Chapter 4: "Visualize a Triangle." What's Professional About Professional Communication?

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Abstract: Research into occupational rhetoric has promoted professional communication as an aspirational discourse by conflating occupational and professional forms and activities. As such, professional communication has become a general term that encircles most forms of workplace, business, technical, or organizational communication. Yet, historically, the professions have played an important role in mediating the regulatory and capitalist forces of government and business. Here, professional discourse is not an aggregate or aspirational form of workplace communication but a separate field motivated to promote cognitive concepts associated with health, justice, science, and knowledge and to constrain the excesses of capitalist and regulatory discourses. Conflating professional discourse with business, regulatory, or other forms of workplace communication obscures the conditions, ethics, and intentions that motivate each sector and the real and important tensions between these sectors. Examining professional discourse as a function rather than an occupational status opens up situational research that could investigate specific professional activities within competing discourses. Such moments and spaces could show where and how discourses are deployed as a correction to capitalist or regulatory over-reach. Such a project could investigate how rhetorical agents modulate discourses while retaining and deploying legitimacy, credibility, and the ability to enact social and economic power.

Keywords: professionalism, discourse, intention, ethics, curation, modulation

It is a particularly good time to revisit the art and science of professional communication. On December 21, 2018, the editorial board of *The New York Times* reported that Judge Emmet G. Sullivan of the Federal District Court in Washington reprimanded the former Attorney General, Jeff Sessions, for not adhering to professional legal standards with regards to federal asylum activities. As the editorial board put it, Judge Sullivan told Sessions to "follow the law." The case being considered involved actions Sessions took in June 2018 to reject potential immigrants' claims of domestic and gang-related violence as criteria for seeking asylum. As the editorial board wrote, "In his ruling on Wednesday, the judge . . . all but accused Mr. Sessions of taking the law into his own hands. By creating a system that categorically denied these claims, the judge wrote, 'the attorney gen-

eral has failed to stay within the bounds of statutory authority.'" In other words, Sessions had acted unprofessionally.

America's 2016 overlaying of government and capitalism and the ensuing challenges by the professions are clarifying and prescient spaces for professional communication research. The events of June 2018 show a legal profession pushing back against a government official whose actions broke the law and violated his purpose, scope, and privilege as a legal professional acting within government. A hopeful account of Judge Sullivan's actions, as well as other judicial and medical challenges since 2016, would posit that a much-weakened professional sector appears to be reasserting itself in the face of a similarly weakened government sector. Judge Sullivan's decision thus reasserted the professions' role within the necessary and dynamic tensions among government, capitalism, and professions. As Eliot Krause (1996) would have it, physicians challenging the treatment of immigrant children at the southern border and lawyers challenging multiple federal government environmental, immigration, and ethical actions demonstrate the professions asserting themselves to "influence and confront the power of both capitalism and the state" (p. 2) —or in this case, a state that has been overrun by self-interested and self-styled capitalists. After decades during which the American economy has deprofessionalized specialized knowledge-based work, distributed the occupational authority typically associated with the professions to other semi- and non-specialized groups, and diluted the professions' social power, it could be that the professions' authority, knowledge, and system of societal checks and balances may again be finding social purpose and resolve.

This chapter revisits the findings from my 2002 study, "Professional Identities: What's Professional About Professional Communication?" and the reception and influence the study has had on professional communication teaching and research. In short, the study was not able to hold back what has appeared to be an ongoing desire to enfold a good deal of non-fiction and occupational writing within the realm of professional communication. The critique in this initial section of the chapter is that while writers have desired and claimed professional status, what has been missing in these claims has been the reciprocal necessity of professional accountability. In other words, what has been missing is an articulation of the specifically professional purpose enacted by a particular discursive form and the social responsibilities that are aligned with that purpose.

As route to better understanding the purpose of professional communication, this chapter then returns to Elliot Krause's (1996) distinctions among professional, regulatory, and capitalist domains. A robust democracy, according to Krause, requires a productive tension among the three domains as each sector holds the other two within productive boundaries. Krause uses a triangle metaphor here, with each sector sustaining, restricting, and defining the other two. To demonstrate how Krause's model applies to communication scholarship, the chapter next offers two short case studies showing professional discourse operating as a

check and balance against capitalist impulses first within an institution and next within the free market.

