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Cox, Damian; Boaks, Jacqueline; Levine, Michael P.

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Integrity and the University

Damian Cox¹ · Jacqueline Boaks² · Michael P. Levine³

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Abstract

This paper examines the idea of the integrity of academic practice. We offer an account of the integrity of professional practice in general before applying it to academic professional practice within the contemporary, western university. We then introduce the concept of integrity traps and explain how they can make it difficult for academics working within a contemporary university environment to maintain their integrity.

Keywords Integrity · Professionalism · Management · University · Ethics

Introduction

This paper examines the idea of the integrity of academic practice.¹ We offer an account of the integrity of professional practice in general before applying it to academic professional practice within the contemporary, western university. We then introduce the concept of integrity traps and explain how they can make it difficult for academics working within a contemporary university environment to maintain their integrity.

The integrity of academic practice is much discussed, but mostly in a restricted way. A large literature is devoted to two aspects of academic integrity: honesty of student performance (Wong et al. 2016; Caldwell 2010; Gallant and Drinan 2008) and honesty and transparency of research (Komić et al. 2015). The *International Journal of Educational Integrity*, for example, is predominantly devoted to studies of student cheating and ways to combat it. The study of research integrity is similarly focused on combatting research misconduct (Ste-

¹ We restrict our discussion to academic practice within contemporary Western universities.

✉ Jacqueline Boaks
jacqueline.boaks@curtin.edu.au

¹ Bond University, Gold Coast, Australia

² Curtin University, Perth, Australia

³ University of Western Australia, Perth, Australia

neck, 2006). However, the identification of research integrity with avoidance of misconduct is not universal. In a qualitative study of clinical and laboratory-based life science researchers from across Switzerland, Shaw and Statakar (2018) found over a third of interviewees rejected the idea that integrity requires no more than an absence of misconduct, holding that accidental or unintentional errors can affect research integrity. Accidents and unintentional errors can, plausibly, affect integrity if they reflect research *practices* lacking integrity. As a 2019 editorial in *Nature* expresses the point:

The biggest impact on research integrity is achieved through sustained improvements in day-to-day research practices — better record-keeping, vetting experimental designs, techniques to reduce bias, rewards for rigorous work, and incentives for sharing data, code and protocols — rather than narrow efforts to find and punish a few bad actors. (Nature 2019)

Alongside the tendency to reduce discussion of the integrity of academic practice to issues of plagiarism, scientific fraud, and other forms of dishonesty, subjectivity and ill-focus, there is an inflationary tendency to equate academic integrity with the realisation of a very broad set of values. For example, the International Centre for Academic Integrity publishes a statement entitled *The Fundamental Values of Academic Integrity* (Fishman ed., 2014). The statement describes academic integrity in terms of six values: honesty, trust, fairness, respect, responsibility, courage. Some of these are virtues (honesty, courage), some are attainments (fairness, trust), and others are obligations (respect, responsibility). This is a list of things that must be in place in a community if integrity is to flourish within it, but the list is both too broad and too general to help achieve a clear understanding of the integrity of academic practice itself or the integrity of academic practitioners themselves.

Academic integrity is a difficult concept to elucidate. It lies between, on the one hand, misconduct prevention and, on the other, full realisation of the ethical values of academic life. Achieving and maintaining academic integrity means more than avoiding fraud and less than becoming a moral exemplar. Resources are available, however, to make progress on the task of elucidating academic integrity in its full, but not inflated, meaning. Academics are professionals working within a particular institutional setting, the university. So, the most informative avenue to an elucidation of the concept of academic integrity may be to treat it as a special case of professional integrity. Much has been written about professional integrity, and about integrity in general, and this work contributes to an understanding of academic integrity. Let us turn, therefore, to the issue of professional integrity in general to see what characterisation of professional integrity might be applied to academic practice.

Integrity and the Professions

Integrity is, arguably, the fundamental virtue of professional life.² It is no straightforward matter to set out what professional integrity is and how it relates to professional practice. Nonetheless, in many cases, most of us can recognise an issue of professional integrity when we see it. Michael Davis tells the story of Robert Lund, an engineer who, in 1986, was pivotal in the decision to allow the launch of the Challenger space shuttle (Davis 1991). Davis

² The literature on integrity both in personal life and professional life is very large. A point of entry is Cox et al. (2017).

describes how Lund originally gave his professional opinion as an engineer that the launch was not safe at the low temperatures predicted. Lund emphasised the unknown performance of critical O-rings (used to join parts of the space shuttle) at such temperatures. As Davis notes, in the face of pressure from management, Lund was challenged by his boss, Jerald Mason.

