Exploring the Concept of Integrity—Toward a Craft-Inspired Interpretation[1]

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ABSTRACT

The concept of integrity is used as a psychosocial concept to describe tensions and dilemmas experienced by professional and semi-professional workers in a neoliberal working life. In Norway, the concept has even been included in the Working Environment Act. In general terms, the concept refers to the degree to which professionals experience that their internalized professional standards can be realized. While supporting the general relevance of integrity as an important concept for assessing an important psychosocial challenge in Nordic working life, we propose that integrity should not be addressed as a psychological phenomenon. We suggest that it in line with a more sociological orientation is addressed as a craft issue. This interpretation is inspired by Richard Sennett's concept of craftwork. Understanding integrity as a craft phenomenon inspires workplace critique within neoliberal work organizations.

KEY WORDS

Craftwork / integrity / psychosocial working environment / Sennett / working environment act

Introduction

Working conditions for professional and semi-professional workers within public sector in the Nordic countries are changing. It is widely recognized that New Public Management (NPM), with its governance by goal and result-indicators, focusing on economical accountability and close monitoring of work tasks, radically changes the work ethos for those working within the public sector (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Klikauer, 2013; Kärreman et al., 2002). Some of the general consequences for professional and semi-professional workers are argued to be, that is, loss of autonomy (Broadbent et al., 1997; Dent & Whitehead, 2002), de-professionalization and proletarization (Leicht & Fennell, 2001), and a more general loss of occupational dignity (Bolton, 2012; Hodson, 2001). A specific phenomenon described within a Scandinavian

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context is the increased tension between professional/semi-professional workers' own perceptions of standards in work, and the possibilities to act in accordance with these standards in the daily conduct of work. A general assumption is that this tension has severe consequences for health and wellbeing (Allvin, 2006; Corley, 2002; Glasberg, 2007; Hanna, 2004; Laabs, 2007; Sørensen, 2008; Taylor, 2005; Thunman 2013; Vike et al., 2002). Within the last decade, the concept of integrity has gained attention, especially in Norway, as a conceptual framing of the professional tension experienced by workers especially within public sector (Aagaard & Gavén, 2006; Sørensen, 2004). An obvious reason for its breakthrough as a working life concept is that it was included in the Norwegian Working environment Act in 2005, stating: 'Workers' integrity and dignity is to be protected' (§ 4.3 (1) (Working Environment Act, 2005).

This article is premised on the idea that the concept of integrity in itself provides an important way of framing a central phenomenon in modern working life—that of the professional tension challenging professional and semi-professional workers—and that it even might represent an important field of regulation in the law. However, the concept itself can be understood and interpreted in different manners, with different outcomes and effects on how the professional/semi-professional tension is approached, both at the workplace and in society. The two main different approaches of a psychological versus a sociological interpretation are explored in this article. When integrity is defined as a psychological state of being, the primarily focus is on the individual worker and his or her sense of integrity. Such a focus might not in itself foster critical discussions on the organizational and societal preconditions for maintained integrity—what we call workplace critique.

The aim of this conceptual article is to develop and clarify a sociologically founded concept of integrity, as an alternative to a psychologically founded concept. The inspiration to a sociological concept of integrity is developed especially from Sennett's writings on craftwork (Sennett, 2008). From this perspective, we develop the sociological concept as a phenomenon-of-doing and as a matter of the hand. A central feature of this conceptualization is that it contributes to empower workers and enable an outward workplace-critique, rather than an inward focus on mental and psychological wellbeing (as is typical for the psychological version).

A short presentation of how the concept of integrity largely is conceptualized as a psychological phenomenon within working life research is followed by a discussion of some of the principal effects this has for strategies to solve integrity-problems at the workplace. Thereafter, we introduce Sennett's concept of craftwork, and some related perspectives. This is used as the framing of integrity as a phenomenon-of-doing, in contrast to integrity as a phenomenon-of-being. Conclusively, we comment on the general outcome of the sociological interpretation of integrity. The concept of workplace critique refers to how the sociological conceptualization more effectively inspires workers to discuss and criticize organizational and systemic conditions. Finally, we comment this in relation to the NWEA concept of integrity.