The chapter concludes by overtly switching frames from occupational status in the 2002 study to the purpose or, otherwise put, the intent of specific communicative forms. Professional communication is professional when it influences and confronts either the unfettered power of capitalism, the regulatory power of the state, or both. At the same time, professional communication is more than protest and advocacy: the initial findings from "Professional Identities" continue to hold. The professions still rely on individual clients, they have a social responsibility to and are accountable for a specific and exclusive knowledge base, and they have an ethical obligation to work on behalf of and be subject to that same knowledge base.

What "Professional Identities" did not sufficiently articulate is the layering and integration of these characteristics with communicative intent. When a professional works with an individual audience (i.e., patient, client, student), the activity is intended to adjudicate professional knowledge as it relates to the audience's particular circumstance. By articulating professional communication through the frame of professional intent, professional communication may not be restricted to particular occupations, guilds, or settings. Instead, professional communication could be seen as the enactment of crucial checks and balances at particular, necessary, and strategic moments.

Professional Identities: What's Professional About Professional Communication?

"Professional Identities" (Faber, 2002) was written to mark and respond to a growth in writing and communication programs that aligned themselves with the art and science of the professions. The concern that led to the project was a perception that this growth and alliance was occurring without a concomitant attention to the concepts of *professional* or *professionalism*. While researchers had articulated specific functional and categorical definitions that were consistent with the sociological literature on the professions (e.g., Couture, 1992; Geisler, 1994; Savage, 1999; Sullivan & Porter, 1993), these portraits had little influence on pedagogy, program development, or studies and articulations of workplace communication. As the article showed, rhetorical studies of workplaces largely conflated all forms of occupational writing as "professional."

At the time, Sullivan and Porter (1993) had articulated an alternative frame for understanding the unique roles associated with professional communication as something different from other forms of workplace writing. Working from Eliot Freidson's (1970, 1986) studies of medicine, Sullivan and Porter emphasized that the professions apply knowledge gained from esoteric education to serve the essential needs of the public (p. 417). Thus, professional communication within a corporate or institutional context would be oriented not to promote a specific

company, product, or service, but towards "helping the company better understand the needs and interests of the public" (Sullivan & Porter, 1993, p. 414). In this characterization, the professional communicator was presented as an independent advocate for the public within or outside of the institutional confines of a corporation or government entity.

Working from Sullivan and Porter's (1993) study, I researched "Professional Identities" by examining 34 articles published in *The Journal of Business and Technical Communication* (*JBTC)*, *The Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* (*JTWC*), and *Technical Communication Quarterly* (*TCQ*) between 1990 and 1999 in an effort to characterize how writers in the field advanced the concept of *professional* in professional communication. The 34 articles were comprehensive of all articles that included the phrase *professional communication* in the title or abstract and provided conclusions that spoke to curricular or research implications for professional communication, professional writing, or professional communicators. As I wrote at the time, the goal of the study was to "examine what the authors seemed to imply through their use of the term *professional* and, thus, how scholars in the field have conceptualized this term" (Faber, 2002, p. 310).

The study offered three findings that articulated what rhetorical scholars presented when they used the term *professional* to discuss professional communication.

■ 1. Audience Relationship

Professionals were viewed as workers who have an integral relationship with a specific and known audience. Professionals rarely communicated with anonymous audiences, larger (mass) groups of people, or people with whom they did not have a known and deliberate relationship. For example, a lawyer's professional responsibility is to represent a specific client. The lawyer may provide free legal advice on a website or blog but in that capacity will note that such communication is not professional advice, but it is educational or informative writing. Similarly, responsible medical blogs or websites do not claim to be diagnostic but are informational, and their writers advise readers to seek *professional* (individualized) medical assistance from a physician.

■ 2. Social Responsibility

Professionals were portrayed as people who work in occupations that have specific social and community obligations and responsibilities. These obligations and responsibilities are knowledge-based and serve larger conceptual categories such as "justice," "health," "knowledge," or "learning" rather than practical, immediate, materialist, or rule-bound objectives. The professional's social responsibility also informs client relationships in that professionals provide advice and direction clients are not always obligated to follow. However, in situations where a particular client explicitly violates or endangers the obligate arenas protected by profession-

al powers, the professional has a duty to act. Thus, academics are required to enforce penalties for plagiarism offenses since intellectual dishonesty is an explicit breach of the cognitive realm for which academics have assumed responsibility. Physicians have a duty to act if a patient's health is endangered by institutional or even other practitioner actions.