Lund's first response was to repeat his objections. But then Mason said something that made him think again. Mason asked him to think like a manager rather than an engineer. (The exact words seem to have been, "Take off your engineering hat and put on your management hat.") Lund did and changed his mind. The next morning the shuttle exploded during lift-off, killing all aboard. An O-ring had failed. (Davis 1991, p. 152)

As Davis rightly notes, left to make the decision as an engineer, an engineer may or may not have prioritised a cautious erring on the side of safety. The threat to Lund's integrity comes not from the substance of his decision and its consequences, but from the exhortation by those motivated by ends other than those of engineering practice (namely, profit, business relationships, the reputational status-implications of an on-time launch) to substitute those ends for the ends of engineering practice.

While it seems clear that Lund's professional integrity had been compromised by his agreeing to take off one hat and put on another, the precise nature of this integrity is not clear. What concept of integrity applies to *professional* integrity? Tapper and Millett's (2015, p. 11) survey of the literature that defines the nature of the professions found that the most common elements taken to be constitutive of professions are (in descending order of prevalence):

- Having "an ideal of service and responsibility to the public good".
- Being "based on a body of specialised knowledge".
- Operating "as a community and is self-regulating".
- Requiring "intensive training and formal qualification".

Ethical autonomy emphasised in the literature on professions is fundamentally a matter of a professional body regulating the ethical behaviour of its members. Barber (1963, p. 572) points to work socialisation, rewards, and honours as the primary means of regulating professional behaviour. Robert and Veatch (2009) and Edmund and Pellegrino (1984) both note the disciplinary powers of professional organisations. In either case, the underlying assumption appears to be that ethical standards professed within a profession are themselves generally in good order and the primary responsibility of members of a profession is to abide by its ethical standards, perhaps as summarized in codes of ethics.

Two important aspects of the ethics of professional life are missing from these accounts. First, the ethical standards of a professional are rarely, if ever, in full good order. Professional ethical standards contain areas of both settled and secure judgement and of contestation and confusion. Second, the ethical work of a profession is not only that of regulating practice within the profession. It is also a matter of determining the goals or value of the profession. Professional integrity requires critical reflection on one's own professional practice, and the practices of one's profession in general. This accords with Cheshire Calhoun's

account of integrity as a matter of taking seriously one's own views and one's role as a reasoning agent in a community of reasoning agents (Calhoun, 1995).

It is useful to cast the goals of professional practice in terms of goods and in this way introduce a distinction, first set out by Alasdair MacIntyre, between internal goods and external goods (MacIntyre, 1985; Moore and Beadle 2006; Reinders 2008). External goods for professionals (external rewards) are things such as money, job security and prestige. External goods for institutions include such things as reputation, financial success, long-term security. Professions also have internal goods. These are valuable states of affairs professionals *qua* professionals are dedicated to realising. Internal goods are sites of contestation and confusion, at least in part and on occasion. When a medical professional seeks to balance quality of life considerations against medical risk, for example, they are undertaking an ethical inquiry about the fundamental goods of medicine. Of course, in best medical practice, such decisions of balance are the responsibility of patients, supported by medical professionals. But the support a professional gives her patients – the way she sets out options, for example – can be, is likely to be, riven through with nuanced ethical judgement. Part of professional medical best practice is to think hard and long in concert with others about the internal goods of medicine.

Professional integrity is usefully defined in terms of the internal goods of professions. Summing up, we may say that professional integrity involves three things: understanding, commitment, and reflectiveness. It involves understanding the basic internal goods of one's professional practice and successfully committing oneself to both the ethical realisation of these goods and on-going critical reflection on them. As with integrity in life generally, integrity in one's professional life is an accomplishment. It takes skill, insight, and perseverance to maintain the commitments of professional practice. It requires understanding the things that will defeat integrity, together with the wisdom, skill and strength of will needed to avoid them. To possess integrity is, at a minimum, to have at least generally successfully evaded such defeaters.

Integrity does not always require success in obtaining the internal goods of a practice, only the wise and genuine pursuit of them. A teacher can teach with integrity without managing to produce in her students the sorts of transformative educative experiences that constitute the goal of her teaching. We can fail with integrity, just as we can succeed without it. In the case outlined by Davis, Lund might have maintained his integrity as an engineer against pressure from the executive to instead think as a manager and nonetheless have made the wrong decision. He might have evaluated scientific evidence on the performance of the O-rings and come to the wrong conclusion about the likelihood of them performing safely in the conditions expected. What he could not have done is decide the case by acceding to the request to start thinking like a manager. It should also be remembered that integrity is never an all or nothing thing. Lund might have somewhat diminished his professional integrity by thinking like a manager at exactly the wrong moment, but he did not *lose* his professional integrity by the act. One rarely loses one's integrity in quite the way that one loses one's innocence: all in a big rush.