Conceptualizations of integrity—a theoretical summary

In this section, we present perspectives on integrity from psychological, sociological, and juridical research. This research partly explores the concept itself, partly comments on phenomena, which are related to the phenomenon as such.

Since the inclement of integrity in the NWEA in 2005, some perspectives on the concept were developed, which were meant to ascribe meaning to the concept as a juridical article. Sørensen and Grimsmo (2004) suggest that the juridical concept should provide a general protection for workers, to not having to comprise personal and professional standards in work, and they refer to the psychologist Schabraqh and the psychological health consequences he describes, in their argumentation (Schabraqhs elaboration is explained below). A master's thesis in psychology, written as a direct to response to the inclement of the concept in the 2005 NWEA, reveals an even clearer psychological interpretation of the concept: 'Integrity is a psychological state of being, signified by feelings of control, order and understandings of one's surroundings (…)' (Aagaard & Gavén, 2006, p. 28). From a strict juridical position, Haavind (2015) is concerned with how the concept should be interpreted as a right for workers to discuss dilemmas of quality, and especially instances when workers experiences to be pressured to deliver poor quality in and at work.

Schabracq (2003) introduced integrity as a working life concept and relates integrity to the work stress debate. He argues that workers' sense of experiencing integrity at and in work is vital to expand the understanding of mechanisms causing stress/distress in modern working life. Schabracq (2003, p. 16) draws on Fromm and Erikson and their elaborations of integrity as the crown on the development of identity. Schabracq further defines integrity as a state of congruence, that is, a state in which we experience continuity and connectedness between ourselves and our surroundings: 'Integrity is used here first in its meaning of an intact whole' (Schabracq, 2003, p. 14). According to Schabracq, when we are able to 'be' in a state of integrity, we experience a state of normality. The world appears as meaningful and understandable and we can see ourselves embedded naturally within this world: 'Reality and normality are among the most important outcomes of integrity' (Schabracq 2003, p. 19). Beyond the essential ontological meaning of integrity as a state of normality, integrity is also explored as a verb, that is, to 'act' in integrity:

> Acting in integrity means also that we are willing to do what we are doing, and, also, that this does not go against our convictions and values. As such, we are at that moment mentally undivided (…). The part of us that is acting is, for the time being, in total control. As such, this being undivided, congruent or one-pointed is a sign of well-being and mental health, sought after by all kinds of psychotherapeutic approaches. (Schabracq, 2003, p. 15)

As indicated by Schabracq, integrity is often associated with moral and is often described as a capacity—whether an individual or a group is able to maintain and defend specific values, despite the environment's pressure to abandon these. Argyris and Schön (1988) define integrity as a virtue that is apparent when 'an individual dissents from organizational policy or practice by means of voice or exit thereby upholding individual interests against organizational ones' (Argyris & Schön, 1988, p. 199). In a similar vein, Cribb (2011) describes integrity as a 'inner moral compass' guiding the thoughts and actions of the competent worker. Cleary et al. (2013) even more directly argue for the necessity of workers to stand up for their personal integrity, as a reaction to new forms of organizing that undermine quality in work. Tyreman (2011) and Edgar and Pattison (2011) point to integrity as not primarily an individual virtue but an internalized set of professional values on behalf of a tradition (in their case, nursing). Thus, they define integrity

more as a collective virtue. In an American context, Sullivan and Shulman (2005) are concerned about the increasing lack of integrity within welfare professions. They call for a wakening of the individual workers' professional moral, to reinstall integrity within these professions.

Without explicitly using the specific concept of integrity, research has been done on phenomenon that are closely related to that of integrity, as this is defined above (acting in accordance with an integrated set of values). Taylor and Bentley have (2005) introduced the concept of 'professional dissonance' to describe the negative psychological experience which arises when professional workers' experience discrepancy between professional standards and what is practically achievable in work. As mentioned in the Introduction, research within the field of health care uses the concepts of 'moral distress' (Corley, 2002; Hanna, 2004; Laabs, 2007) and 'stress of conscience' (Glasberg, 2007). Generally, these experiences are seen as causes of fatigue, burnout, and so forth.

