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Organizational Sense: A Notion for Studying Emerging Organizational Professionalism at Work

Abstract: This article examines organizational professionalism at work and in action. I focus on how organizational professionalism emerges in the workplace and what kinds of situated skills are involved. Organizational professionalism is explored in three dimensions (activity, politics, and ethics), from which the notion of *organizational sense* is developed. Organizational sense has three accepted meanings. The first accepted meaning relates to everydayness and ecologies of action. It has collective, material, and informational dimensions, and is distributed between people and objects. The second accepted meaning concerns the political dimension of performing a professional activity and its sensitivity (attentiveness, discernment, etc.). The third accepted meaning concerns ethics and examines loyalty toward an organization. The notion of organizational sense is illustrated by means of fieldwork with a population of internal communicators working in seven major French organizations.

Keywords: organizational professionalism, in-house communication practitioners, organizational sense, turbulent and political contexts, loyalty

In recent years, professionalism has grown analytically and empirically closer to commercialism and corporatism. In particular, several works have taken organizational dimensions into greater consideration in the study of professionalism and examined how they are interwoven. After several decades of mutual ignorance between the sociology of organizations and that of professions (Lounsbury & Kaghan, 2001), organizations and professionalism have become closer. Several reasons (of a structural nature) for this increased closeness exist: The model of the major internationalized corporation is dominant in capitalism, and most professional work now occurs in organizations. The general implementation of management indicators and of quantified appraisal performance indicators, even in the state and nongovernmental organization (NGO) sectors, makes it necessary to take into account the organizational dimension (Evetts, 2010).

From the link between organizations and professionalism has emerged organizational professionalism. The initial inclination is to envisage it as a risk. Fournier (1999) was the first scholar to consider the appeal of "professionalism" within organizations as a disciplinary mechanism; the use of professionalism discourse—for example, in a large, privatized service company—inculcates

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"appropriate" work identities, conduct, and practices. More recently, scholars have also suggested that professionalism has become diluted, owing to the influence of organizational logics. For example, Evetts (2010) contrasts the ideal-type of "occupational professionalism" (based on collegiality, trust, and autonomy) with that of "organizational professionalism." She describes organizational professionalism as follows:

> Organizational professionalism is a discourse of control used increasingly by managers in work organizations. It incorporates rational-legal forms of au-authority and hierarchical structures of responsibility and decision-making. It involves the increased standardization of work procedures and practices and managerialist controls. It relies on externalized forms of regulation and accountability measures, such as target-setting and performance review. (p. 129)

The second inclination is to focus on the issues concerning professionalism that arise from the organizational dimension. According to Muzio and Kirkpatrick (2011), professionals, as a collective entity, "are responding to the encroaching influence of organizations" (p. 395). In this context, practitioners develop stratagems and strategies (Suddaby & Viale, 2011). This can also lead to the emergence of hybrid professionalism (Noordegraaf, 2007). In other situations, areas of stability in professionalism are found at greater degree than real transformations (Evetts, 2010). Organizational professionalism could then be interpreted as a new professionalism, where "the traditional values, objectives and rewards connected with professionalization projects are increasingly achieved and secured through the support of appropriate organizational systems, structures, and procedures" (Faulconbridge & Muzio, 2008, p. 20). This interpretation opens the door to empirical research and makes organizational professionalism more concrete. Organizational professionalism is indeed embedded within a series of scenes and moments where professionalism is tested or (re)elaborated. It could be studied at work and in action, and organizations could be a source of professionalism. In our opinion, this orientation increases the relevancy of the concept of organizational professionalism to beyond the study of professions. Because it sheds light on dimensions such as interdependence, action, managerialism, and hierarchy weight, organizational professionalism also concerns the evolution of occupational groups[1] in organizations. It is especially the case for dominant occupational groups that adopt an aggressive approach when trying to win in organizational power games and dealing with organizational issues. Because large companies have comparable working conditions and experience similar issues, the skills deployed by those groups within organizations are indications of how to understand organizational professionalism with regard to professions.

[1] In this study, *occupational groups* share the same meaning as *groupes professionnels* in the French literature, which are defined as "groups of workers carrying out an activity with the same name, and as a result endowed with social visibility, benefitting from identification and recognition, occupying a differentiated place in the social division of work, and characterized by symbolic legitimacy" (Demazière & Gadéa, 2009, p. 20).