Managing for Integrity

If we are right about integrity being the fundamental virtue of professional life, then a measure of the well-being of a profession is the extent to which it clears a path for those working

in the profession to work with integrity. An unhealthy professional setting is one in which it is singularly difficult for practitioners to consistently act with integrity. It is one in which external success is difficult to achieve with integrity and external goods of professional practice are not well-coordinated with the internal goods of this practice. An unhealthy professional setting is also one that may limit, deform, and otherwise undermine the profession's internal goods.

Lund's case is a singular example of explicit pressure being brought to bear on a professional. However, threats to professional integrity do not always come in the form of explicit management pressure. Threats to integrity can be structural. Consider cardiac surgery. The internal good of the practice (arguably, there is only one) is the cardiac health of patients, advanced in a way that does not significantly undermine other health and life considerations. Other desiderata—institutional financial success, efficient hospital administration, personal wealth, prestige and reputation, personal satisfaction in one's exemplary display of dexterity and skill, the gratitude and high regard of patients—are all external goods.

As MacIntyre points out, external goods are important (MacIntyre 1988 p. 35). It is important that professionals consider the viability of the context in which they operate, financial or otherwise. Our point is not that professionals, as professionals, should remain oblivious to what allows themselves and the organisation in which they practise to thrive. It is that professional integrity requires commitment to and interrogation of the *internal* goods of professional practice, not the *external* goods of that practice. External goods are a means to an end; they are instrumentally valuable in the maintenance and production of the internal goods of the practice.

Cardiac surgery, we hypothesise, has the one (complex) internal good and many external goods. Management of cardiac surgery is fundamentally the task of supporting and optimising realisation of the internal good of the surgery (cardiac health). External goods of cardiac practice (financial rewards, promotions, and honours, for example) are a means to this end. Cardiac surgery would be in a very unhealthy state if it operated with a reward and management system that sought to regulate behaviour through inappropriate or ill-considered external rewards. Imagine a case in which professional rewards attend surgery success rates without any measure of the context, need, complexity, and difficulty of surgeries. In such a situation, nominated external rewards (bonuses, promotions, honours) would fall to those with the highest surgery success rates. Of course, the most effective way to maximize one's success rate is to restrict one's surgery to simple cases with good prognoses. To work under such a management system with professional integrity requires one to ignore its reward structure. This would lead to a degree of external failure (relatively deflated income, advancement, security, and reputation). A better system, an ethical system that promoted the well-being and interest of both patients and doctors, would organise surgical practice so that surgeons are not punished for undertaking their profession with integrity.

The cardiac surgery case illustrates, in a way that the Lund case does not, a perennial danger for the management of all professions. It is a management strategy that seems, on the face of it, very natural. For an institution to manage professional practice satisfactorily, it must first establish, or at least agree upon, the internal goods of the practice. It must next formulate a success measure of the accomplishment of these goods. Finally, it must hold professionals accountable for the realisation of these goods. How might it do this? One answer is by manipulating external rewards to reflect measured success. The management

strategy can be summed up very simply: work out what people should be trying to achieve and reward them for achieving it.

There are a number of reasons why this often fails in practice. One reason is the demotivating effect systems of reward and punishment have on individuals' pursuit of internal goods. For example, setting someone a task of potential intrinsic interest, but then subjecting their performance to a system of external reward (e.g., paying them for the level of success in the task) reliably leads to diminished performance and demotivated participation. An interesting task becomes a chore done for money.³ Another reason is the complexity of professional work and the elusiveness of measures of internal success: often enough managers will find themselves (obstinately) measuring entirely the wrong thing. A third reason that management by reward so often fails is the reflexive nature of that practice. In a complex professional environment, it is very difficult to measure successful practice in a way that cannot be gamed (consciously or unconsciously) by practitioners once they learn of it. And a measure won't have any regulatory effect unless practitioners learn of it. Imagine, for example, that surgeons realise they are being held accountable solely for patient survival rates. One understandable response to this would be to only take on minimal-risk cases. There is no point keeping systems of accountability a secret from professionals; the aim is not for managers to know how people are doing, but to inform and evaluate performance so that professionals can manage and adapt their practice to the requirements of the institution.