In general, it seems reasonable to argue that the research front to a large degree conceptualizes integrity as a psychological and individual phenomenon. It is described as a state of mind and as an experience of psychological equilibrium or congruence. The psychological conceptualization of integrity is relevant to see in relation to a more general tendency, toward individualistic and psychological research within the field of psychosocial research. Väänänen et al. (2012) argue that psychological concepts and tools dominate the field of research connected to stress, and that this has led to a shift from structural empowerment of workers to microlevel characteristics of the work situation. In the next section, we reflect on consequences of a psychological interpretation of integrity. What kind of strategies at the workplace becomes important if integrity is something, which primarily is constituted as psychological and mental state of being?

Exploring the empirical consequences of 'integrity as being'

If integrity, ontologically, is a psychological phenomenon in the sense that it is associated with a psychological state of being, focus is directed toward the experience or sense of integrity in itself. When this happens, it is possible to imagine that integrity can be maintained or repaired independently of changes in organizational or structural conditions. Whatever workplace initiatives help workers protect their sense of integrity becomes legitimate. Thus, integrity can principally be achieved by exercising therapeutic procedures that help worker think differently (often more positively), to accept things as they are, to contemplate during lunch breaks, or to rethink their professional ambitions (Madsen, 2014). Mental health professionals such as the psychologist, mindfulness-instructor, or the coach may take on a central role. In many ways, such responses to pressured integrity might be seen to fit seamlessly into a working life, which in itself also is considered by some to be more and more psychologized and even therapeutisized. Within a Scandinavian context, Madsen (Madsen, 2010, 2011, 2014) and Brinkman (2015), respectively, from Norway and Denmark, has described a general increase in psychology's influence on society over the last decades, with the result that psychological models of understanding have become nearly hegemonic, also affecting working life. In Sweden, Tunestad (2014) has, exploring the growth of therapeutic techniques in working life, argued that a 'psychological work-ethic' even has arisen.

From a sociological point of view, the psychological conception of integrity is problematic in many respects. A main concern is that this conceptualization identifies the worker, and specifically the worker's mind and mental state, rather than the work place or the organization of work as the site of intervention and repair of integrity. The problem of integrity becomes, in this way, a problem for the worker, and there is a slippery slope dumping problems of working life on the workers themselves. This way to conceptualize integrity not only bears with it the moral problem of privatizing a structural problem but might also increase the actual problem, at the individual level. When integrity is privatized, a strategy of 'individualized compensatory techniques' (Allvin, 2006) is likely to occur. This means that workers will do whatever they can at the individual level to ensure proper quality in work, as a decent standard of experiencing 'good work' is vital to experience integrity. According to Allvin, this strategy, however, will also lead to poor health: 'What is interesting is that the individual, in an attempt to solve the situation, produces a strategy that undermines his or hers health' (Allvin, 2006, p. 166)[1].

As indicated in the Introduction to this article, the severe consequences for professional/semi-professional workers today can be seen as subtle consequences of organizational turbulence generated by the neoliberal governance (NPM) within public sector (Buch & Andersen, 2013; Kamp et al., 2013; Thunman, 2013). Vike et al. (2002) has even explained public service workers' sense of inadequacy in their daily conduct of work, as an instantiation of a structural problem, and use the expression that nurses (as an example of a professional group) 'carries the organisational limits within their body' (Vike et al., 2002, p. 53). This points to a need to redefine what sort of phenomenon integrity actually refers to, in contemporary working life. If it is to be a useful lens for exploring and investigating the specific phenomenon related to the professional tension, it is necessary that it incorporates a critical capacity. Not doing so might in worst case, as Allvin points out, lead to it becoming counterproductive, and enhance the problem it seeks to solve.

Integrity as a phenomenon-of-doing versus a phenomenon-of-being – a new analytical framework

Our outset for an alternative conceptualization of integrity is inspired by research perspectives, which are concerned with how psychological and psychosocial work environment, to a large degree, is constituted through workers' experiences to execute the core of work (Ebeltoft, 1990; Klemsdal, 2006; Sørensen, 2008). That workers subjective sense of meaning and identity, essential for psychosocial work environment, is constructed by experiences relating to the work itself, is in many ways a key assumption in the Nordic working life tradition (Abrahamson & Johansen, 2013; Gustavsen, 2010; Hasle & Sørensen, 2013; Håkansta, 2014; Thorsrud & Emery, 1970). However, in order to construct the alternative conception of integrity, we lean primarily toward Richard Sennett's perspectives on craftwork (Sennett, 2008). The point of departure in this perspective is that craft entails an understanding of professional work as a primarily outward, and not an inward-directed activity: 'Craftwork focuses on objects in themselves and on impersonal practices; craftwork depends on curiosity; it tempers obsession; craftwork turns the craftsman outward' (Sennett, 2008, p. 288). When we utilize Sennett and apply the concept of craft, this is because Sennett has developed a substantial and direct critiqe

