

Language and Social Interaction: Communication Design in Professional Practice

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People are regularly called upon to shape successful communication activities for others in their everyday work, civic, and personal lives. This is particularly true for communication professionals involved in public relations, public affairs, corporate social responsibility, and management but increasingly so across the range of professional work. The continuous developments of communication and information technology are transforming business, science, law, politics, and government in a way that has increased the complexity of managing disagreements and fostering collaboration. The demand for competence at managing differences is only growing as our communication environments become increasingly complex.

Communication Design refers to the communication work performed to manage differing points of view and to foster collaborative interaction and reasoning among a variety of stakeholders in any project. Communication Design entails competence and expertise in intervening and inventing to make communication possible what has otherwise been difficult, impossible, or unimagined for groups, organizations, and communities to manage differences and achieve collaboration.

In this class, we will study professional practice from a communication design perspective that will (1) help you see when and how people purposely intervene on communication situations and with what consequence and (2) help you develop expertise and competence to effectively and appropriately intervene by designing communication. We will do this by learning how to analyze messages and interaction to identify opportunities for managing disagreement and fostering collaboration. During the the workshop we will focus on the uses of language and interaction in managing differences of opinion while also focus on the uses of information and communication technology in managing differences of opinion.

In the end, you should find that you have improved your:

- analytic skills in assessing how communication contexts lead to digression, impasse, and stalemate in discussions and decision making
- problem solving abilities for designing more collaborative communication
- ability to construct messages that influence and shape how others communicate with each other
- ability to assess and critique techniques and strategies for stakeholder engagement

Seminar Main Topics

- Introduction to Communication Design: Augmenting human interaction and reasoning
- Design Moves and Design Thinking in Professional Practice: The cases of dispute mediators, meeting facilitators, and policy professionals
- Designs as Arguments: Communication work and the construction of contemporary argumentative realities

Required Reading:

- Aakhus, M., & Jackson, S. (2005). Technology, Interaction and Design. In K. Fitch & B. Sanders (Eds.), *Handbook of Language and Social Interaction* (pp. 411–433). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Jacobs, S., & Aakhus, M. (2002). What mediators do with words Implementing three models of rational discussion in dispute mediation. *Conflict Resolution Quarterly*, 20(2), 177–204. <http://doi.org/10.1002/crq.3890200205>
- Aakhus, M., & Laureij, L. V. L. V. (2012). Activity, materiality, and creative struggle in the communicative constitution of organizing: Two cases of communication design practice. *Language and Dialogue*, 2(1), 41–59. <http://doi.org/10.1075/ld.2.1.03aak>

Preparation

- Read the required readings, note key terms/concepts to be clarified and questions the participant would like to have addressed.
- Choose the version of the assignment to be completed *after* the seminar meeting and select the subject on which the assignment will focus.

Assignment

- Pick one of the two following focal points:
 - **Description — Communication Design Work:** The project seeks an answer to: How do the communicative actions people perform shape the opportunities for pursuing and handling differences of opinion? Class participants will, as individuals or small teams, select some discourse for analysis from one [Change My View subReddit](#). An analysis of that discourse will be conducted by applying concepts and methods introduced in the course lectures and readings. Central to the analysis will be a reconstruction of the arguments and arguing in the online discussion using the mapping techniques and methods discussed in class. Based on the analysis, a brief report will be written that (1) explains and illustrates the explicit/implicit reasoning that emerges through the disagreement management practice evident in the discussion among the participants and that (2) explains two to three key lessons that can be derived from this analysis about how the communicative actions of the participants contribute to (or detract from) the quality of the discussion.
 - **Description — Design for Communication:** The project seeks an answer to: How do communication-information services (e.g., platforms, blackboxes, blockchains) shape the quality of interaction and reasoning for a communicative context in which you participate? Class participants will, as individuals or small teams, select a mediated communicative context to analyze. Before conducting analysis, the individual or team, will write down key standpoints they have about how communication-information services influence their communicative context. These key standpoints should be examined and tested through a description and analysis that applies concepts and methods introduced in the seminar, readings, and activities. Based on the analysis, a brief report will be given that (1) explains and illustrates the ways that communication-information services shape the

quality of interaction and reasoning for the selected communication context and that (2) explains two to three key lessons that can be derived from this analysis about how the actions of the communication-information services contribute to (or detract from) the quality of the interaction and reasoning in the selected context.