There is a catch built into the very idea of managing outcomes of reflexive practice. It has been referred to as Goodhart's Law. As formulated by Marilyn Strathern, the law states that a measure ceases to be a good measure when it becomes a target (Strathern 1997). A related proposal is Campbell's Law: "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor." (Campbell 1979, p. 85).

Summing up our discussion, we argue that management of professionals can fail in four basic ways. First, managers can fail to fully understand, or can thoroughly misunderstand, the internal goods of a practice. This yields a misunderstanding of the profession and practice itself. Second, managers can fail to measure the realisation of internal goods accurately or fairly. Third, managers can fall into the trap of seeking to control reflexive practice, producing one generation after another of readily corruptible evaluative metrics. This is a kind of arms race between professionals and their managers that the managers are likely to lose. And at the price of their integrity, professionals will often give management what they want. Fourthly, the very act of evaluation and control—of measurement, reward, and also punishment—is severely demotivating and can have a devastating effect, not just on morale, but on performance.

It seems clear that management of professionals ought, in the first instance, to avoid such failures. To do this, managers must understand, articulate, and support the internal goods of the practice they manage. *Hire for success; manage for integrity* is a potential motto for the management class (if they must have a motto). To manage for integrity means focussing upon professional education, informative peer review, open, critical discussion of institu-

³ The evidence of this demotivating effect has been well-established in social psychology and widely known for a considerable time. *Punished by Rewards*, by Kohn (1993), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) sums up the evidence.

tional goals and norms, and the avoidance of integrity traps.⁴ In the remainder of this paper, we turn our attention first to the nature of academic integrity and then to the integrity traps encountered by academic professionals.

The Nature of Academic Integrity

We have argued that professional integrity involves ethical attempts to realise the internal goods of a profession alongside critical reflection upon these goods. Thus, an understanding of the academic integrity – the integrity of academics – requires an understanding of the internal goods of academic practice. If the cardiac surgeon, as described in the previous section, has only one internal good—cardiac surgery being an extremely focussed profession—the opposite holds for professional academics. Academics reside in a complex professional environment. To clarify the internal goods of academic practice, it will help to consider the multiple roles of academics. The most fundamental and significant of their roles divide up into three kinds: discipline roles (such as research); educative roles (such as teaching); and application roles (the application of disciplinary knowledge to practical problems). Disciplinary roles are those focused on the search for understanding that is central to academic practice. This search generates the internal goods of the historian *qua* historian, the economist *qua* economist, the chemist *qua* chemist, and so on. A search for understanding involves many things: reading deeply and with scholarly attentiveness the work of others; reviewing the work of others; publishing the work of others; searching for arguments; searching for evidence and facts; developing theories; critiquing theories; and so on. It also includes reflecting on the nature of the discipline and of academic practice itself. Such reflection is both ‘meta’ and normative.

Educative roles are focused on the relationship between those within a discipline and those outside of it who are interested, who want or need to know something about it, as well as those inside it who want to practise at a higher level—including those few seeking to professionally enter it. As Barber notes, this function is especially central to the role of the professional within the university. “The university professional school has as one of its basic functions the transmission to its students of the generalized and systematic knowledge that is the basis of professional performance.” (1963, p. 674) The basic internal goods of academic educative roles are the development of understanding and the development of expertise. The development of understanding involves all kinds of attempts to spread understanding beyond a discipline: to students; a reading public; a media consuming public; government commissions and funding bodies; and so on. The development of expertise includes the development of academic and non-academic expertise: the expert gaze of an art historian or the expert diagnosis of an oncologist.

Application roles focus on the search for worthwhile applications of knowledge. They encompass both directly instrumental forms of academic practice (e.g., medicine, engineering, clinical psychology) as well as indirect forms of practically guided inquiry (e.g., robotics, neuroscience). In its indirect forms, knowledge is sought that has known practical potential as a kind of prolegomenon to a future applied science.

⁴ If this is right, then managers of professionals have their own set of internal goods which are defined in terms of both the successful production of the internal goods of the professions they manage and the integrity of the professional practice they oversee. Managers confront their own pressures and integrity traps.