New notions are needed to better assess this kind of reality for occupational groups and professions, which exists at the crossroads between the sociology of organizations and the sociology of professions. In this exploratory study, the notion of *organizational sense* is proposed. The argumentation is based on the study of an occupational group—communication practitioners in France. I present empirical research[2] to illustrate our analytical proposal. Communication practitioners within large companies deserve attention because they belong to an occupational group created in organizations; this group has become an institutionalized function. Communication practitioners provide internal services to all organization members and develop close relationships with organization leaders.

In the following section, I state the research problem and provide background information for our study, especially concerning the organizations we investigated. Next I put forward our analytical perspective. I then outline the methodology and fieldwork used to conduct the study and the reasons why we selected the population under investigation. Finally, I present the empirical results and discuss whether they support the analytical proposal.

Research problem and background of the study

Understanding occupational and professional work within organizations involves paying particular attention to settings. In that sense, I take a similar approach to that of Noordegraaf (2011) by focusing on a population of providers of internal services. According to Noordegraaf (2011), organized professionalism "represents professional practices that embody organizational logics" (p. 1351). It is organizational professionalism in action whereby "professional workers might develop organizational capacities in order to face changing work circumstances" (Noordegraaf, 2011, p. 1351). It calls to mind previous research on interactionism, especially the idea of "working things out" (Corbin & Strauss, 1993). Professions and occupational groups within organizations have to find solutions and invent arrangements in the work process so that they can realize their work and accomplish what they consider important to do, despite contingencies to overcome and ever-changing conditions experienced by organizations (Corbin & Strauss).

Based on this knowledge, I formulate an exploratory research question: When organizational professionalism is studied as an emerging reality in the workplace, for both professions and occupational groups, what kinds of analytical perspectives are relevant?

In attempting to answer this research question, we have to keep in mind that the aim of this study is to shed light on situated competences and skills developed within organizations, which could become resources for professions—particularly for "wannabe professions" such as in-house communication practitioners.

To define this analytical perspective, which is based on the notion of organizational sense, I provide background information about the type of firms we investigated and the French context. First, those firms have a propensity for

[2] This survey was carried out together with Olivia Foli (Université Paris Sorbonne, France).

agitation and disorder; for this reason, researchers in the field of organizational studies are obliged to analyze organizations as unstable entities (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002). This propensity was evident in the environments we visited. Sudden increases in work rate occurred, resulting from the occurrence of unexpected emergencies. Those turbulent contexts also existed in pervasive information and communications technology (ICT), causing untimely disturbances and a nonstop flow of information. Priorities also seemed to be constantly changing, and, more generally, a certain uncertainty about the future of these firms existed.

Second, most of the firms we investigated correspond to the divisionalized form described by Mintzberg (1980). Firms with a divisionalized form are typically organized in decentralized business units, with “middle line” managers occupying an important role (Mintzberg, 1980). They are also frequently multinational. Within the French context, they were previously controlled by the state and possessed the characteristics of a “machine bureaucracy” (Mintzberg, 1980). Some features of this kind of organization have not disappeared: the formalization of behavior and respect for the authority of positions. Moreover, Crozier’s (1964) analysis concerning French bureaucracy seemed appropriate for the firms we investigated. We noted avoidance behavior and a lack of direct confrontation in these firms. Those types of behavior did not stem from an overabundance of rules, as described in the original theory (Crozier, 1964), but might have been attributed to the anticipated consequences of dissenting behavior in a tense employment situation. Moreover, inertia and excessive caution were evident, especially in the presence of multilayered hierarchies. We also observed many power games (Crozier, 1964) and sensed the existence of cliques within these firms. Our interviewees worked in settings far away from the places where important decisions were made. In these organizations, as in major French companies, power is centralized; that is, power is in the hands of a few (Courpasson, 2006). Moreover, in-house communication practitioners are victims of power games and are sometimes negatively affected by animosities between managers. The political dimension in these organizations is omnipresent and makes for complex relationships. Action often depends on knowing how to read between the lines. Owing to a domino effect, internal communicators also suffer from the volatility and urgency experienced among top and middle management.

