The Dynamic Interplay between Professional Identity, Threat and Context within Interprofessional Health Care Teams

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BComm, MBA(with Merit)

A thesis presented in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Management

University of Newcastle

September, 2014
Declarations

Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed

Dated

(Karen A McNeil)

Thesis by Publication

I hereby certify that this thesis is in the form of a series of published papers of which I am a joint author. I have included as part of the thesis a written statement from each co-author, endorsed by the Faculty Assistant Dean (Research Training), attesting to my contribution to the joint publications.

Signed

Dated

(Karen A McNeil)
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2 List of Publications Included in the Thesis

Paper 1:

Paper 2:

Paper 3:

Paper 4:

The author’s final versions of these publications have been included in Section 7 of this thesis.
3 List of Additional Publications

The following additional publications are relevant to the thesis and are referred to in discussion, but are not included in it.

Additional Publication 1:


Additional Publication 2:


The author’s final versions of these publications have been included in Section 8 of this thesis.
4 Abstract

Interprofessional practice has garnered widespread attention in the literature, yet current evidence does not elucidate the key mechanisms and contextual factors that determine its outcomes. This thesis by publication, arranged in the form of an overview, four core publications and two ancillary papers, addresses the question of how professional identity, identity threat and context interact to impact on interprofessional working.

Professional identity underpins much of what occurs in interprofessional health care teams. Threats to valued professional identities can activate faultlines within teams and trigger tensions, conflict and underperformance, if not adequately managed. These threats can take the form of differential treatment of professional subgroups; divergent values and norms; and assimilation or devaluing of other professions. As the perception of threat is context dependent, this research focuses on rural settings where professional boundaries can be less distinct.

This study was part of a larger project investigating the enablers of, and barriers to, effective interprofessional practice in an Australian rural health care context. Health practitioners representing various settings, functions, locations and professional backgrounds were interviewed to gather data on the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes of interprofessional practice. Independent content and thematic analyses were integrated to present the findings.

The findings show that many rural clinicians were motivated to engage in interprofessional practice, and in doing so embraced flexible approaches and role overlap as a means to manage workforce pressures and overcome professional isolation. In contrast, interprofessional working was stymied by some practitioners who observed strict role boundaries and traditional hierarchies and who were reluctant to consider input from other health disciplines. However, workload sharing and role flexibility is limited in its application and cannot overcome continued skill deficits in rural health services. Moreover, extended role overlap or any hint of genericism is likely to provoke professional identity threat as individual professions need to maintain their distinctiveness and claims to unique expertise. Leadership strategies are required to balance a shared team identity with the salient professional identities characteristic of health care contexts.

This is one of the first studies to examine the interplay between professional identity, professional identity threat and context, with particular reference to interprofessional practice in rural settings. By employing a sociological lens to examine the mechanisms and contexts of interprofessional practice, it advances our knowledge of the nature of collaboration between the professions and how interprofessional activities translate in the workplace.
## 5 Glossary of Terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AMA</td>
<td>Australian Medical Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARC</td>
<td>Australian Research Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMC HSR</td>
<td>BMC Health Services Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEM</td>
<td>Categorisation-Elaboration Model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CMO</td>
<td>Context + Mechanism = Outcomes model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CNC</td>
<td>Clinical Nurse Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GP</td>
<td>General Medical Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSM</td>
<td>Health Services Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HSR</td>
<td>Health Sociology Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMO</td>
<td>Input, mediators and output model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPE</td>
<td>Interprofessional Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IPP</td>
<td>Interprofessional Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAN</td>
<td>Journal of Advanced Nursing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCR</td>
<td>Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LHD</td>
<td>Local Health District</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MO</td>
<td>Medical Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MPS</td>
<td>Multi-Purpose Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NM</td>
<td>Nurse Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>Nurse Practitioner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT</td>
<td>Occupational Therapist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RN</td>
<td>Registered Nurse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJCS</td>
<td>Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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6 Thesis Overview

The following explanatory overview of the thesis links the published papers to the overall research thesis. It begins with an introduction that includes the study purpose and aims, research questions and an outline of the methodology, discussion and implications. This introductory section also describes the significance and contribution of the thesis, how the key concepts are integrated and how the thesis is structured. This is followed by the literature review which discusses the terminology used, teamwork and interprofessional practice in health care, the unique characteristics of rural interprofessional practice, and three theoretical approaches to understanding interprofessional practice. The remainder of the thesis overview outlines the research design and method informing the empirical papers, synthesises the findings and discussion from all the papers, and explains practice implications and potential future research.