Any account of academic integrity must accommodate the complex of roles specific to academic life. It resides in the commitment, skill, and insight necessary to perform the multiple roles of the academic with a strong commitment to the various internal goods of these roles, including a commitment to the on-going critical scrutiny of the profession and its conception of internal goods. One additional feature of professional integrity in complex environments like this is the challenge of balancing multiple roles with integrity. Issues of balance are important, but not ones we have room to explore here. There is something which it is to balance the various demands of one's professional life with integrity, just as there is something which it is to balance one's personal and professional life with integrity.⁵

Integrity Traps

Integrity traps are institutional arrangements and practices that undermine professional integrity and promote professional vice. We need to be careful, however, in characterising the kind of arrangements and practices that constitute traps. A trap, for example, is more than a possible reward for malpractice. Temptations to malpractice abound and are probably ineliminable. It is hard to envision, for example, a way of conducting scientific research that did not offer opportunity and potential reward for those unscrupulous enough to engage in scientific fraud of one kind or another. Yet the mere existence of potential reward for scientific fraud is not a trap set for scientists. What, then, constitutes an integrity *trap*?

Generally speaking, we succumb to a trap when we are fooled into undermining ourselves, depriving ourselves unwittingly of good options. An army falls into a trap set by its enemies when it advances too quickly, finding itself surrounded by enemies, with no way out. A mouse is fooled by the mouse trap because the little piece of cheese on the trigger-plate is indistinguishable to the mouse from any other tasty piece of cheese. To trap an Australian bush turkey, it suffices to place a small mirror at the end of a cage. The turkey mistakes its image in the mirror for another turkey and runs forward to deal with a rival, not noticing the cage until it is too late. (Australian bush turkeys are not all that bright.) Traps are based on deception. They are generally intentional – designed and set – but can also be inadvertent. A chess player places her Queen in a vulnerable position by mistake. Her opponent gladly takes advantage but is then forced into checkmate. In retrospect, the player's mistake in moving her Queen to a vulnerable position looks like a brilliant sacrifice. The trap isn't *set*, but it comes about anyway. We may find ourselves trapped – into buying a house we cannot afford, a marriage we are not suited to, a job that will come to immiserate us – not by the wiles of a trapper, but through inadvertence, carelessness, confusion, self-deception, and lies.

An integrity trap is a circumstance in which professionals are unwittingly brought to undermine their integrity. They generally arise in professional contexts out of a misalignment of the external goods of professional practice with the internal goods of the profession. However, external goods are a heteronomous class and integrity traps vary with them. External goods can sometimes function as a reward system, which is an attempt (criticised earlier in our paper) to manage professional performance. External goods such as bonuses, promotions, job security, honours are desirable for professionals and can thus operate as

⁵ See Cox, La Caze and Levine, *Integrity and the Fragile Self* (Ashgate, 2003) for an attempt to set out and understand this over-arching challenge of integrity.

rewards for exemplary performance and motivators of exemplary performance. It is useful to label these kinds of external goods as external rewards.

Misalignment between the internal goods of a practice and the rewards of that practice can make it costly and difficult for a professional to maintain their commitment to internal goods. It is tempting for professionals to abandon commitment to internal goods and cynically work the system for the rewards on offer. Temptations are not traps, as we have observed, but pushed far enough the misalignment of internal and external goods can generate a trap in which professionals come to compromise their professional integrity without ever meaning to. This occurs because external rewards function as more than mere rewards. They also function as expressions of value. They do not simply reward and motivate exemplary performance; their distribution communicates the value of that performance. When someone is promoted to a new level within their profession through a reasonably well-trusted process, their promotion is an institutional expression of what the institution values in its employees. Professionals are promoted, ideally, for their exemplary professional practice; so, promotions indicate a great deal about what makes a practice exemplary. Since reward systems communicate as well as manipulate, they can, over time, generate a self-deceptive professional culture in which the internal goods of practice are misunderstood, disguised, and downplayed. Failure to properly understand, commit to, and reflect upon the internal goods of a profession is a failure of professional integrity. In this way, misalignment between internal goods and external goods can generate integrity traps. Whether purposefully or not, an institution may cognitively and affectively manipulate professionals into compromising their integrity. What is rewarded by the institution may genuinely come to seem to be what really matters to the profession. The gymnastics required to be so manipulated – things such as motivated avoidance, self-deception, and rationalisation – seem well within the reach of vulnerable, desirous, intelligent professionals, especially those with restricted employment options.

Goods external to a profession are not all about individual rewards. Institutional prestige and reputation, for example, are often considered to be important external goods of an institution itself. Competitive advantage, financial security, community esteem, and so on: all these can be, often are, recognised as important institutional goods. If the institution – such as a university, a hospital, a law firm, a court – is in part a college of professionals, then such goods are external to their profession. Some external goods are important for instrumental reasons – a law firm cannot survive for long without financial security; a court cannot function adequately with an unwholesome reputation – but even instrumentally valuable external goods are not to be confused with the internal goods of the profession itself.

