



THEME OF THE 2014 Annual Meeting

The 2014 Theme encourages us to consider the effect of *words* – our words and others’ -- on individuals, teams, organizations nations or even global systems. *Words* -- in the broad way I am using the term here -- can take the form of spoken utterances, written text, or symbols (e.g., “thumbs-up” or “thumbs-down” to convey a message of approval versus disapproval, respectively; emoticons used in text-messages to convey emotions; graphs of growing or declining performance-outcomes).

Words allow people to convey and interpret meaning, hence potentially to influence perceptions, emotions, attitudes, decisions, and associated behaviors. *What* and *how* words are communicated determine the results they effect. Leaders and those aspiring to become (or remain) leaders have therefore long understood the need to manage communications’ style as well as substance. Over time as new digital (Internet-based) technologies have become available, what and how people say things has grown even more important, as well as more challenging. This is because new digital technologies have enabled words of ourselves and others (sometimes without the original communicator’s awareness) to be *ported*, in an instant, to and from audiences of unknown location and size. Understanding the effect of words and their portability is therefore a critical task facing us as management scholars.

The 2014 Conference logo depicts the many forms by which words can get communicated, including the new technologies that enable many more people to *send and receive* words (in the form of texts, books, songs, videos to and from any location around the globe. Digital communication technology has thus increased the number and diversity of people who can potentially join and influence our conversations and the perceptions, emotions, attitudes, decisions, and behaviors resulting from them.

The 2014 Conference Theme regards the effect that words can have on the subsequent events of individuals, groups/teams, organizations, industries, and even nations— depending on who or what is the subject of conversation, how many hear or see the conversation, and the extent to which the conversation inspires action. At a micro-level, the types of consequences potentially stirred by the words received in organizations’ strategic mission statements, codes of ethics, and performance-appraisal forms or in authorities’ or others’ verbal



communications may include varying levels of initiative-taking, creativity, innovativeness, ethicality, inclusionary behavior, cross-cultural sensitivity, and performance-quality by individuals and teams. At a more macro-level, the types of consequences inspired by words in texts and speeches delivered by authorities or others include organizational-, industry-, and even country-level outcomes (e.g., varying levels of organizations' innovativeness, institutionalized corruption, exclusionary (diversity-unfriendly) climates or cultures, and economic performance of organizations or nations).

Digital technologies have increased the speed with which our own and others' words can be received and sent (and potentially also with the original communications *modified* in the process), thereby enabling many more people (of varying levels of authority) to contribute to, and shape, conversations they hear or see. This has made it more challenging for individuals, organizations, and nations' governments to control the words that others read or hear about them. Additionally, digital technologies' portability of words have changed the trajectory of entire industries, accelerating the demise of some (e.g., independent book stores and musical record stores, newspapers and textbooks), and accelerating the formation of others (webinars, I-Tunes, I-Books, E-books, E-newspapers, etc.). Although digital technologies make it far easier to communicate with people across country borders and cultures, this ease can also enhance the frequency of cross-cultural misunderstanding since words (e.g., colloquialisms) and symbols representing them (e.g., a "thumbs up" to indicate approval) are often interpreted differently across cultures.

The effects of words and word-carrying technologies, as well as the interactive-effect of messages and the channel carrying them, have management implications in need of scholarly attention. Possible questions include:

1. How is employee- or team-performance outcomes (e.g., perceptions, organizational- or team-identity, work-related attitudes, task-related decisions, or behaviors) influenced by the words associated with organizations' strategic mission statements, codes of ethics, and performance-appraisal forms? How might the latter relationships change when employees see their organization (or individuals representing it) "talked about" favorably or unfavorably in blogs, social media-sites, or tweets, and re-tweets?
2. How are new communication technologies affecting how managers pursue goals such as setting norms, motivating desired employee or team behavior, enhancing employee wellbeing, creating and sustaining desired team or organizational climates of justice and ethicality, creativity, inclusivity, high-performance? Does the shift from printed to digitized forms change the meaning of organizational texts such as vision and mission statements, codes of ethics, handbooks, rules and bylaws, operation manuals, templates, performance-appraisal forms, strategic plans, business contracts, historical documentation?
3. How is organizational effectiveness (e.g., profits, customer satisfaction, sales, repeat-business, referrals, etc.) affected when the organizations use social media such as twitter, blogs, etc.? And at a more micro-level, when are individuals' use of social media more versus less likely to be effective in mobilizing collective voice about desired changes? How might antecedents to individuals' effectiveness as social media-reliant change-agents inform change-initiating or change-managing processes used by employees, managers, business, or governmental-leaders who wish to mobilize support for their requests?



4. Given the ease with which digital content can be duplicated (as compared to print media), how are these new technologies affecting the way organizations deal with privacy and security? Relatedly, what does privacy mean in the internet age? Different countries seem to be legislating different norms in this regard: is there any convergence in view? How do individual employees and consumers navigate this new world?

5. What qualities distinguish the businesses and industries that have thrived rather than died as a result of this technological revolution? What can we learn from these other industries as management educators?

6. What improvements may be needed to prior theorizing and empirically-guided advice about antecedents to (interpersonal or organizational) legitimacy and related outcomes (e.g., individuals' or organizations' subsequent reputation and persuasiveness) in light of the fact that it is possible for an image-damaging message-- including a rating of thumbs-up (liking) or thumbs-down (disliking)-- to be anonymously electronically posted, blogged, tweeted, and/or re-tweeted by those whose goal is to undermine the organization or members of it, such as business competitors, angry employees or former employees, and/or coworkers who envy higher-performing peers?

7. How do differences in language-fluency affect processes and outcomes of multicultural or multinational teams? What practices help to enhance inclusiveness among members of such teams and to overcome (unintended or intended) exclusivity when members of such teams speak a language unknown to other members? How can digital communication technologies be used to facilitate the work of culturally-diverse and transnational teams? Does the frequency of cross-region conversations increase employees' understanding of and comfort with cultural differences?

8. How have new digital communication technologies enabled the construction of new vocabularies and forms of communication that have helped to alter extant fields (e.g., business, education, non-profits) by enabling the introduction of new logics and practices? In turn, how do organizations cope with the resultant institutional complexity-- that is, the varied pressures they face associated with multiple institutional logics?

9. How will digital communication technologies impact the way we conduct and communicate our scholarship and teaching? For example, how does access to digitized texts or conversations affect our ability to understand organizational phenomena? How will journals' transition from print- to online-forms and from paid-journals to open source influence the conduct of science, the evaluation of science, and the delivery of scientific findings? How will the transition from face-to-face classroom interaction to on-line virtual interaction with students affect access to education, the quality of education, and the lives of educators?

In summary, the 2014 Theme— “The Power of *Words*”— encourages submissions (at all levels of analysis) that focus on the many forms of *words* in organizations and the ways in which they facilitate or hinder the outcomes that various organizational stakeholders seek. In so doing, it is my hope that the 2014 Program may help uncover knowledge on how organizational stakeholders can leverage the *power in words* to bring about positive changes!

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