against the tendency to separate meaning from execution of work itself. This separation produces a discourse where both workers and organizations turn to the inward, psychological subject—and imply a deep misunderstanding of what the contemporary professional frustration actually is about:

> (...) but the reality on the ground is that people who aspire to be good craftsmen are depressed, ignored, or misunderstood by social institutions. These ills are complicated because few institutions set out to produce happy workers. People seek refugee in inwardness when material engagement proves empty; mental anticipation is privileged above concrete encounter; standards of quality in work separate design from execution. (Sennett, 2008, p. 145)

By comparing professional work with craftwork, it is possible to develop an alternative to the psychological interpretation of integrity. This is shown in the following table, which contrasts the sociological and psychological interpretation, the former labeled as a phenomenon-of-doing and as a matter for the hand, while the latter is labeled as a phenomenon-of-being and as a matter of the mind.

Table 1 Integrity as a phenomenon-of-doing and as a matter for the hand, versus integrity as a phenomenon-of-being and a matter of the mind

	A phenomenon-of-doing. Integrity as a matter for the hand	**A phenomenon-of-being. Integrity as a matter of the mind**
Ontological departure	The craft itself. A material state of being	The mind. A psychological state of being
Subject	The profession	The individual worker
Object	The work produced; an outward focus	The worker; an inward focus
Levels for intervention and strategies	- Workplace level: premises for professional craft and imperative acts of work? - Organizational level: well crafted organization? - Societal level: an professional controversy	Individual level: Psychological/therapeutic interventions: - mindfulness - debriefing - the psychologist
Perspective	Conflict: the legitimacy of organizational workplace critique	Harmony: silencing organizational critique

By seeing integrity as a phenomenon-of-doing, integrity alters from being a psychological state of being connected to the mind, to become a phenomenon, which evolves around the craft itself. As such, this depicts integrity as a primarily material, and not a psychological state of being. Within the craft perspective, the 'subject and object of integrity' alters. The subject in integrity-as-doing is the profession itself, more than the person or the individual. When imperative acts are neglected, it is not the person who suffers, but the professional standards within a professional tradition. The object of integrity alters

in the sense that the 'outcome' of work is not seen as consequential for the workers' own psychological well being (an inward focus), but as consequential for what happens with the work itself. An example of the alteration of subject and object within a craft perspective can be found in our own research on nursing and integrity-dilemmas (Thomassen, 2013). Nurses' experiences of integrity as threatened are here described as deriving from organizational changes that have adverse effect on the nurse's perception of the quality of work. The psychiatric nurses' calls for building good alliances and doing proper activity therapy are analyzed with reference to Sennett's description of the imperative craft-principle of 'reasoning backward, from effect to cause':

> The sound itself is the moment of truth. This is also the moment when errors become clearer to the musician. As a performer, at my fingertips I experience error – error that I will seek to correct. I have a standard for what should be, but my truthfulness resides in the simple recognition that I make mistakes. (Sennett, 2008, p. 159)

