by the market culture. A sense of powerlessness probably helps account for the fervor with which they drove a Cook, Goree or Blair out of the newsroom—they have a culprit by the collar at last.

The Jaysons of journalism thus present a paradox. On the one hand, they deserve to be called to account. On the other, they can be considered scapegoats—stand-ins for the unpenishable, reminders of an old refrain that Mark Feldstein brought up at the forum. One version goes like this:

Stealing the goose from the Commons Risks irony, the hood and the nose, But law will not touch the Brahmins Who steal the Green from the goose.

Notes
1 This essay was inspired in part by conversations with Dr. Mark Feldstein of George Washington University and my wife, Rachel Berlin. I want to thank them for their insights, while stressing that any oversights and inaccuracies in the article are strictly my own.
2 The University of Maryland and its College of Journalism tapped access-story Blair for recruiting ads and fund-raisers, even though he had failed to graduate.
3 Interestingly, though, NPC reporter Marie Brann was pressuring to quit when her husband, media-man actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, became Governor of California in 2005. The logic of the networks seems to be as follows: The celebrity journalist draws ratings, so she can keep working after marrying a newsman—unless the newsmaker begins to seriously outshine her. In such a case, she is locked in a “conflict of interest” and must go. The network is not really concerned about the ethical problem, though. It just does not want to show less brightly because some celebrity has eclipsed one of its own.

Reference

Organizational Failures in the Jayson Blair incident
ROBERT G. PICARD Jönköping University, Sweden
The disastrous episode of Jayson Blair’s faked news reports and plagiarism at The New York Times has led to widespread discussion and soul-searching in the journalistic community and society. Many observers have discussed how Blair duped and deceived his bosses and portrayed The New York Times as an unwitting victim; others have cast the incident as an ethics issue; and some cast it as an affirmative action and diversity issue. Those issues are clearly involved but the central problem behind the scandal is a set of systemic management failures that made the episode possible and compounded its effects.

The finger of blame does not point to any single individuals but to a collective failure of many individuals, the Times as an organization, and its managerial processes. The story is fraught with examples of failures of personnel management, organizational culture and coordination, and crisis management, compounded by problems of leadership.

At the heart of the Times’ failures in the Blair episode were gross shortcomings in personnel management practices and processes involved in the selection, hiring, development, supervision, and discipline of Jayson Blair. Had these failures not occurred, the Blair episode would not have blighted the Times’ and journalism’s reputations today.

Basic personnel procedures involve standard-ized and similar procedures for personnel searches and selections that are expected to be followed to avoid difficulties. Journalistic organizations, especially large ones such as The New York Times, have procedures and processes established by human resources departments to ensure adherence to legal mandates and to recruit the best possible personnel. These processes involve announcement of positions, reviews of applications, and checking references, former employers, and educational institutions.

The process of Blair’s hiring is not clear from public discussions of the incident. Whatsoever occurred, he was an extremely young journalist who did not meet the paper’s normal experience requirements. His selection may have been for diversity purposes, but it is unclear why he was chosen when hundreds of more qualified minority journalists would have been delighted for the chance to work at the elite newspaper.

What is clear is that Blair was hired without adequate background checks by the newsroom.
or human resources personnel. The personnel functions appear to have been primarily mechanical paper filing. No real check was done of his resume, which indicated he had graduated from the University of Maryland. Simple phone calls to the university registrar and discussions with journalism faculty would have found that Blair had not received his degree and revealed the earlier problems that he had as a journalism student and editor.

The deficiencies in the initial selection process created a situation in which development of Jayson Blair's abilities and character were critical. As a neophyte journalist in one of the world's most important journalist organizations—especially if he were hired for diversity purposes—Jayson Blair needed to grow significantly as a journalist and Times employee. There is no evidence, however, that he was given that attention, training, and support, or that he had a mentor to which he could turn who was concerned about his development.

These processes and resources, which exist in many media companies, were strangely unapparent in Blair's short career. Managing Editor Gerald Boyd, who was later accused of helping Blair and giving special treatment, specifically denied that he was Blair's mentor.

The organizational omission of helping Blair become a journalist—much less a journalist at a leading news organization—left him on his own to develop the sense of the paper's mission, its culture, and practices, and to wrestle with professional problems on his own. At the most, the organization showed indifference to his misjudgment in selecting for any position to which his potential Blair had that would allow him to contribute to the organization and its readers' understanding of the world about them.