Analytical perspective

Based on the organizational contexts studied, I identified three dimensions to explore. First, I linked the activity and ordinary work of in-house communication practitioners, who operate in environments characterized by a continuous and abundant flow of information and requests. Consequently, they had to remain as organized as possible. I adopted Abbott’s (1988) approach, which encourages researchers in the sociology of professions to explore the activities of professionals. In this vein, Noordegraaf (2011) proposes, based on his research of healthcare services, that professionalism reorganize itself at the institutional level, as well as at the level of the practical provision of services, under the combined effect of three forces: global changes in the workforce (generational change,

feminization, etc.), the general implementation of multidisciplinary work, and the continuous emergence of new risks and situations. He stresses the organizational effort involved in these transformations. It implies planning, scheduling, and coping with incidents and failures so as to maintain the quality of service; doing so often requires working under pressure and with reduced means. Organizing (Czarniawska, 2008; Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) is a key issue for occupational groups, especially in large organizations. I used the term *organizing* here not to describe a continuous process of reassembling an organization at a general level (as is usual) but rather to discuss the work of individuals and groups. Organizing then becomes a professional problem and an occupational problem because it relates to autonomy. This point will be expanded upon later in the article.

Second, I explored the political dimension. Politics directly affects the way in which organizational professionalism is grasped. Organizations are not monolithic units. According to the sociology of organizations, they are the result of power games (Crozier, 1964). In the language of the sociology of professions, positions are not comparable in organizations in the technical and moral divisions of labor (Hughes, 1956). Within the category of knowledge workers and among support staff, in-house communication practitioners lack prestige. Consequently, they are particularly dependent on the political dimension of organizations (i.e., managerialism) and are affected by the red tape that characterizes hierarchies and by sudden changes in priorities.

Third, I examined the moral and ethical dimension, which is a traditional pillar in the sociology of professions (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007). A gap may exist between what professionals or members of occupational groups within an organization consider to be fair and effective actions and what their partners (especially managers) want them to do. This situation creates an ethical problem. This is true not only within the relationship between professions and society but also inside the operations of occupational groups (Kultgen, 1988), such as the writing of financial reports by corporate communicators (Atkinson, 2002). The values that an occupational group or a profession attempts to apply in its day-to-day work are vectors of collective belonging, as well as factors of regulation in relationships with professional partners and customers (Bourgeault, Hirschkorn, & Sainsaulieu, 2011).

The notion of organizational sense subsumes those three dimensions. Thus, it has three complementary accepted meanings. It also benefits from the polysemy of the words *sense* and *organization*. The first accepted meaning deals closely with everydayness and ecologies of action. It has collective, material, and informational dimensions, and is distributed between people and objects. It is a discipline and involves trying to stay balanced in turbulent environments. The challenge of working in turbulent environments is to continue to carry out activities so as to preserve continuity as much as possible. According to its second accepted meaning, organizational sense concerns the political dimension of a professional activity and its sensitivity (attentiveness and discernment) within a configuration of asymmetric interdependence. The third accepted meaning of organizational sense refers to a sense of duty—a duty of loyalty toward the organization that employs the professionals or occupational group members.

Organizational sense is a body of skills and competencies, which is mainly intangible and is the result of an encounter between organizations and practitioners who are supposed to carry out specific work (in this case, internal communication). Hence, it is related to the accomplishment of work. Both Abbott (1988) and Freidson (2001) have written about the content of work. According to Abbott, being a professional means finding abstract solutions to concrete problems. He states, “Only a knowledge system governed by abstractions can redefine its problems and tasks, defend them from interlopers, and seize new problems” (p. 8). This is a way of preserving territory in the competitive system of professions (Abbott). Freidson describes “discretion” in the workplace as the sine qua non of professionalism and as one of the “institutions” that supports it. However, if one takes into consideration the organizational dimension of the place where work is carried out, the question of work content is not asked in the same terms. It is not reduced to professional problems in a strict sense. For this reason, I proposed studying three broader dimensions, from which the notion of organizational sense is developed.

Methodology, data, and appropriateness of the population studied

To shed light on the notion of organizational sense, I endeavored to elucidate its three accepted meanings. This approach involved focusing on three specific aspects that could be supported empirically.

To study the activity dimension, I investigated how internal communicators try to regulate their workflow. It is a difficult issue that professionals, as well as occupational groups within large companies, deal with daily. This difficulty mainly stems from the use of ICT, which has intensified the rhythms of work. Employees have to deal with a constant flow of information and requests (frequent e-mails, phone calls, etc.) in disruptive environments (e.g., noise, surrounding conversations). According to our inquiry, internal communicators often have to reorient their activities at short notice, particularly at the behest of top management. This type of situation gives rise to organizational sense at a micro-sociological level.