Misalignment of institutional external goods and professional internal goods thus generates another path to integrity traps. When the value-demands of an institution are dedicated to realisation of its external goods, well-motivated and sincere professionals can fall into a trap. Without meaning to, they may conflate institutional external goods with internal professional goods and undermine their professional commitments. Arguably, this is what occurred in the Lund case we discussed earlier. Lund's manager asked him to "take off your engineering hat and put on your management hat." (Davis 1991, p. 152). This can be described as a request for him to substitute external goods of his institution (Morton

Thiokol) for the internal goods of his profession (engineering). Since on this occasion they clashed, the substitution caught him in an integrity trap.⁶

The account of integrity traps we have developed is this. Integrity traps are institutional arrangements and practices that systematically generate confusion about the internal goods of a profession, conflation between the internal goods of a profession and external goods of an institution, conflation between the internal goods of a profession and external rewards of professional employment. They undermine professional commitments to the internal goods of professional practice and stymie critical reflection upon those goods. They trap professionals into betraying themselves. This account of integrity traps is rather abstract. In the following, we furnish concrete examples, focusing on contemporary universities. Where might such traps emerge in a contemporary university setting?

Integrity Traps and the University

Integrity traps seem to abound in contemporary universities and professional academic are themselves often complicit in their construction. In this section we examine seven of the most prominent sources of integrity traps in contemporary universities. Here is our list, in no particular order of significance.

I. Corporate Brand Management

University brand management can put pressure on academics to avoid, alter or dissemble about unpopular and controversial research. The external institutional good of high reputation and community esteem readily conflicts with internal goods of academic practice, such as an unflinching search for truth. Popularity and general esteem are not always served by controversial research outputs. A difficult professional life often awaits an academic devoted to unpopular research. Brand management and the pursuit of external goods associated with it can become incorporated into the value culture of the institution so that academics come to think of protecting the university's brand as a fundamental part of their role as a member of the university and willingly adapt their research practices to conform to what is currently popular and uncontroversial. We often self-censor, not because we are frightened and after an easy life, but because we are enthusiastic adopters of the institutional perspective. There may be nothing wrong with the external good of maintaining an excellent reputation for one's institution; the trap is set when that good substitutes for the internal goods of academic research, distorting or limiting how these internal goods are understood and pursued.

II. Grantsmanship

Grantsmanship is the practice of working grants systems to maximize one's chances of a successful application. In a highly competitive environment, one produced by many contemporary forms of research funding, success requires playing a game. Grantsmanship is a

⁶ Complex institutions like NASA involve several professions working together, and the question of how to balance their sometimes-competing demands with integrity becomes a pressing issue. However, we do not have here the space to discuss questions of inter-professional balance and integrity.

kind of skill at playing the game. It requires its own special brand of—very carefully calibrated—dishonest exaggeration (puffery). It also bends academic research agendas to the easy sell: the low-risk, high wow-factor research that may well amount to betrayal of what ought to be of fundamental value to an academic in their research. Grantsmanship can be a cynical exercise, but it has more insidious effects still. External rewards that come with grant-getting are value-setting. When research income is rewarded, it is esteemed, and in the wrong culture, grant-getting substitutes for the actual internal goods of research practice. In this case, academics come to treat winning grants, not as an enabler of research and an indirect and fallible marker of research success, but as the very coin of research success; virtually an end in itself. (“It is important that we do good work with our grant because how else will we get another one?”) A culture of grantsmanship risks cultivating such integrity traps, leading academics to unwittingly betray fundamental professional values.

III. Industry Partnerships

One of the fundamental roles of academics (not all academics, but many) is the pursuit of valuable knowledge application. The point of such practice is not to add to the world’s store of knowledge to enhance understanding, but to apply knowledge to practical problems in a way that has a significant, positive impact on the world outside the academy. The point is to make a positive difference in people’s lives. Partnering with industry can be vital to this process. Industry partners of universities generally have a commercial interest in using university expertise to solve an industry problem. That commercial interest is compatible with realisation of a genuine social good. There is a great deal of value in this. But there is also an integrity trap beckoning. Over-reliance on industry partnerships can lead research away from critically dealing with the industry in question. This needn’t ever be a matter of the industry interfering with the conduct of research itself or its communication. It might simply be a matter of investing in research that suits the industry, externalising its own research costs, and directing research away from research that is critical of the industry in ways the industry is unlikely to appreciate.⁷ Over-reliance on industry-led research is an integrity trap. Researchers can find themselves unwittingly self-censoring or directing their research away from an unfettered search for the truth.

