

IBSS RESEARCH SEMINAR

Organized by: RCE 1-Sustainability and ESG

Professional Judges or Government Agents? A Study of Identity Conflicts of Chinese Patent Examiners

Abstract

Commercial, social, and governmental organizations increasingly rely on professionals to handle complex tasks and make critical decisions, yet these professionals often face the issue of multiple conflicting identities in their roles. Our study explores how professionals navigate identity conflicts by investigating Chinese patent examiners' responses to the Made in China 2025 policy that enacted their national identity in professional work. Employing a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies, we develop and test an explanatory framework that reveals how identity conflicts affect professional practices. We find that when a national identity is enacted, examiners compromise their diagnosing diligence—a subordinate professional element—while attempting to maintain judgmental fairness as a core professional value. This compromise is mitigated through interactions with two close professional groups: foreign examiners as non-local counterparts and experienced patent agents as local professional rivals. These interactions redirect examiners' attention back to their professional identity. Our analysis of 970,199 patent cases reviewed by 10,305 Chinese examiners between 2012 and 2020 supports these qualitative findings while revealing an important caveat: subordinate and core professional elements are interdependent, such that compromised diagnosing diligence ultimately undermines judgmental fairness. Our study advances the understanding of professional identity dynamics and provides insights for managing professionalized public institutions.

Presenter

Dr. Yanfeng Zheng is currently working as a tenured associate professor in Dept. of Management at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). He earned his Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin Madison in 2006, majored in management and minored in economics.

Dr. Zheng's research interests primarily revolve around the nexus of strategic management and entrepreneurship. His work has been published at leading management and entrepreneurship journals such as AMJ, SMJ, JBV, JMS, ICC, and SEJ. He also serves the editorial board of AMJ since 2013, the most prestigious academic journal in management field and won the Best Reviewer Award in 2014 and 2016. He was the recipient of the Irene M. McCarthy Award for the best paper on the topic of High Technology and Innovation at the Babson International Entrepreneurship Conference. Dr. Zheng has won several major research grants such as General Research Funding (GRF) of Hong Kong. He also has extensive teaching experience in entrepreneurship and strategic management. He has developed a few innovative teaching methods and novel courses such as Fintech Entrepreneurship.

Date:

28 February 2025

Time:

14:00-15:00 (China Standard)

Location: BS 574