◼ 3. Ethical Awareness

Professionals were viewed as members of an occupational group who have unique and specific ethical obligations to their specialty knowledge. A professional is ultimately responsible and accountable to professional knowledge as established and certified by other members of the profession. The professional is evaluated by the codes of conduct, duties, and performance expectations established by other professionals rather than by institutional authority, clients, or customers, even if payment is rendered by these other groups. While professionals may be paid by a customer or may work within a large institution (hospital, university), professionals break the traditional capitalist contract in that they do not see themselves as ultimately accountable to the people who pay them. Similarly, professionals break traditional bureaucratic hierarchies in that the rules of the profession supersede the rules of the workplace.

◼ The Professionalization of Everyone

In the time since "Professional Identities" was published, writers have offered alternatively careful and creative propositions and defenses for situating as *professional* the rhetorical activities of occupational, hobbyistic, and personal pursuits. Not comprehensively, these have included accounts detailing the activities of writers of online product reviews (Mackiewicz, 2010); women providing online advice about motherhood (Petersen, 2014; Rogers & Green, 2015); women podcasters (Petersen, 2016); craft beer artisans and people who write about, advertise, and promote the craft beer industry (Rice, 2016); Pre-hospital care providers (Angeli, 2018); lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals working in corporate (retail) management (Cox, 2019); and physicians who reasserted autonomy and power as they simultaneously adapted to potentially deprofessionalizing workplace changes (Del Canale, 2012).[1] While not comprehensive and with some

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1. In full disclosure, while I served as a reviewer for a number of these projects, my review did not address whether or not the particular occupation or activity chosen by the writer might or should qualify as a profession, a semi-profession, the professional-managerial class, or another occupational arrangement. In part, I did not envision that as my role. Instead, I have been more interested in how the fields that study occupational rhetorics have articulated an understanding of the professions and whether or not that articulation is accompanied by rhetorical forms or activities that delineate purposes that are unique to a *professional* disposition.

exceptions, this discussion has largely focused on whether or not particular writers' forms and actions could be considered (or should be considered) professional.

As the list above suggests, regardless of (or despite) efforts towards a more restrictive accounting of a specifically *professional* communication, researchers aligned with the occupational practices of technical and other workplace-specific communication have continued to aggregate nearly all workplace rhetorics with professional activities (Bridgeford et al., 2014; Coppola, 2012; Rosén, 2013; Spigelman & Grobman, 2006). Several writers, following the distinction made by Barbara Couture and Jone Rymer (1993) have continued to promote a distinction between "professionals who write" and "career writers" (Couture & Rymer, 1993, p. 5; see for example, Artemeva & Fox, 2014; Bhatia & Bremner, 2014; Henry, 2000). Yet, as Cindy Sing-Bik Ngai (2018) has demonstrated in her recent review of the research literature in professional communication, it remains common to conflate "occupational" and "professional" without drawing distinctions in the rhetorical purpose, form, intent, audience, or action different occupations or actors may enact or promote in their communication. Ngai's (2018) review is insightful as she shows that *professional communication* has emerged as a generalizing term that encircles any form of workplace, business, technical, or organizational talk, writing, and communication. At the same time, Ngai also documents specific context-specific studies in business, education, engineering, engineering management (marketing, collaboration), and medicine that also self-identify as professional communication.

▇ Professional Communication as Aspirational Discourse

Over the two decades since "Professional Identities," when the research literature has differentiated *professional* communication from *occupational*, the distinction has appeared to be aspirational rather than conceptual, functional, or categorical. Advocates of particular discourses have made distinct cases to argue that a specific practice be considered *professional*. The form here has been to claim an aspiration to achieve professional status and then subsequently detail particular shortcomings that need to be (or have been) overcome before the practice could reach full professionalization.

