

Triage Devices: How Organizations Manage Commitments

Call for papers for a Workshop on February 27-28 2015 at Goldsmiths College London

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Deadline for abstracts: September 19, 2014

This workshop at Goldsmiths College brings together research and reflections on practices and devices that involve the allocation of scarce resources in different fields of expertise.

The term triage comes initially from military medicine, where it describes the process by which doctors decide whom to treat first when they arrive at a battlefield and have more patients than they could reasonably treat in a timely manner. In military and emergency medicine it is generally accepted that medical attention is based on medical need but also on chances of survival. Doctors try not to “waste” scarce resources on patients who have little chance of survival. Triage, as practiced in emergency medicine is extreme in how explicitly it aggregates consequences for individuals into collective calculations and how explicitly it justifies that some “units” are left to die, but other practices of prioritization, in medicine and in other fields, whether explicit or implicit, can also have dramatic implications.

This workshop will explore how organizations and individuals in organizations pick among the different things they could be doing in their everyday work. This will include consideration of explicit decision-making processes but also of routines and taken-for-granted. The workshop aims at developing a better understanding of how organizations manage their commitments in view of limited means. We welcome contributions that address practices in one of many different substantive areas, such as, for example, healthcare, policing and surveillance, education, environmental conservation, development practice, and we aim to include work on organizations in the public, private and the third sector.

Questions might include:

- What resources are labelled as scarce?
- What kind of units function as the targets of distributions (individuals, territorial units, priority themes, company divisions, product lines etc.)?
- What are the knowledge-claims involved in making decisions among units and how are debates about this knowledge resolved?
- What role do management tools and devices play in selecting among things that could be done?
- What are the time frames involved in these commitments?
- How are trade-offs involved in selecting priorities reflected? Is triage or rationing explicit or implicit?
- What different kinds/types/logics of allocation are observable? In how far do “talk, decision, and action” (Brunsson) differ with regard to the organisational distribution of scarce resources?

- How do actors make sense of triage and its dilemmas? How do they deal with the responsibility that is involved?

Examining these organizational practices in more detail and in comparative perspective is important in itself. The workshop will also explore to what extent research questions about triage can form the basis of new ways of describing patterns or “orders” established within and around organizations, which could then be used to answer broader kinds of questions in new and interesting ways.

Practicalities

Please submit a long abstract of 300 to 500 words by email to nils.ellebrecht@soziologie.uni-freiburg.de and m.krause@gold.ac.uk by September 19th 2014. A limited budget to help with travel expenses is available. Accommodation and meals will be provided. Invited presenters will be notified by Oct 1st 2014. Please be prepared to share your paper by February 6th 2015. Papers will be circulated before the workshop. The workshop will be reserved for intensive discussion of papers.