The third, and perhaps greatest personnel management failure surrounding the incident, involves supervisory practices and the failure reveals serious gaps in the abilities of editors at the Times to manage effectively. Supervision involves monitoring and controlling personnel and is necessary when one assigns work tasks and responsibility. A good supervisor manages the work of his or her employee and makes regular evaluations of the work being done as a means of helping subordinates improve their performance and contributions to the organization. Good supervision helps the employee grow as a person and professional and results from regular and committed interactions between reporters (especially young journalists) and their editors.

Supervision of Jayson Blair appears to have been a problem throughout his career and he learned the techniques of manipulating and defrauding the organization because of lapses in that oversight. During the course of his employment, when errors and misdeeds were discovered, they often went unpunished by the Times.

During his five-year career at the Times, about one in 15 stories required corrections before those involved in the scandal that resulted in his downfall. Accounting reviews showed he had a history of overspending on and falsifying expense accounts. Yet they did not result in stronger oversight, career counseling, or even punishment.

As early as 2002, metro editor Jonathan Landman wrote a strongly written memo about Blair's performance because of the mounting problem, saying "We have to stop Jayson from writing for the Times. Right now." That memo to the associate managing editor for administration and the assistant to the Managing Editor Gerald Boyd resulted only in a memo to Blair's personnel file indicating he was in danger of losing his job.

Despite knowledge of Blair's problems, no effort was made to help him improve his performance. In fact, Blair was promoted OUT of his position and given better reporting positions. This clearly kept him from learning lessons from his performance and reveals a narrowness of vision of supervisors who were merely trying to make the problem go away rather than looking out for the organization as a whole.

At one point, Blair took part in a company-sponsored program for personnel with personal problems. Although the nature of that incident was and should remain private, it should have been a warning signal to supervisors. During and after his time in the personnel assistance program, Newscom supervisors should have seen the need to give him greater oversight, to
ensure he did not harm the organization, and
to assist him in overcoming his difficulties and
in feeling part of the organizational family.
They apparently did not.
So Blair continued to have a relatively dis-
connected life at the paper, reportedly exhib-
ted erotic behavior, and continued to make
journalistic mistakes. Finally, at 27 years of age,
Jayson Blair was discovered to have had prob-
lems with dozens of stories in his coverage of
the Washington DC-area sniper case and the
war on Iraq involving falsified quotes, con-
coccted interviews, and lies about his where-
abouts.
Complaints about inaccuracies in the report-
ing from officials were originally unheeded.
Perhaps it was an arrogant dismissal of com-
plaints of outsiders (although the newspaper's
Washington bureau even complained), perhaps it
was a Times culture of professionalism to
give journalists independence, or perhaps it
was because management was paying attention
to things other than content complaints and
staff problems. Whatever the reason, manage-
ment did not deal with the Blair problem until
it became a huge public embarrassment and
sparked the ritualistic orgy of self-examination,
breast beating, and wailing in the paper and
the journalism community.
Most worrying in the Times' response has
been the notion that Blair was an aberration
and the company had no reason to be wary of
his actions and falsehoods. Plagiarism and false
stories, however, are hardly new to journalism,
and journalistic fraud and misrepresentation
are regularly exposed. They are constant prob-
lms in the newspaper industry that lead to
dismissals and discipline of reporters in
journalistic organizations every year.
Admittedly, these kinds of cases only rarely
rise to level of that involving Blair, but pre-
vious problems should have made the Times'
managers cognizant of the potential and lead
them to investigate allegations earlier. After
Washington Post reporter Janet Cooke was ac-
cused and acknowledged fabricating her
Pulitzer Prize-winning story, the paper re-
sponded by instituted hiring, training and su-
ervisory programs to help avoid future
problems. Apparently, these protections were
not in place at the Times, were ignored, or
managers just failed to carry out those portions
of their jobs.
Discussions of the incident and managerial
failures at the Times have made it clear that the
editorial structure of the paper is strongly hier-
archical, has significant bureaucratic tenden-
cies, and lacks effective communication
mechanisms.
The editorial staff complaint that they are
isolated from the editorial management, that
managers are indifferent or arrogant, and that
managers exhibit significant favoritism in treat-
ment of staff. Relationships between managers
and subordinates are said to be poor and
morale is low. A clear asymmetrical power
relationship is described instead of a symmetri-
cal relationship among colleagues.
Regardless of the degree of truth to those
complaints, there is a clear perception among
many journalists at the Times that these factors
are harmful and contributed significantly to the
Blair incident. After the Blair frauds were ex-
posed, those perceptions were voiced in a ta-
untuous meeting between Executive Editor
Howell Raines and the staff. In reports about
the meeting, Raines was quoted as saying "You
view me as inaccessible and arrogant" and that
he regretted a climate of "fear" that kept other
journalists from talking with editors about
Blair before the public humiliation of the pa-
per.
"You believe the newsroom is too hierarchi-
cal, that my ideas get acted on and others get
ignored," Raines told the assembled journalists.
"I heard that you were convinced there's a star
system that singles out my favorites for eleva-
tion."
It was not the first indications of an organi-
zational divide and evidence has been accumu-
lating for many years. Three decades ago, Abe
Rosenthal was known for curing, threatening,
and humiliating journalists in front of their
peers. Although that situation has been evident
for some years, a divide in which the great
editors are highly separated from the working
journalists clearly remains and will continue to
hamper organizational communication and re-
lations in the Times unless significant attention
is given to the organizational culture.
Crisis Management Failures