Accordingly, the nurses' desire to spend more time together with their patients is analyzed as a call for applying, as well as developing, professional nursing skills in themselves, and not as egocentric professional needs. As such, the nurses are described as craftsmen, in the same sense as the cellist that Sennett uses as an example—seeking to do good work in itself and to improve skills and competencies (Thomassen, 2013). With this alteration of the object of integrity, integrity-as-doing focuses outwards, while integrity-as-being focuses inwards. The next level spells out potential strategies and interventions that can be outlined from the two different conceptualizations. This is of crucial importance, as it displays some of the essential practical consequences of the different approaches to integrity. At the workplace level, constitution of integrity as a phenomenon of doing alters from psychological/therapeutic interventions to questions of craftwork. This would imply a focus on the possibilities to execute the 'imperative acts of work' (Thomassen, 2016). This concept does not refer to existence of objective 'truths' within a profession, but that some acts, norms, standards, etc. after all are guided by a 'to-the-best-of-our-knowledge' competency and that complementation of such acts is seen as detrimental to the quality of the end product. The question of structural well craftedness should, however, not only be seen as something concerning the immediate workplace context but also involves the organization as such and, to some extent, even society. Constitution of integrity is, by the lens of craftwork, dependent on the degree to which the organization as such is able to establish a structure and a culture in which good craftwork can be executed (Klemsdal, 2006). As Schön (1983) points out, the reflective practitioner—which strongly resembles the Sennettian craftsman—cannot properly function alone, but is dependent on the organizational ability to promote reflective practice. Which again—and especially relevant for the public sector—raises a further question about how society at large can create conditions for good craftwork. Thus, integrity-as-doing connects integrity closely to the organizational conditions that lay the premises for basic working conditions. This 'outwardness' is not so likely to be present when integrity is viewed as a psychological construct. In that case, the object is actually the person, and, as indicated earlier, integrity problems might potentially be solved with an inward focus, by 'repairing' integrity, that is, via therapeutic procedures. Finally, thinking of integrity-as-doing implies a more distinct critical perspective. When integrity is constituted by imperative acts and focuses on structural working conditions for craft, it becomes necessary to monitor and

evaluate these conditions. This is important, as the general causes to pressure on integrity, as we have argued in this article, to a large degree derive from tensions experienced by semi-professional and professional between workers own imperatives of work, and how these clash with new incentives within contemporary welfare institutions (Evetts, 2009). Through the optical lens of craft, organizations that do not support craft have little or no legitimacy in the eyes of the professional.

What the craft-perspective basically fosters is organizational workplace-critique. This would mean that professional/semi-professionals, on behalf of their conception of what their imperative acts of work are, critically evaluate, oppose, question, and sometimes criticize the organizational and structural conditions. Such a critical opposition is not fostered within the psychological conceptualization, according to which there is no need to change working conditions—and in which, in the worst case, critique is raised toward oneself rather than the organization, and in which workplace critique hence might be silenced.

Discussion: Implications of a craft-based interpretation of the concept of integrity

So far, we have spelled out some principal differences between a psychological versus a sociological understanding of integrity, and have suggested a craft-based interpretation as the alternative framework. In this section, we make a broader discussion on some principal aspects and consequences of this distinction, for organizations and for workers, and, hence, for the juridical article. The philosophical thinking of integrity as a phenomenon related to craft has some specific and practical relevancies for the concept in the NWEA, which asks for a comment.

The controversies that arise in the tension between good professional craftwork and neoliberal governance in the public sector are important to discuss critically, at workplaces—and in society in general. A philosophical thinking of the phenomenon of lost integrity as something deeply related to a matter for the hand is a good starting point for stimulation of critical workplace discussions among workers on the preconditions for good craftwork. However, such discussions are not necessarily easy to take on and might be seen as both delicate, and sometimes even dangerous, to workers. Workers face new challenges concerning freedom of speech, in contemporary working life. In a neoliberal regime, the mechanism that creates such boundaries are assumed to be subtler, not necessarily explicit and harder to identify (Trygstad, 2015). However, this is precisely also why the concept is of strong relevance today. The concept can be seen as an invitation and call for activation and mobilization of professional and semi-professional workers, precisely to engage into discussions on their working conditions. As a general concept, this is where the primarily quality of the concept lies. Haavinds (2015) discussion of the legal concept of integrity is interesting due to this, because he identifies how protection of workers integrity is as a right for 'the common worker' to protest against—and discuss, both with each other and publicly—'pressure' to deliver poor quality in and at work. As previously mentioned, the concept of imperative acts of work is not intended to refer to objective truths that constitute a profession. The strong moral and ethical code, that is, within nursing (which we have used as an example of professional craftsmen/women), might produce 'imperatives' that, from a craft perspective, are not directly imperative

(Thomassen, 2013). One argument which is put forth is that nursing to some extent is becoming a 'romanticized practice' that fosters a specific way of being (i.e., kindness and positivity) rather than ensuring sufficient competencies around a set of basic and practical skills (Heggen, 2000). As such, integrity should not inspire professional dogmatism (Edgar & Pattison, 2011), nor should it be used by different professions to dominate a multi-professional field. The use of craftwork as a lens through which to explore integrity therefore also presupposes a (self) critical discussion of a profession's 'religious beliefs'. What the lens of craftwork suggests is the necessity to discuss what the imperative acts of work are, and how organizational conditions support, or does not support, these.