Terry Skelton and Shirley Andersen's 1993 guest editorial in the Society for Technical Communication (STC) journal *Technical Communication* reads as an enduring representation of this form. Skelton, then manager of the STC professionalism committee, and Andersen, then assistant to the president of the STC for professional development, wrote a guest editorial on behalf of 21 members of the STC professional committee. The editorial was a statement on the status of the field as a profession. Working exclusively from Wilbert Moore and Gerald Rosenblum's 1970 book, *The Professions: Roles and Rules*, Skelton and Andersen recounted six criteria Moore and Rosenblum provided as a "scale of professionalism": (1) specialized educational preparation, (2) body

of knowledge acquired through research, (3) unique and indispensable public service, (4) autonomy in work practices, (5) ethical professional practice according to enforceable codes, and (6) commitment to the values of public service and social responsibility (Skelton & Andersen, 1993, pp. 202-205). Skelton and Andersen reported that technical communication conformed well to principles one and two, as universities provided specialized training and universities and corporations supported and advanced research that informed and was applied to occupational work. They also reported that the field maintained a commitment to "public service and social responsibility" by "using socially responsible language," "facilitating the timely communication of information," and "putting the public good above special interest, i.e., service as public advocates" (Skelton & Andersen, 1993, p. 205).

However, Skelton and Andersen (1993) conceded that, at the time, the field did not yet constitute a unique and indispensable public service. They wrote, "Although technical communication, at this point, is not widely recognized by society as offering a 'unique and indispensable public service,' its value is increasingly recognized by business" (p. 204). Skelton and Andersen also recognized that technical communicators had yet to claim full autonomy over their work. Though, they wrote that they hoped that the advent of "the total quality ethic" in business would create conditions under which technical communicators "should experience increasing autonomy" (p. 204). Finally, they wrote, "Technical communicators do not currently operate according to an enforceable code of ethics unique to the profession" (p. 204).

Although the field fell short in three of their own six criteria, Skelton and Andersen (1993) assumed and thereby asserted that technical communication was a profession (p. 202). They argued that "professionalism ultimately is manifested in the behavior of practitioners," asserting that the occupation is organized as a profession if its practitioners act professionally. Acting professionally here entailed demonstrating (1) commitment to the profession, (2) commitment to a professional calling, (3) commitment to organizing the profession, (4) commitment to education, (5) commitment to a service ethic, and (6) commitment to achieving professional autonomy (Skelton & Andersen, 1993, pp. 205-206).

Skelton and Andersen's choice of *The Professions: Roles and Rules* as their guidebook to the professions provided them with a favorable and relatively diffuse description, as the book does not scale or define occupations as professions but instead largely evaluates characteristics of workers. The book is also concerned not with professionals as independent workers but in locating and defining professional work within organizations. The book's focus is institutionalized professions, an occupational space that would seem particularly suited to technical communication. As Ida Simpson wrote in a 1972 review of the book, "The criteria are not used as a scale to compare the professionalism of occupations but chiefly as rubrics under which attributes of professional roles and their incumbents are described" (p. 408).

Roles and Rules could provide a useful model for how an occupation could emerge (or "evolve" to use the book's metaphor) as a profession while within the confines of a larger institution. However, Simpson (1972), in her review, was critical of the suggestion, arguing that the book never fully connects the activities of presumed professional workers with the unique roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities of their occupations. She wrote,

> But the relations of professional roles to their parent occupations as commonly treated in the literature on professionals are not dealt with. The failure to distinguish explicitly between profession and the roles of professional individuals or to make plain that the scale of professionalism deals chiefly with the latter weakens much of the analysis . . . ." (p. 408)

In other words, simply asserting professional status was not a sufficient condition for recognizing or treating an occupation as a profession.

In an important argument, Simpson (1972) wrote that the book's justification for professional service is convoluted and, in many ways, self-justifying. While somewhat difficult to trace, her point here is worth presenting in full:

> The institutionalization of professional roles is said to be a sequential acquisition of the professional attributes. But in discussing the institutionalization of roles, Moore and Rosenblum appear to start with the assumption that a full-blown profession, including the role expectations which are to be institutionalized in the later stages of the process, already exists. At this point in the analysis, the relations among professional attributes and sequential process stages become difficult to disentangle. The nature of the demand for professional services as described by the authors presupposes that a service orientation has been institutionalized, but the professional role — including its service orientation — is said to be institutionalized only after the demand for professional services has evidenced stable continuity. The service orientation is defined in terms of the very thing that supposedly fosters its institutionalization: the bringing to bear of professional judgment on client's problems. (Simpson, 1972, p. 408)

Simpson's (1972) argument can be equally applied to Skelton and Andersen's (1993) essay as to their theoretical source, as both studies of professional work begin their analysis by assuming "that a full-blown profession" exists and fail to adequately establish the connections between what may be well-intentioned and deeply committed occupational actions and the actual roles, responsibilities, and actions of an actual profession. What we do not get from Skelton and Andersen's essay, to use Simpson's critique, is a "coherent line of reasoning to show systematically the relations of the criteria of professionalism to each

other or the process through which professions and professional roles become institutionalized" (p. 408).

