

**Title: Precarious Identities in Elite Occupations: Navigating Identity Tensions**

**Speaker: Prof. Karan Sonpar (University College Dublin)**

**Area: OBHRM**

**Date: 21.06.2022, Venue: P22 @ 2.30PM**

**Abstract:**

How do members of elite occupations deal with the identity tensions intrinsic in their work activities that threaten their status? We draw on 42 interviews with former fighter pilots, who are routinely confronted with the possibility of losing their elite status in the Air Force due to expulsion, injury, or death. We find that these individuals face three tensions, invasive scrutiny, mortality awareness, and competitive camaraderie, that place contradictory expectations on them, since they require reconciling demonstration of individual expertise and adherence to collective norms. We document three forms of identity work by which individuals negotiate these tensions in their identity enactment: rationalizing, disregarding, and compartmentalizing. Our findings contribute to theory by documenting how individuals respond to threats posed by identity tensions emerging from their work. We suggest that the maintenance of an elite occupational identity may be a more contested process than previously conceptualized and how negotiating the identity tensions it involves might be one of the most challenging aspects of this process. We also offer a less cynical view of the role of organizational monitoring and surveillance in this process, highlighting how individuals can view these as enabling learning and status protection.

**Speaker Profile:**



Karan is Professor of Management at University College Dublin. He earned his PhD from the University of Alberta, Canada. He has held prior academic appointments at IE Business School, Spain (2008-09) and University of Manitoba, Canada (2006-2008). Karan served as Captain in the Indian Army prior to his PhD (1993-2001). His work has been published in outlets such as Journal of International Business Studies, Journal of Management, Journal of Management Studies, Human Relations, Human Resource Management, and MIT Sloan Management Review.

Much of his research is phenomenon-driven and draws upon literatures of social cognition, image and identity work, risk, and the exercise of managerial direction in the face of competing institutional and stakeholder demands. He is a recipient of several teaching awards and has served as Academic Director of MBA Programs and Associate Academic Director of Executive Development at University College Dublin. <https://people.ucd.ie/karan.sonpar/about>