Regarding the relevance of the craft-inspired interpretation for the law, this is closely connected with how integrity can be seen as a stimulation to organizational workplace debates and critique—and that this interpretation actually has a stronger support within the general framework of the law, compared to the psychologically orientated interpretation. The drafts of the 2005 act indicate that integrity in very general terms was included in order to give a general protection against seriously compromising of professional and personal values in and at work [Ot.prp. nr. 49 (2004–2005); Sørensen & Grimsmo, 2004]. It is important to remember that a central goal of the NWEA was, and still is, to facilitate worker-participation, and even to generate democracy processes at the workplace (Gustavsen, 2010). When the first demands concerning organizational and psychosocial work issues were included in § 12 of the 1977 NWEA, these drew directly on the research carried out by Thorsrud and Emery (1970) and their pioneering concepts of 'self-led groups' and the development of the 'psychological work demands'. This practical, and partly ideological research string of the Scandinavian research tradition emphasized workplace democracy and worker empowerment (Hasle & Sørensen, 2013). Soon after the 1977 law was implemented, another central researcher within this tradition, Gustavsen (1980), emphasized that the intention behind including some specific demands concerning psychological, social, and organizational conditions is to be understood in terms of activation:

> The main dimension from which the arguments for section 12 is drawn, is the dimension of *activity-passivity*: The point of departure is the thesis that the primary negative consequence of work with little skill content and little freedom is passivisation. (Gustavsen 1980, p. 13)

The specific conditions[2] mentioned in § 12 (generally known as 'the psychosocial work paragraph') were assumed to be of general importance for workers within a dominantly industrial working life paradigm. The idea was that, by pinpointing some ostensibly relevant conditions, workers would be triggered to engage in efforts to improve the work environment—and even to initiate democratization processes in the workplace. Thus, § 12 of the NWEA was intended to motivate workers to participate themselves in efforts to create a better working environment. Although the law of both 1977 and 2005 carries with it duties and obligations for workers—as well as rights—the idea of activation is essential when defining the core intentions of the regulations of psychological and social dimensions. When integrity was included in the 2005 law, we, hence, think it is relevant to think of this in the same way as when dimensions of 'social contact between workers', 'repetitive work', or 'work-phase' were put into the NWEA of the industrial working life paradigm. If applying the idea of activation as a key for interpreting the general idea

behind regulations of psychosocial work environment, there are good arguments for seeing integrity as a call for activation.

Conclusion—and future research on integrity

In this article, we have offered a conceptual analysis of the concept of integrity. As an alternative to the dominating psychological interpretation of integrity in research, we have developed a sociological understanding of the concept. This understanding, build around the Sennettian concept of craftwork, contributes to 'turning the inward experience outward'. The argument is that workers sense of lost integrity is a response to how professional work is under pressure in today's welfare institutions and, therefore, can trigger critical discussions about how work is organized to foster good professional craftwork. Who other than the professionals experiencing the malfunctioning directly should inform our understanding of how welfare institutions are organized and hence contribute to organizational changes? Hence, we have argued that the concept of integrity as a craft phenomenon is an important lens for facilitating workplace critique.

Future working life research, especially within the field of psychosocial research, might as well benefit from studies founded on a Sennettian-inspired understanding of work as craft and professional/semi-professional identity as craftsmanship. The reductionist tendencies within psychosocial working life research, in which individual and psychological perspectives have become dominant, should be confronted by sociological perspectives which bridges the personal and the structural. As such, the craftsmanship exploration of integrity might demonstrate one way to do so.

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Working Environment Act. (2005) *Act relating to working environment, working hours adn employment protection, etc.*

End notes

[1] Our translation.

[2] The 1977 version of the NWEA includes regulations related to issues of regular social contact between workers, avoiding repetitive work (if possible), the need to vary the work phase, and the importance of workers seeing a connection/meaningfulness between their own work tasks and production in general.