This critique is important to current day explications and assessments of what is being articulated as professional communication. Ironically, the foundational assumptions articulated by Skelton and Andersen—that while particular occupational forms or actions do not necessarily fulfill the empirical criteria for professional categorization, desire and ambition to be a profession are sufficient evidence to sustain the argument—have largely held over the more than a quarter century since their argument was published. Similarly, pointing out that a particular rhetoric has an ethical component or is informed by a community's ethics does not necessarily constitute that rhetoric as professional. Ethics is not the sole terrain of the professions. What has been largely elided in these discussions has been a robust articulation of how rhetorical function, intent, and form may be distinctive when discourse enacts a specifically professional purpose.

◾ Eliot Krause and the Professions as a Check and Balance

Krause's (1996) articulation of professionalism as a sphere of societal influence and competitive balance within Western democracies has continued to direct my own understanding of the professions' occupational designation and communicative practice. After reviewing the functional, trait, and institutional perspectives of professionalism, Krause constructs a competitive model of the professions that aggregates workplace, economic, and social power into an occupational field. Krause's model emerges from both Freidson's (1970, 1986) studies which showed how medicine used specialized knowledge to create social power and Magali Sarfatti Larson's (1977) analysis of the professions' role in shaping an emergent class based on the simultaneous monopolization and valuation of knowledge. To these models, Krause adds a historical perspective that casts the professions as modern variations of formal artisans' and trade workers' guilds. Putting these approaches together, Krause characterizes the professions as independent guilds that occupy a third-form of social influence and power. Their power is not found in wealth or capital, nor in bureaucratic regulations and institutional hierarchy, but instead is rooted in circumscribing and monopolizing specialized knowledge that societies require for modern life: medicine, education, law, and science, being archetypal, but not exclusive, professional sectors.

Working from a historical perspective, Krause (1996) details the unique occupational patterns and responsibilities that formed conditions for professional occupations in Western economies. As such, he describes the differing conditions for professional work, power, and motivation in the United States versus those in Germany, Italy, and the UK. Engineering and academics, for example, have emerged differently in European economies than in the United States. Academics are nearly exclusively state employees in Europe, and engineers work largely, though not exclusively, for large corporations in the United States. Similarly, an

update to Krause's work could consider how different European or Canadian healthcare systems differ in the way physician work is organized versus in the United States. For example, in the United States, over the past two decades, most physicians have become employees of large hospital systems or group practices, and the adjacent occupations of nursing (nurse practitioner) and physician assistant have simultaneously adopted physicians' traditional primary care and public health responsibilities while pushing physicians into greater specialty roles.

Having spent the better part of a career studying the professions, Krause is an advocate for what he envisions as a special contract the professions elicit within their communities according to which professionals "provide service and use their knowledge for economic gain" (1996, p. ix). Importantly, for Krause, the professions are not merely a vehicle for occupational status or a more desirable way to describe a vocation. The professions are necessary, Krause emphasizes, for their efforts to shape, limit, and influence the state and capitalism. "Visualize a triangle," Krause writes, "with the state, capitalism, and the professions at the corners. The state influences and shapes capitalism and professions, capitalism influences and shapes both the state and professions, and the professions act to influence and confront the power of both capitalism and the state" (pp. 1-2). Professionals and, by association, professional communication, are cast as competitive antagonists, methods for eliciting checks and balances against the overreaches of capitalism and bureaucracy.

Krause's ultimate concern appears to be the consumer of professional services. In a question that appears increasingly prescient since 2016, he writes, "[i]f the doctors, the lawyers, the engineers, and the professors lose their power over the delivery of healthcare, legal service, applied science, and knowledge itself . . . and they lose it to capitalism and the state, what will be the implications for all of us?" (1996, p. 2).

