expertise have empirically studied and theorized how distinctions between specialist/generalist occupations and process/content expertise contribute to the ongoing transformation of what "counts" as professionalism (Barley et al., 2020; Mitra, 2018; Woo & Meyers, 2020). Another strand of research focuses on professionalism as a way of cultivating specific types of professional logics or scripts for solving problems, for example during socialization when future professionals acquire specific forms of communication competence (Apker & Eggly, 2004; Brown & Bylund, 2008; Bylund, 2017).

The co-constitution of occupations and organizations in communication and the implications of professional identity and practice for the occupation-organization interface are also key to communication scholarship. Topics have included material and discursive tensions between organizational and occupational demands (Kuhn, 2009; Lammers & Garcia, 2009; Lammers & Proulx, 2015), the

multiplicity of attachments in professional work, and the professions' influence in the adoption and use of organizational technologies (Bailey & Leonardi, 2015).

Building on Ashcraft and Cheney's (2007) germinal text on "the professional," communication scholarship foregrounds and celebrates the multi-faceted nature of professionalism as an essentially contested concept that is characterized by internal complexity, conceptual diversity, and reciprocal recognition of the concept's contested character among contending parties. Rather than championing any one definition or perspective, this special issue aims to map out and contextualize the multiple meanings of professionalism and professional organizations, particularly in novel or non-standard contexts. It also seeks to articulate how distinctively communication-centered research can deepen our understanding of professionalism and professional organizations.

Topics for the special issue may include but are not restricted to:

- How is professionalism defined and operationalized in communication studies? How are we, as researchers, contributing to institutionalize particular understandings of professionalism? How might we develop more communicative understandings of professionalism?
- How do the meanings of professionalism shift across varied institutional, organizational, and cultural contexts?
- Through what analytical and empirical lenses should we study professional workers, professional organizations, and professionalization?
- How can we open up the meanings of professionalism to include emotion work and embodied work experiences?
- How is professionalism critically used to push back against organizational and social control?
- Is professionalism an aspirational concept? How does professionalism act as a resource and as a constraint? Whose interests does professionalism serve? How might we disrupt contemporary meanings of professionalism?
- How might communication scholars contribute to interdisciplinary dialogues and/or practitioner-researcher collaborations about professionalism and professionalization?
- How has the post-industrial economy contributed to establishing new forms or definitions of professionalism? (In the sense that others - often unqualified - decide how professional you are? E.g., the Uber world; online reviews of almost everything and everyone including professors, doctors and medical specialists, restaurants, etc.)
- How will the automation of work and the work of automation form and affect professions and professionals in the future?

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