When the problems with Jayson Blair became too evident to ignore, The Times' management initially failed to respond clearly, candidly, and, contrarily, lessons it should have learned over the years as it watched major companies in other industries respond to its own revelations of misconduct, corporate irresponsibility or dangerous products.

Indeed there were deliberate efforts by Publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr. to protect the paper's top managers when the stories broke. Soul searching about the paper's self-interests in credibility emerged, but organizational responsibility was generally ignored and statements of disbelief, of placing blame elsewhere, and of trying to avoid responsibility appeared. After two months—when it was clear that the company response failed to assure the journalistic community and the paper's own staff—Managing Editor Gerald Boyd and Executive Editor Howell Raines ceremonially fell on their swords and resigned.

It was a soul-searching article in November. The New York Times called the incident "a low point in the 155-year history of the newspaper," and Arthur Sulzberger Jr. called it a "huqie black eye." Despite that verdict and the calming of some of the public debate, there is still no sign of organic change in the culture or management of the paper, except the appointment of new editors and a reader's representative whose ability to solve the managerial failures is suspect.

Unless stronger attention is given to the company culture, work structures, and managerial processes, the changes implemented are little more than small bandages put on an open wound at the paper.

Commentary

PAUL McMASTERS First Amendment Ombudsman. First Amendment Center, USA

Jayson Blair is not a member of an exclusive club. Never was. Never will be. He is not even a world-class liar, despite the barrels of ink spilled over his journalistic failuries. We know him chiefly—and most likely temporarily—because he got caught telling little lies in a big way.

It is true that even little lies add up to a big problem for the press, especially when they appear in America's newspaper of record, The New York Times. It is also true that Jayson Blair damaged the Times grievously between the fall of 2002 and the spring of 2003 as he made up material, stole the work of others, and failed to be where he and his dateline said he was. His departure left the newsroom in turmoil, the careers of two top editors in ruins, and the entire American press on edge.

If that were not enough, there quickly tumbled out in the wake of the Blair scandal a series of distressingly similar journalistic vil- lains, just a sampling from March of this year alone:

After examining 10 years of reporting by one of its best-known journalists, USA Today reported that the inquiry had turned up "substantial" evidence that foreign correspon- dents Jack Kelley had fabricated significant portions of eight major articles and lifted 24 quotes and other material from other publications. His editors also said that he had persuaded others to help him deceive the newspaper's investiga-
tors.

The Chicago Tribune launched a review of three years' worth of reporting by Uli Schmet-
zer, a former foreign correspondent who had continued to work for the paper on a freelance basis after he retired two years before. Editors said that Schmetzer had admitted making up the name and occupation of a source used in a February 24 story, datelined from Australia.

And to prove the forgiving—or forgetful—character of the news profession, The Boston Herald announced its hiring of Mike Barnicle, whose 25-year-career at the rival Globe ended ingloriously in 1998 after questions were about sources quoted and material appearing in his columns.

And so it goes.

Jacques Steinberg wrote in the Times on March 22, "At least 10 papers, as large as The Chicago Tribune and as small as The Sofia'tis Democrat in Missouri, have confirmed instances of plagiarism or fabrication since the Times re-