IV. Teacher Evaluations and Their Treatment as a Teaching Quality Metric

In a different way, over-reliance on student teaching evaluations is an integrity trap for the university teacher. Teaching evaluations are particularly effective at measuring the rapport that teachers have succeeded in building with their students—a rapport that may well be based on matters external to the intrinsic goods of the profession (such as grades). Teaching evaluations have an important place in appraising (primarily self-appraising) teaching. Listening to what students have to say about one’s class is generally a good thing, at least when it is not prejudicial or abusive. When teaching evaluations are used as the primary metric of

⁷ Integrity traps lie in wait for the industry players too: burnishing their reputations by association with universities; using them for mere PR / Annual report reasons.

teacher quality, however, an integrity trap beckons. The trap is that pursuit of what matters most in a learning environment may be replaced by an over-riding need to keep one's metric high. Overly generous grading; assessment extensions for all; unrealistically easy, distractingly entertaining classes; clever timing of teaching evaluations after the easiest assessments; subtle pandering: all these things contribute to a high student evaluation metric and all of them undermine the internal goods of teaching practice. The result can be a race to the bottom—the drive not only towards entertaining classes and easy assessments but towards classes that are comparatively easier and more entertaining than those of one's peers.⁸

V. The Translational University

The translational university is an institution wholly dedicated to the translation of its practices into social goods. For anything that is taught, researched, or communicated beyond the walls of the university, the fundamental desideratum is utilitarian promise. What good are we doing future society? What economic, social, health, psychological benefits accrue from our efforts? The curricula set for students at a translational university are wholly devoted to their future employability and their future good citizenship. Research at a translational university is dedicated to realising social goods.

Employability is a good. Good citizenship is a good. The realisation of social goods is good. But the translational university nevertheless introduces integrity traps. It does so by what it leaves out or relegates, namely custodianship of scientific and cultural knowledge. The relegation of this fundamental role of the university can lead those whose internal goods are directed towards custodianship of scientific and cultural knowledge to produce fake rationales for their practice. For example, on this model the study of philosophy becomes merely a means of acquiring critical thinking skills, the study of literature becomes merely a means of acquiring writing skills, the study of history becomes a series of lessons for tomorrow's leaders, mathematics becomes the development of formal manipulative tools. This fundamental misunderstanding of the internal goods of academic practice can lead philosophers, literary scholars, historians, mathematicians, and so on, to betray their commitment to the fundamental internal goods of their practice.

VI. Strategic Overstatement

Institutional overstatement – the exaggeration of achievement, quality, and merit – is rife within universities because so much of their social and economic power derives from prestige and prestige is not earned through modest and realistic self-description. Consider the case of private universities – universities that operate without government assistance as not-for-profit institutions. Despite their not-for-profit status, such universities operate like merchants; they sell degrees. Of course, universities do not sell degrees directly: they sell a

⁸ For an overview of the numerous and well-documented issues with such measures and what the authors refer to as “an instrumental ethos of measurement in the management of academic work” that “has deleterious consequences, both for knowledge production and knowledge transfer to students”, see Crawford Spence, “Judgement’ versus ‘metrics’ in higher education management”, in *Higher Education*, May 2019, Volume 77, Issue 5, pp 761–775.

service, which amounts to an opportunity to obtain a degree through undertaking a program of instruction. They do not sell a mere opportunity, however, and they do not sell a mere service. They sell reasonable expectations. Imagine a university course with a failure rate of 99%. If this were kept secret from students and their parents, students could fairly complain that they had been sold an unsatisfactory product. Had they known the failure rate, they wouldn't have paid for the program. If the failure rate were advertised, the product would fail—the course would be withdrawn by the university in very short order or reformed to bring the failure rate down. Private universities do not tolerate high failure rates because they are not just selling mere educational opportunities, they are selling reasonable expectations of a degree and the increase in future income levels and social position that come with it.

For merchants in a competitive business, a deliberate use of overstatement, or puffery, is very hard to avoid. Advertising slogans such as “Stand Out from the Crowd” abound (connotation: *if you come here, you are special; if you go down the road, well, good luck with your life...*). Along with advertising puffery, come claims about the quality of student experience, the exemplary research (and thus prestige) of the university, and so on. This leads to strategic overstatements: claims about the goals and standing of the university that make unrealistic assumptions and claims. *We are to become a world-class educational destination. We are to produce world-class research. The learning experience we provide is to be unique, student-focussed, industry-led, experientially deep, engaging, and transformative.* It is very rare for a university strategy to announce that the institution aims to maintain its standing as a middle-ranking, mediocre research establishment; or that it aims to provide students with a learning experience comparable to those offered by similar institutions. Honesty in strategy is anathema. Puffery in advertising is bad enough; puffery in management strategy is an integrity trap.