The political dimension is reflected in a remark frequently uttered by the interviewees during our inquiry: “To be able to communicate about an organization, you have to know it.” The issue here is how to work in organizational contexts where the political aspect has a prominent influence on action. In other words, internal communicators’ knowledge of the organization directly impacts the way in which they carry out their work. Indeed they not only produce information but also put it into circulation within the entire organization. Similar to other occupational groups and professionals, internal communicators work by knowing how to move inside an organization that operates like a silo, where challenges frequently emerge and relevant information is often not easy to find despite (or perhaps because of) an abundance of information. A fear that internal communication may have a strong impact on employees also existed in our interviewees’ work climate. Thus, there is an inertia that moderates the often hectic pace in large-

sized organizations. All those aspects lead to political obstacles to overcome, which represent a second source of organizational sense.

The ethical dimension is raised in the debate on loyalty toward organizations. I discovered that the communication practitioners interviewed for this study were involved in a contradictory injunction. Their loyalty was being tested within the discrepancy between what the organization wished from the practitioners and what the practitioners believed was important for them. Because loyalty is not infinitely elastic, this situation raises the following question: What is the extent of communication practitioners' loyalty? Context pushes internal communicators into the arms of individuals at the top of the organization; however, they do not wish to be rejected by the rank and file. On the one hand, the study of professionalism, immersed within organizations, also concerns occupational groups, beyond professionals. On the other hand, the ethical issue is not abstractly formulated in terms of morals, ideals, or ideologies. It does not refer to members of the public who are the recipients of the service that practitioners (or professionals) propose, those recipients being a kind of representative of collective interest (Kultgen, 1988; Freidson, 2001). Here collective interest does not cross the boundaries of organizations and is not defined by the workers themselves. The issue is then loyalty toward members of organizations. Ethics is concretely linked with daily organizational life, especially when dilemmas emerge (Gunz & Gunz, 2006).

We conducted our fieldwork in seven major French corporations in the banking, insurance, energy, and transport sectors. The survey was carried out in 2010 in the headquarters of major French corporations. Most of them were multinational. We conducted 24 interviews with ordinary internal communication practitioners—not the heads of communication departments but mainly individuals in charge of newsletters and managers of small in-house communication teams. The interviewees were between 27 and 57 years old, and all were university graduates. Seventeen of them were women, and eight were men. We also carried out four days of observations, attended three in-house newsletter editorial meetings, and collected written material (Post-its, agendas, e-mails, etc.). The interviewees obtained their jobs neither by chance nor by vocation. They used various other means including career opportunity changes and successful attempts to obtain secure positions (in the case of former journalists). Although only half of them wanted to occupy their jobs until the end of their careers, they all considered their current jobs to be acceptable (albeit not necessarily fulfilling). Internal communicators in general comprise a heterogenous occupational group. This group is ranging from an intern or employee working in a company cafeteria who administers intranets and handles the layout of the internal newsletter, to a communications manager who sits on the management committee. Thus, considerable differences exist in status and academic background among members of this occupational group.

During the investigation, we met with several administrators of the French Association of Internal Communication (AFCI), which was created in 1989. With more than 400 members, it is the main professional association representing communication practitioners in France today. Making contact with this association was initially a way in which to access interviewees. As these administrators became interested in our inquiry, they invited us, as researchers, to participate in a

regular seminar called "Internal Communication and Social Sciences." This seminar was chaired by individuals involved in the academic and corporate worlds.

The population studied does not possess the traditional features of a profession: For instance, communication practitioners are educated and have credentials, but no effective closure strategy is in place so far. Nevertheless, we selected this population because it is well suited to fulfilling our research purpose—that is, to extend organizational professionalism thought so that it applies to occupational groups as well by formulating a notion that could be also heuristic for professionals evolving within organizations. In the following two paragraphs, I explain the reasons for selecting communication practitioners as our study population.

First, in-house communication corresponds to what Reed (1996) calls an *organization profession*. It was developed within organizations such as marketing, human resources, and procurement. Since the late 1980s, it has occupied an institutionalized "function" in large companies in France. Consequently, communication is concerned with organizational professionalism. It is also a highly segmented field (internal, external, institutional), with different boundaries according to the organizations concerned. An institutional framework supports and reinforces the installation of internal communicators in organizations, especially with the establishment of communication courses, specialized schools, and the creation of courses in top schools such as Sciences Po, as well as the birth of professional associations. Over the two years (2009–2010) that we followed the AFCI group it became apparent that it was interested in claiming jurisdiction (Abbott, 1988). Several members of this group said that the internal communication department played a key role in renewing social bonds in organizations during a time of crisis—especially in light of the fact that the human resources department had essentially abandoned this task—in their opinion.[3] Because of their direct contact with the social fabric of the organization, the internal communication practitioners also considered a core part of the job to involve working closely with management to keep it informed. Moreover, internal communication practitioners have the mandate to "communicate" to different groups within large organizations but knowing how to communicate is also an expectation for a large number of employees in the kinds of organizations we investigated.