Capitalist marketplaces and omnipresent bureaucratic regulation are equivalent functional models for providing consumers with necessary and important services. However, proponents of professionalism argue, left unchecked, capitalism will accelerate the pursuit of efficiency and profit maximization without regard for human life, the environment, or even the system's own long-term sustainability. Similarly, bureaucratic regulations can become oppressive, stifle innovation and investment, eliminate incentives, and legislate without concern for difference, nuance, context, quality, or situation. Here, Krause's (1996) model strikes an important balance among the three sectors and stresses their productive tension. The professions' advocacy for health, safety, and fair pay, for example, mediates capitalist rationalization and its prioritization of profits over the provision of services. Yet, Krause also notes that at times government was required to mediate professional excess and capitalist-leaning monopolization of knowledge. For example, to counter increasing specialization and a lack of access to medical care in the 1960s and 1970s, the U.S. federal government created national Medicare and Medicaid programs and loosened professional physician monopolies by sanctioning alternative practitioners in physician assistants (1965) and nurse practitioners (1974).

These activities occurred as a response to a period from 1930 to the 1960s, during which, while a high point for guild power among U.S. professions, American medicine showed particularly limited concern for the poor, the socially marginal, and at-risk communities (Krause, 1996, p. 284). Thus, the tensions between the different sectors are dynamic. Sectors may over time converge or share interests, and while some historical periods may see a particular sector rise in dominance, like the professions from 1930-1960, other eras may be dominated by government or, as we see in the current era, capitalism.

■ Capitalizing Professional Communication

When Skelton and Andersen (1993) claimed that, at the time, technical communication could gain professional status because "its value is increasingly recognized by business" (p. 204), they conflated professional and capitalist forms, actions, and interests. Skelton and Andersen do not specify what "value" business is recognizing in technical communication. They do offer that some of this value is found in contributions that "have improved product quality while reducing the time and cost of product development" (p. 204). Improving efficiency, reducing cost, and improving product quality are important and considerable contributions. However, they are contributions that advance the business interests of the corporation. This is an important distinction because it demonstrates how, especially in an American context, the interests of capitalism have been conflated with and have increasingly eroded the independent functions of the professions. When business is able to set the terms that define and value the professions, the power of one sector (capital) has fully subordinated and delegitimized the other.

Krause (1996) discerns this consolidation of professional and capitalist interests well, writing,

> Directly, capitalists are the employers of many professional groups. The characteristically private practice of the American medical and legal professions of 1930 have given way, especially since 1970, to employed physicians and an elite segment of lawyers working directly for big corporations either in legal firms or, increasingly, as "house counsel" within the corporation itself. (p. 35)

Further, he writes,

> Increasingly since the 1970s, though, capitalists have moved to employ professionals including doctors and lawyers, more directly, to take ad hoc action to control the costs created by professionals, and to work with the state toward constraining the remaining guild power of the professions. (Krause, 1996, p. 35)

While American professionals have enjoyed the benefits of enrolling within capitalist work spaces, the financial benefits associated with promoting capital-

ist enterprises, and the prestige that comes with the "culture of professionalism" (Bledstein, 1976; Krause, 1996, p. 31), such conflation does much to obscure the watchdog and mediating function the professions have historically served in a well-balanced economy. Returning again to Krause (1996), he writes,

> Where state and capitalist power have won out, they and not the profession control the aspects of professional life that we call "the workplace" and "the market" and determine to a large extent how much associational group power the profession has left vis-à-vis the state and capitalism. Subgroups play an important role here— in some cases, the elite remains in some kind of guild control while the mass has succumbed to capitalist or state control, or to a mixture of the two. (p. 22)

When academic researchers conflate the interests of the professions with those of capitalism or those of government, we continue to perpetuate the erosion of professional responsibility and professional power, and we (perhaps unintentionally) promote the interests of capital (or government). In our teaching and our research, we should be more careful to delineate the unique purposes enacted by each sector. Business communication cannot be identified as professional communication because one of the primary purposes of professional communication is to constrain the excesses of business communication. Business communication, by definition, emerges from and promotes capitalist, market-driven, and commercial forms and actions. Its purpose is to generate wealth, commercialize value, and promote the functioning of a market-based economy. Consolidating the business, regulatory, and professional sectors is not only inaccurate, but it obscures the conditions that gave rise to each sector and elides the real and crucial tensions, historical and current, between each sector.

Professional Communication as Functional, Interventional Discourse

Looking back at "Professional Identities" and the literature since, I wonder, anachronistically, if that research could have been more useful if it had switched frames from professional as an occupational category to a communicative function. Despite the baggage associated with the term, perhaps communicative *intent* provides a more productive frame to deliberate what is professional about professional communication than a narrow focus on occupational class, status, or aspiration. There are, of course, occasions when a physician, lawyer, or scientist communicates outside of and in ways unrelated to professional forms and actions.