Once a strategic goal is in place—*the learning experience we provide is to be unique*—then a small army of university auxiliaries will be given the task of making it appear real. Eventually this filters down to academic practice itself. In an annual performance review, for example, an academic may be required to explain how they have achieved a key performance objective of introducing uniquely innovative teaching practice into their subjects. It is generally a good idea to say something in answer to this request. Puffery doesn't just stay on the advertising posters. It infiltrates strategy and expectations; it dominates management reviews; it works its dishonest way down to the lies one is asked to tell about the conduct of one's profession. (And surely this kind of dishonesty is bound to make its way outside of the university into places of employment and into personal, social, and political domains.)

VII. Citation Metrics

It is widely recognised in the university sector that current practices of research assessment are dysfunctional. For example, the European University Association, a peak body representing more than 850 universities in 49 European countries, set up a Reforming Research Assessment Agreement in July 2022. A core commitment of the agreement is to “abandon inappropriate uses in research assessment of journal- and publication-based metrics, in particular inappropriate uses of Journal Impact Factor (JIF) and h-index.” (EUA, 2022). At the same time there is very widespread use of citation metrics as a measure of research quality

and scholarly impact. For example, the Australian Research Council assessment research quality through an assessment process ‘Excellence in Research for Australia.’ In 2018, this process divided disciplines into two camps: one camp was assessed with reference to peer review of publications, the other camp was assessed on metrics alone, including citation metrics and income metrics. The sector thus finds itself in a situation in which widely criticised forms of research assessment are used in a highly consequential way.

But what is wrong with assessing the quality of a research publication in terms of the citations it attracts? One may cite the distortional effects on research production, and the injustice of judging researchers by inappropriate measures – and both concerns are very real – but we argue that it is valuable to look at the problem through the lens of integrity traps. One problem with a heavy reliance on citation metrics is that incentives to publish in high citation areas of research at the expense of important niche areas are likely to distort the pursuit of the internal goods of research practice. And, as we have previously observed, incentives of this kind have the more insidious potential of distorting the self-understanding of academic professionals. If publication in high impact factor journals is institutionally validated and publication in lower impact factor journals actively discouraged, a research culture which values impact factor over intrinsic merit may come to dominate. This would be a culture in which professionals systematically misunderstand the internal goods of their practice. In such a research culture having your work cited becomes an end in itself.

There is another kind of integrity trap beckoning here, something that might be called the trap of the citation club. A way to increase citations is to network with a group of similarly minded academics, cite their work religiously (even the really bad stuff; perhaps *especially* the really bad stuff), do it without a great deal of critical attention in long, impressive looking literature reviews. In effect, this is to join a citation club and await your own citations by return mail. It is very hard, for both insiders and outsiders, to distinguish this kind of behaviour from productive and legitimate research networking. A citation club can form without anyone in the club thinking of it as other than a research network grouping. But it is an integrity trap nonetheless because it threatens to substitute the benefits of club membership for achievement of the internal goods of professional practice.

Over-reliance on citation metrics threatens to not only undermine professional integrity but distort research practice in general. Research may come to be directed, not at the internal goods of research practice, but at what will cite. Generations of well-cited papers may distort a field because they were selected for their citation-potential, not their credibility. Researchers are encouraged by this system to eschew replications, or risky, marginal, small-scale research. Why, for example, try to replicate an experiment? If you succeed, and somehow get published, who is going to cite you? Why get involved with a minor philosophical figure? Who will cite you? Write about Heidegger instead: surely there haven’t been enough books about him yet. In this way the good of the practice, and the professional’s decision about how best to pursue that good, are distorted by contextual factors and demands from others. Thus, the manifold integrity traps of citation metrics.

Over-reliance on citation metrics shares a feature with over-reliance on teaching evaluations. They are both distortive ways of measuring the internal goods of a practice. Other poor measurement metrics, such as research income metrics, are familiar in academic life and generate similar kinds of integrity traps.

Conclusion

Professional integrity is undermined in the university, albeit in other organizations and institutions as well, in an insidious way. This is because, as with others forms of structural and institutionalized injustice (e.g., economic, racial, gender injustice), it is the internally constructed institutional structures themselves that defeat integrity. In this paper we have sought to explicate these threats to integrity. We have developed an account of the professional integrity of academic professionals and put it to use in describing many of the traps set (wittingly or unwittingly) for academics seeking to pursue the internal goods of their profession with integrity.

Appendix A: Conflict of Interest Statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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