Second, in-house communication practitioners are of particular interest from our research perspective because they are members of the "support staff". Studies in the sociology of professions and the sociology of organizations have not focused specifically on this group. In-house communication practitioners do not directly participate in the core production of a firm; instead, they are involved in the "operating core", the "technostructure", and the "strategic apex" (Mintzberg, 1980). Structurally, members of "support staff" are at the service of other departments in the firm and of managers. Thus, it is difficult for them to control their own work because their work levels depend on the number and type of

[3]This point of view was expressed in a column in *Stratégies* magazine (2009, November 19) titled "Face à la crise, la communication au coeur du social" [Faced with a crisis, communication is at the heart of social issues].

requests that are made and the work rates of their internal clients, especially members of management. Yet control of work is a crucial issue for professionalism in general and for organizational professionalism in particular. In studying this occupational group, we observed major contradictions, tensions, and difficulties stemming from conflicts between organizational demands and the attempt to preserve discretionary decision making at work, which is an aspect of autonomy. This problem is particularly acute for internal communicators who work in a professional configuration characterized by asymmetric interdependence; they need protagonists within the organization to set their work in motion and to feed it. Conversely, for colleagues and managers, the communicators' usefulness is less obvious. Consequently, internal communicators have to develop situated skills so as to help define their role in the organization and to carry out their work efficiently and effectively despite this context.

Illustrations of organizational sense

Trying to control workflow

The first accepted meaning of organizational sense is being organized as much as possible and controlling workflow. Internal communicators attempt to keep their work on track, which implies a minimum level of continuity to maintain a minimum level of autonomy.

Organizational sense is understood literally here, and it involves performing a daily balancing act in the workplace. Internal communicators must at least remain organized when faced with real or potential turbulence, the multiplicity of tasks to be performed, and the volume of information to be assimilated, which may occur at variable intensities but more or less uninterruptedly.

Practically speaking, it implies the possible reorientation of action, which is characteristic of work within large companies and whose internal communicators perform common tasks. A reorientation involves changing direction and increasing the work rate. For example, the internal media manager of a car manufacturer said that she recently had to "abandon her scheduled activities" following a leak related to the production of part of the firm's latest model in Turkey. This controversy rekindled criticisms in the press about French firms that relocate operations to other countries and the risks of plant closures and layoffs in France. The image of the firm was tarnished. The chief executive officer (CEO) tasked the internal communication department with recording a video in which he reassures employees. This activity kept our interviewee extremely busy for two days.

More generally, I observed attempts by internal communicators to regulate workflow, sometimes to be better prepared in the future, despite already having to handle a continuous and abundant flow of work. For example, an internal communicator may spend time reading a document in an empty meeting room or researching ways to prepare for the possible occurrence of an unexpected and time-consuming event. These types of efforts, however, do not necessarily lead to a situation of stability and quiescence. Internal communicators may be overwhelmed and feel that they have done nothing all day, a feeling that affects a considerable

number of office workers today. For example, I observed the internal communication manager of a railway company one day and immediately noticed her nervousness. She could not sit still and even apologized for it. Another interviewee expressed his dissatisfaction by comparing himself to a surgeon in wartime in that he had to jump from one task to another without being able to delve deeply into any of them, without taking enough time, and without using the appropriate means.

Task juggling (multitasking) must not be perceived as heroic—that is, in the sense that only lone individuals can "keep all the balls in the air at once." Indeed, juggling acts are distributed among things and individuals and are related to ecologies of action, as Datchary (2008) has already noted in an event agency. A juggling act may involve leaving the "fresh" files at the top of the pile, deciding with one's superior about designating a place in the office for handling urgent requests, or transforming a set of Post-it notes into a to-do list so as to visualize the weekly tasks to be performed and crossing them out as they are completed. Other strategies involve marking which incoming e-mails really concern the addressee and using a special color code for meeting notes, with the aim of ranking, sorting, and filtering the information to be processed. For the manager of an internal communication department, those skills also involve relying on individuals in their formal (event organization, management communication, etc.) or informal fields of specialization. For example, an in-house communication manager of a bank may need to rely on an individual who has a good understanding of English to solve a translation problem for an upcoming internal newsletter or sufficient computer skills to find the latest version of a document rapidly.