There are times when physicians make business transactions, scientists are constrained by bureaucracy, and lawyers undoubtedly gossip. Perhaps the question can be restated: What makes professional communication uniquely professional? Alternatively, when does communication deploy a specifically professional action,

on what occasion, to what purpose, in what form, with what consequence, with what risk, against what sort of disputant, and toward what cause? Perhaps future research into professional communication can be less focused on occupational status and function and instead can seek to locate specific moments and spaces when communication enacts a specific *professional* activity.

Several years ago, in an effort to improve the institution's reputation, the former provost at an institution where I worked required that peer review activities related to faculty tenure and promotion solicited evaluations from individuals at "top tier universities." The logic here was that passing faculty dossiers through the hands of influential people at more highly ranked institutions would improve the stature and reputation of the university. The evaluators would come to see and associate the university among their own peer group. More pragmatically, when asked to complete reputational surveys for national rankings, these influential people would rank the school higher than they ordinarily might have done. Higher rankings would lead to higher prestige, more undergraduate applicants, higher yields, and students more willing to pay full (or less reduced) tuition.

This effort to conflate marketing with peer review was mostly ignored by committees. However, several faculty members disputed what was seen as the marketization, indeed monetization, of a non-commercial *professional* process. These faculty members also argued that the requirement was misleading: faculty with a teaching-based load (3:3 or 4:4) would be compared with and evaluated by faculty with a research-based teaching load (1:1 or 1:2). Faculty who had no lab space or who were sharing lab space with researchers and graduate students in different disciplines would be compared with faculty with extensive laboratory resources. Faculty in undergraduate-only programs would be evaluated by faculty with graduate students. Asserting that one institution was "peer" to the other was repudiated as a fabrication and a violation of the American Association of University Professors' (1966) ethical standards. Professional standards were eventually reinstated with the appointment of a new provost. When overturning this policy, the new provost explicitly noted that reviews should be obtained by "appropriate" faculty at similar institutions, with similar responsibilities.

On a long weekend in July, the ambulance agency where I volunteer was asked to respond to a two-car motor vehicle accident. After arriving at the accident scene, the responders discovered that a young driver had fallen asleep while driving and veered into the oncoming lane, colliding with another vehicle. Fortunately, there were no life-threatening injuries, but both drivers were taken to the local hospital for evaluation. In his evaluation of the driver who had fallen asleep, the emergency department physician determined that the patient had fallen asleep because the patient was diagnostically morbidly obese and the weight of the patient's neck and chest impeded adequate breathing when the patient was positioned in the driver's seat. The physician determined that the patient represented a threat to public safety and confiscated the patient's driver's license. Several hours later, the patient's father confronted the physician, stating that the

patient needed the driver's license for work. The physician was unmoved and stated that the license could be reinstated if the patient lost sufficient weight such that the patient's condition would no longer pose a threat to self or society.

Both of these cases demonstrate moments of professional communication in that they are spaces in which specialists use their objective, knowledge-based positions to confront and mitigate perceived excesses of capitalism. In advocating against capitalism, these actors are also promoting larger conceptual categories (justice, health, knowledge, learning) rather than immediate, materialist, and commercial interests. The patient's ability to drive to work, while a primary concern of business and capital, may have overlapped with but did not add up to the sum total of a physician's domain. That the patient represented a threat to self and society overrode the capitalist's immediate monetary problem. The patient would need to find another way to get to work. Similarly, the administration's ability to monetize its national rankings was a concern unrelated to and separate from the faculty's professional obligations to conduct a fair review of its membership and be truthful with external colleagues. In both cases, professional communication was enacted situationally and deliberately with a clear intent to push back against capitalist incursions.

▪ Visualize a Triangle: Movements and Curative Action

"Visualize a triangle," we could write, in a specifically rhetorical version of Krause's (1996) model, with business communication, regulatory communication, and professional communication at the corners. Regulatory discourse influences and shapes capitalism and professions, business communication influences and shapes both the state and professions, and professional communication acts to influence and confront the power of both capitalism and the state. Conflating these practices misrepresents the unique and crucial roles, purposes, and intentions of each sector. Simultaneously, such conflation also subordinates the ethical obligations and social responsibilities of one to the other. Each activity enacts separate and important intentions that could still be better researched, understood, and articulated by rhetorical workplace scholarship.

