

## Thursday 1st February 4pm – Maynooth University Psychology Department

Dr. Sam Cromie (Trinity College Dublin)

*Just culture's "line in the sand" is shifting one; the empirical investigation of culpability determination.*



Sam is an Assistant Professor in Psychology at TCD. He has a variety of research interests including : Foreign object retention in healthcare, aviation and other industries. Psycho-social outcomes and mechanisms of self-help groups. Just culture and culpability decision making. Organisational, professional and national cultures and their relations to human factors. The meaning and use of incident information. Efficiency and effectiveness of training methodologies and processes. Assessment methodologies for non-technical skills. Models of human competence. Integrated risk management. The use of virtual and augmented reality for training, operations management, risk assessment and safety management.

### Abstract:

A just culture is one which distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, not punishing those who make genuine errors in an honest attempt to do a good job but applying discipline where there is clear recklessness, unjustified risky behaviour or evidence of substance abuse. Marx (2012) summarizes the approach thus: console the human error, coach the at-risk behaviour and punish the reckless behaviour, independent of the outcome.

Just culture was introduced with the intention of providing a more nuanced approach to culpability than a no blame culture which, in turn, was intended to negate the negative impact of a blame culture (Frankel et al., 2006; Marx, 2001; Reason, 1997; Walton, 2004). It has been widely assumed in the just culture literature that it is possible to consistently, and with reasonable objectivity, analyse an incident and determine culpability. Dekker (2009) questions the framing of the culpability decision process in such objective terms. He argues that culpability is not an objective thing to be determined but is rather a judgement which is constructed socially:

“The problem is guidance that suggests that a just culture only needs to “clearly draw” a line between culpable and blameless behaviour. Its problem lies in the false assumption that acceptable or unacceptable behaviour form stable categories with Immutable features that are independent of context, language or interpretation”. This paper introduces the empirical investigation of the social-cognitive processes of culpability determination that build on Dekker’s argument.

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Marx, D., 2001. Patient Safety and the “Just Culture”: A Primer for Health Care Executives. Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York, Columbia University, New York.

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Reason, J., 1997. Managing the Risks of Organizational Accidents. Ashgate, Hants, England.

Walton, M., 2004. Creating a “no blame” culture: have we got the balance right? Qual. Saf. Health Care 13, 163–164. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/qshc.2004.010959>.