This organizational sense then presupposes trust and mutual understanding with close colleagues, and is developed over time. However, the turbulent environments in contemporary organizations are scarcely conducive to this process. In the same way, the difficulties frequently experienced by internal communication departments in terms of resources (high turnover, staff shortages, a large number of interns and employees in sandwich courses, and budget reductions in crisis periods) make this process of developing organizational sense even more complicated.

Overcoming political obstacles in the workplace

According to its second accepted meaning, organizational sense concerns the political dimension of a professional activity and its sensitivity when communicating about sensitive issues. It includes interpreting the sometimes seemingly imperceptible thoughts of middle and top managers, as well as dealing with their flip-flopping.

This situation calls to mind the interviewees' frequently uttered remark: "To be able to communicate about an organization, you have to know it". In this context, what does the verb to know mean? For internal communicators, knowing an organization means being aware of the interpersonal relationship codes that are prevalent within it, sensing the atmosphere, and being sensitive to current events, as well as understanding the underlying issues of requests that are made of them and of the problems with which they have to cope. They must know what and how to communicate and what tools to use. Hence, they must be aware of the alliances

and enmities that exist within the inner circle of top managers and of the predominant opinion of employees about a given issue. Knowing an organization therefore includes a cognitive dimension, which is acquired by learning about its members. A link also exists between knowing an organization and performing action: It is necessary to act so as to "know." Knowing is not a passive mechanism of absorption. An interviewee said that he would learn about issues by "put[ting] out feelers" in several organizational arenas where individuals congregate and converse. These arenas included informal places, such as areas around coffee machines where employees often engage in ordinary conversations, and participative intranet forums where employees can post comments about current events. The editorial committee of the internal newsletter represented another type of organizational arena. Members of top management were invited to participate in this committee. During one of the committee meetings I attended, I observed that the coordinator of the internal newsletter addressed the strategy manager specifically and listened to what he said attentively. The coordinator's behavior toward the strategy manager was not an act of kowtowing but rather an acknowledgement of the strategy manager's direct link to the newly appointed CEO. Even though in-house communicators seem to be at the service of top management, top management does not necessarily keep them up-to-date on information that directly impacts them. For example, in-house communication practitioners might have to draft a strategy about a given issue; however, the individual responsible for this strategy may be risk averse and, therefore, may try to avoid writing it by claiming to have no time. The reason for this risk aversion might be because this strategy does not already exist. One interviewee, a 56-year-old internal communication manager at a bank, provided a clear example when speaking about the issue of social responsibility:

> Putting together the special issue about corporate social responsibility was quite a joke. Because we asked them, "What is it? What are we trying to attain? How is it going to be illustrated? How is this process supported?" And F [the internal coordinator] asked, "Who will be my contact persons?" "Well, that won't be possible because there's nobody here who can answer." So we asked the HR [human resources] department, which is normally responsible for this issue, and they said, "There's nobody. Nobody has an overall vision and can say 'That's what we did.'"

Moreover, organizational sense here involves understanding the political inertia of organizations so as to know how to circumvent it in certain circumstances while carrying out one's work. The relationship between internal communicators and the human resources department illustrated this aspect. A sharp contrast was evident between the competition of professions on the institutional scene and in the workplace. Jurisdictional relations are often reshuffled in the workplace, and "the reality of jurisdictional relations in the workplace is therefore a fuzzy reality indeed" (Abbott, 1988, p. 66). On an institutional level, as I previously mentioned, the AFCI would like to expand internal communication in France to include "social matters". More specifically, it wants internal communication departments to absorb teams in charge of "social relations" (relations with trade unions and staff

representatives). Indeed, the AFCI would like to create "internal relations departments" (Chauvin, 2010). Currently, social relations teams are included in the scope of human resources. Thus, the AFCI project would lead to competition within the territory of human relations. In the workplace, the conflict of jurisdiction was not situated at the level of "social matters," and internal communicators did not take an offensive stance.[4] They defended their boundaries (communication) and pointed out the tendency of human resources to not communicate. One interviewee, a 39-year-old head of management communication in a major corporation in the defense field, described the situation as follows:

> It's not necessarily prejudice, but people are often overcautious concerning HR [human resources] issues because behind that there are all the problems with the unions and the workers' committee and the fear of interfering with the operations of the workers' committee, and so on. They really do a lot of things; there are many projects in the company, but when you want to talk about it, it's always, "No, let's wait. We'll wait until it's really ready". The result is that they would prefer we never say anything.