- Deliverables and Evaluation:
 - **Preparatory Deliverable:** By the time of the seminar: (1) select a preferred focus for the assignment; (2) familiarize yourself with the CMV or mediated context you intend to analyze; (3) prepare any questions or concerns you have about the assignment. It will be possible to change your preferred focus or CMV or mediated context once you become more familiar with the assignment.
 - **Final Deliverable:** To be prepared after the seminar. A brief written report, no longer than 3 pages (excluding title, abstract, references, and appendices) that addresses the points in the description. The report is to be written in the APA format. Appendices that include examples, argument maps, and additional analysis can be added to the report and will not count toward the page total. The appendices provide a way to offer expanded explanations and analysis that can be referred to within the report.
 - **Responsibility:** This can be completed as an individual or team.
 - **Evaluation:** The report will be evaluated on how well it addresses the overarching project question and two key points highlighted in the description above. Most essentially this includes (1) making and defending an overarching point (thesis) relevant to the aim of the assignment, as described above, (2) the effective use of course material in the report and appendices, and (3) the clarity and quality of the written and oral presentation. The basic expectations for a passing grade include: Demonstrating effective use of observational data in the paper and in the appendix to support the explanations while successfully incorporating course readings, seminar content, and activities in developing and supporting the explanations made in the report. The answer demonstrates understanding of key ideas from the course and has elements of an original perspective but should go further in developing and supporting an original or insightful perspective in making the explanation.

Readings that may be of interest for further study (not required):

- Aakhus, M., Agerfalk, P. J., & Lennmyr, F. (2018). Digital Innovation as Design of Digital Practice: Doctors as Designers in Healthcare. *51st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, 9, 4594–4601.
- Aakhus, M. (2017). The Communicative Work of Organizations in Shaping Argumentative Realities. *Philosophy & Technology*, 191–208. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s13347-016-0224-4>
- Aakhus, M. (2015). Understanding the Competence Involved in Constructing Argumentative Contexts. In D. Mohammed & M. Lewiński (Eds.), *Argumentation and Reasoned Action Proceedings of the 1st European Conference on Argumentation (Vol II)*. (pp. 153–161). Milton Keynes, UK: College Publications.
- Aakhus, M. (1999). Science court: A case study in designing discourse to manage policy controversy. *Knowledge Technology and Policy*, 12(2), 20–37. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s12130-999-1020-6>
- Barbour, J. B., Gill, R., & Barge, J. K. (2018). Organizational Communication Design Logics: A Theory of Communicative Intervention and Collective Communication Design. *Communication Theory*, 28(3), 332–353. <http://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtx005>
- Barbour, J. B., & Gill, R. (2014). Designing Communication for the Day-to-Day Safety Oversight of Nuclear Power Plants. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(2), 168–189. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2013.859291>
- Barge, J. K., & Craig, R. T. (2009). Practical Theory in Applied Communication Scholarship. In L. R. Frey & K. N. Cissna (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Applied Communication Research* (pp. 55–78). New York: Routledge.
- Buchanan, R. (1985). Declaration by Design: Rhetoric, Argument, and Demonstration in Design Practice. *Design Issues*, 2(1), 4. <http://doi.org/10.2307/1511524>
- Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (2014). Building Grounded Practical Theory in Applied Communication Research: Introduction to the Special Issue. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(3), 229–243. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2014.916410>
- Craig, R. T., & Tracy, K. (1995). Grounded practical theory: The case of intellectual discussion. *Communication Theory*, 5(3), 248–272.
- Harrison, T. R. (2014). Enhancing Communication Interventions and Evaluations through Communication Design. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(2), 135–149.
- Harrison, T. R., Morgan, S. E., King, A. J., Corcia, M. J. Di, Williams, E. A., Ivic, R. K., ... Hopeck, P. (2010). Promoting the Michigan Organ Donor Registry : Evaluating the Impact of a Multifaceted Intervention Utilizing Media Priming and Communication Design. *Health Communication*, 25, 700–708. <http://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2010.521912>
- Jackson, S. (2015). Design Thinking in Argumentation Theory and Practice. <http://doi.org/10.1007/s10503-015-9353-7>
- Jackson, S. (2005). Designing countermoves to reshape disagreement space. In P. Riley (Ed.), *Engaging argument: selected papers from the 2005 NCA/AFA Summer Conference on Argumentation*. (Vol. 20). Washington, D.C.: National Communication Association.

- Jackson, S., & Aakhus, M. (2014). Becoming More Reflective about the Role of Design in Communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 42(2), 1–10. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2014.882009>
- Jacobs, S., & Jackson, S. (2006). Derailments of argumentation: It takes two to tango. In P. Houtlosser & A. van Rees (Eds.), *Considering pragma-dialectics* (pp. 121–134). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. <http://doi.org/10.1200/JCO.2011.40.1414>
- Parker, G., Alstynne, M. W. van, and Choudary, S. P. (2016). Platform: How networked markets are transforming the economy and how to make them work for you. New York: W. W. Norton, Co.
- Schön, D. A., & Rein, M. (1994). *Frame Reflection: Toward the Resolution of Intractable Policy Controversies* (pp. 91–128). New York: Basic Books.
- Schön, D. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. New York: Basic Books.
- Simon, H. A. (1996). *The Sciences of the Artificial (Third edition)*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Sprain, L., Carcasson, M., & Merolla, A. J. (2013). Utilizing “On Tap” Experts in Deliberative Forums: Implications for Design. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 00(00), 1–18. <http://doi.org/10.1080/00909882.2013.859292>
- Stolterman, E. (2008). The Nature of Design Practice and Implications for Interaction Design Research. *International Journal of Design*, 2(1), 55–65.