This is not to suggest that any capitalist-confronting or rule-defying communicative action constitutes professional discourse. The findings of "Professional Identities" continue to be relevant and appropriate even if the social and occupational terrain of the professions may have changed. The professions continue to operate with individual clients, with knowledge-based and conceptual social responsibilities, and with an ethical obligation to uphold their knowledge and the unique functions that knowledge enables. What "Professional Identities" and subsequent work may have overlooked is the layering and integration of the characteristics. While professionals work with distinct and individual audiences (e.g., patient, client, student), the motivation for this activity is the adjudication of the professional concern as it relates to the audience's particular circumstance:

A lawyer's long-term responsibility is the enactment of justice, not necessarily a win for the client. Physicians diagnose disease even if a patient dies. Scientists pursue knowledge, even if that pursuit is disruptive to a student's, community's, or politician's belief. The enactment of societal service takes place through the professional's audience relationship, and the professional is ethically bound to advocating and upholding the concept such work entails. While professional discourse may advocate, not all advocacy or protest brings with it the structural and institutional power the professions wield.

As a correction to capitalist or regulatory overreach, professional communication may include an overt critique or may simply function as a decree. Whether and how this is accomplished; how such decrees are enacted, sustained, and made rhetorically effective; and where and how they inflect capitalism or regulation remains a productive question. The sort of dynamic offered in a rhetorical deployment of Krause's (1996) triangle articulates professional communication as a curative action and a purposeful, even temporary, intervention. It also introduces a certain movement or motion that could turn this discussion away from distinctly occupational frames. For example, a technical communicator could deploy professional discourses to rebalance the power dynamics between users or particular groups and individuals and those who would profit from either the unbounded expansion or the undue restriction of a particular technology (Haas & Eble, 2018). Alternatively, technical communicators could adopt forms of business communication when working to market their products and services, maximize efficiencies, and conduct other actions consistent with marketization of goods and services. Technical communicators adopt regulatory or rules-based communication when creating products that require strict adherence to narrow instructional forms.

Paul Rabinow (2003), in the conclusion of his book *Anthropos Today*, discusses the growing distances between technology, science, and the social and philosophical thought that has attempted to characterize such work. He writes that as "technology was preceding science and achieving a certain autonomy . . . this separation and this relative autonomy itself became a phenomenon that required new types of explanation, new narratives, and new metaphors" (p. 135). Rabinow concedes that within such flux, there remains an "impulse" to create a comprehensive narrative and a common account, something to retroactively make sense of where we are and what may have occurred. Yet, Rabinow asks us to resist such an approach, suggesting that such a quest is born of "the reflex to answer old questions" (p. 135). Similarly, attempting to account for a uniquely professional occupational discourse in a fractured, disconnected, and increasingly polarized economy, political culture, and weakened regulatory sector may be seeking answers to questions that are no longer relevant. Rabinow instead offers the metaphors of motion and movement, of a critical practice attuned to what he calls "relations of distance and closeness" (p. 135). To Rabinow's list, I would add modulation. In the example I suggested above, where a technical commu-

nicator deploys and moves through situational capitalist, regulatory, and professional discourses, we are presented with new questions of discursive modulation. As Rabinow suggests, such questions entail movement, passage, and rhetorical legitimacy. How might rhetorical agents legitimately pass from capitalist to professional discourses and retain credibility? Might a professional leverage the blunt forces of regulation in order to uphold a commitment to health, justice, or science? How might professional discourses continue to promote core concepts like health, medicine, justice, and science if such concepts are aggregated as equal or contemporary to capitalist and regulatory values? Perhaps the question for a new generation of researchers is how this dynamic is managed, maintained, and modulated by the sorts of new occupations, rhetorical positions, and institutional powers that have emerged over the past 20 years.

This is not to say that we should forget or ignore what we know. Professional communication occupies a distinct purpose apart from, in contrast to, and in competition with other forms of workplace communication and, as such, it is curated in strategic forms and actions within and against these other economic and socially-contested spaces. But movement also permits a certain flexibility. It elides some nostalgia for a discursive order that in actuality may never have been altogether fixed. And, perhaps more importantly, it allows for a renewed appreciation for institutional and disciplinary events that have successfully transformed new discourses into what are now stable acronyms, courses, majors, departments, research journals, and productive, useful work.

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