"Validation" is another organizational game in which internal communicators deploy their organizational sense. Indeed, internal communicators need to call upon many individuals to "validate" the texts they write for newsletters or the intranet. When internal communicators do not receive replies, they consider that "silence implies consent" and rarely get in touch with their contact persons again. On other occasions, they may ask a qualified individual to provide supplementary validation—that is, to provide an opinion to help resolve a debate about a title or give input about a technical aspect. The request for validation is actually a form of protection when a protagonist complains after the deadline has passed. However, organizational sense cannot be reduced to a mere protective shield; it also involves audacity—that is, finding a way to bypass validations, procedures, and inertia. For example, the internal communication manager of a very bureaucratic bank told us how he succeeded in establishing a dialogue between the CEO and the leading staff representative, a task to which he was truly committed. To do so, he bypassed the editorial committee of the internal newsletter and the bank's hierarchy and directly convinced the two protagonists instead. In his opinion, this interview would never have taken place otherwise; he also believed that this situation was useful for employees to read about. In other words, organizational sense was here related to experience (what the interviewees referred to as "feeling") and was disconnected from technical expertise. Organizational sense is also linked to what characterizes a "good professional" in an organization (in contrast to the clumsiness often demonstrated by a beginning professional).

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[4] I should also mention the creation of human resources marketing teams in several major French corporations. Their objective is to communicate positively about their companies' human resources policies and actions (hence, the use of the term *marketing*). In this situation, internal communication is subsumed by human resources.

Loyalty toward organization and its limits

The third accepted meaning of organizational sense refers to a sense of duty—a duty of loyalty toward the organization. The case of internal communicators illustrates well the ethical contradictions to which occupational groups, or even professions, are exposed in organizations; they must reconcile the representation of management discourse about the organization with the reality experienced (or feared) by ordinary employees and by themselves. Internal communicators are acted on by two opposing forces: One force pushes them to present information, projects, and achievements in a positive way, and another force pushes them to defend a more nuanced vision. If this is not the case, they, in their words, lose all "credibility" and have doubts about their "usefulness." Thus, they fight to define and fulfill their role, which, to them, means carrying out valued-added work. They want to be involved in contributing to the content produced as opposed to performing the duties of a messenger.

Analyzing the interviewees' responses in terms of how they reacted to these two opposing forces may help affirm a professional ideal. Several interviewees were proud to be the spokespersons of management and said they promoted "acceptance of change." This discourse was similar to that promoted by the AFCI, of which those interviewees were members. A few others boasted that they keep management "informed about realities in the field." Most interviewees, however, sought to reconcile contrary elements; they said that they tried to "oil the wheels" and "create synergies"—that is, to improve social relations in the organization through communication and "liaise" between management and "ordinary employees." The interviewees also placed limits on their organizational goodwill. This limit is "lying"—the feeling of betrayal of the reality when "everything is seen through rose-colored glasses." One example is when contradictions, difficulties, and delays in projects are purposely eliminated from communications media to the exclusive benefit of what pleases managers. Although several interviewees claimed to be advocates who present positive versions of the facts, they all refused to disguise or ignore reality completely.

However, which stance do internal communicators adopt when their professional ethics are flouted? In our research, we identified three different reactions at critical moments. One reaction described during the interviews was that of anger and rejection. One interviewee said that he would lock himself in his office and scream to obtain some relief at moments that he described as "farcical". Another interviewee emphatically said that he would express his opposition and refuse to comply so as to assert strongly his point of view as a professional. He described one such situation as follows:

Concerning a technical assistance issue, my colleague from the IT [information technology] department told me, "You'll have to help us to think of a logo for a new intranet site that we want to set up about individual and collective efficiency because it is not a very sexy logo and at the same time …" I said, "Say that again." I knew that the IT department site had just been revamped. And now he wanted to create a new site with a new logo specifically about this phony concept of individual and collective efficiency. I said, "Listen, I don't quite get it. Can you explain it to me?" He came back with his head of department, and they explained it

to me again. And I said to them, word for word, "I won't mobilize anybody in my team or myself to try to invent a stupid logo for a stupid site. If your site had been well designed, and it was really nice not to have consulted us, you wouldn't have needed to invent a new site that is supposed to improve the information of IT users so that they can find the tools they need". (Jean-Philippe, 56 years old, internal communication manager of a bank)

Another reaction was that of passive acceptance and resignation. For example, internal communicators could not admit the fact that they were tasked with drafting a brochure about sustainable development and the responsible nature of the company when there was no real action that proved this to be true. The communicators complied, improvised, and filled in the blanks. They gave in gradually and did not fight back—or, if they did, only timidly. They were pulled in all directions but ultimately decided to take the passive route (i.e., carry out the assigned task). They sometimes even persuaded themselves that it is not so important.

Yet another reaction was that of cynicism. In this case, internal communicators considered their work solely as a source of income. To maintain a low profile, they did neither more nor less than they were asked to do and adhered to the prescriptive information provided by the service requester. They stayed within the boundaries of their roles to avoid any irritations. For instance, in their written communication, they sometimes used convoluted wording that was imposed from above or adopted an exaggeratedly optimistic tone.

Conclusion

In this article, I endeavored to answer the following research question: When organizational professionalism is studied as an emerging reality in the workplace for both professions and occupational groups, what kinds of analytical perspectives are relevant? I first proposed scrutinizing three dimensions (activity, politics, and ethics), which relate to the notion of organizational sense. I then examined three other pertinent issues (workflow, political obstacles, loyalty toward organizations) and showed how internal communicators (the population studied) cope with those issues. Adopting this approach was helpful in illustrating the notion of organizational sense, which has three complementary meanings. Furthermore, the main research contributions of this article and its analytical perspective are proposed as follows:

This article offers a methodological contribution. The notion of organizational sense invites to explore daily activities for both the sociology of organizations and the sociology of professions. Abbott (1988) recommends that researchers in the sociology of professions explore the activities of professionals. However, this approach is hardly ever used. Meanwhile, researchers in the sociology of organizations mainly seem to describe organizing or create monographs of organizations. They rarely seem to focus on the situated skills developed by practitioners in the workplace, which is the focus of organizational sense and could lead to professionalism. Moreover, our study encourages the scrutiny of both daily activities and the critical moments that occur during them. Nevertheless,

organizational sense does not have the same empirical boundaries as the concept of sensemaking proposed by Weick et al. (2005). Indeed, sensemaking starts with chaos (Weick et al.) and very ambiguous situations—or rather extraordinary situations, such as accidents—which are occasions for making sense. Sensemaking may be considered the interpretation of situations, which in turn generates competences. The daily work situations deemed of interest to our research could be considered critical; however, it should be noted that the individuals involved were never in any physical danger. What is created by internal communicators does not always make sense, as Weick et al. understand it, but rather is an unstable compromise.

This article also offers a conceptual contribution. With the idea of organizational professionalism as our starting point, I contested "the assertion of an inherent conflict between professionalism and bureaucracy" (Nygaard, 2012, p. 24). Our intention was to provide support for the rapprochement between the sociology of professions and the sociology of organizations. I also defended the relevancy of organizational professionalism in the study of professions and of occupational group activities within organizations. On the one hand, I endeavored to contrast the institutional discourse of an occupational group intent on claiming jurisdiction, with what happens in the workplace. Making comparisons between what happens inside and outside organizations is of importance for both the sociology of organizations and the sociology of professions. On the other hand, I focused on situated skills, which are developed during daily activities in the workplace. This emerging organizational professionalism represents a potential resource for instilling professionalism within an organization. Using two different approaches, I developed the notion of organizational sense.

Finally, I hypothesize that organizational sense is a notion that is of relevance not only to internal communicators but also to other groups. It also refers to a difficulty experienced by knowledge-intensive firms (Alvesson, 2001)—that is, the difficulty associated with formalizing, verbalizing, and, above all, promoting skills, competences, and performance (what I call *organizational sense*). In terms of organizational professionalism, this difficulty conducts us to a paradox. The turbulent political contexts in large-sized organizations destabilize professions and occupational groups that work there. To manage the situation, occupational groups, such as internal communicators, develop and deploy skills that become part of an emerging organizational professionalism. However, practitioners seem unable to convince their colleagues to recognize those skills and are even less successful in changing public opinion concerning them. Organizational professionalism at work elaborated in specific settings could then lead to a stalemate if it is only valid for those who develop and deploy it. This lack of recognition will certainly be a crucial issue for organizational professionalism in the coming years.

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