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Stakeholder engagement as communication design practice

Mark Aakhus^{1*} and Michael Bzdak^{1,2}

¹ *School of Communication & Information, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, New Jersey USA*

² *Johnson & Johnson, New Brunswick, New Jersey USA*

Stakeholder engagement competence is here framed as an ongoing matter of *communication design*—that is, professionals and organizations of all sorts are challenged to invent forms of engagement with organizational stakeholders making communication possible that may otherwise be difficult, impossible, or unimagined. An original framework for articulating logics of communication design that addresses extant shortcomings in understanding stakeholder engagement competence is introduced. The framework draws into relief how communication for stakeholder engagement is conceptualized and valued by professionals and organizations. The communication design practice framework provides a path for opening up the black box of stakeholder engagement to advance communication competence in professional practice and organizational communication. The framework is illustrated by reconstructing, from current corporate social responsibility practice, two competing communication design logics for constructing dialogue and stakeholder engagement. One logic, grounded in the shared value framework, reprises a common theme about business that points to constructing communication to maintain the primacy of shareholders in stakeholder networks and to seek profitability in social, environmental, and economic problems. The other logic introduces an alternative communication design logic grounded in commitments to collaborative governance and open innovation. This logic is for stakeholder networks to generate and manage multiple values that address matters of social, cultural, environmental, and economic concerns. We then consider some key implications for engagement practice and competency for inventing forms of dialogue and stakeholder engagement to create value in the new globalized, mediated context. Communication design practice opens new ways of thinking about stakeholder engagement that has implications for cultivating professional practice and improving organizational decision-making about investing in communication resources and infrastructure. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

COMMUNICATION DESIGN LOGICS FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The publication of Freeman's *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach* (Freeman, 1984) highlighted and reframed fundamental questions about value creation through business. Companies could no longer be seen as black boxes with no obligations outside of efficient production but instead were more clearly defined as entities designed for engaging in

multiple relationships for conducting business within society (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). The ensuing 30 years of business practice and research shows that all functions of a business, from strategic management to marketing to accounting, are affected by stakeholders' pursuit and definition of value creation (Parmar *et al.*, 2010). Stakeholder engagement is thus a complex competency to be developed by organizations and the professionals that run them. The initial insights of stakeholder theory highlight that organizations have positive and negative consequences in which many kinds of actors have a stake. The competence imperative is for management to figure out a company's obligations and what role or influence stakeholders

*Correspondence to: Mark Aakhus, School of Communication & Information, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, New Brunswick, NJ, USA.
E-mail: aakhus@rutgers.edu

might have in an organization's decision-making and value creation. Changing beliefs about the role of business in society, along with globalization and the evolving media-information environment, however, has increased the pressure on business to pursue profitability while responding to accountability demands that motivate pursuit of purposes beyond financial gain (Handy, 2003). With these changes, there is an important shift in stakeholder engagement competence that calls for attention.

What is noteworthy about the shift in expectations for engagement and value creation is that, in many cases, companies are not the central node in a value-creating stakeholder network but are instead one part of a values-creating network. The growth of collaborative efforts among all sectors of society to tackle the world's most pressing issues is an important indicator. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is one arena where considerable attention has been given to collaborative stakeholder engagement. It is probably no surprise that in the decades since Freeman's seminal publication, CSR has risen to new levels of prominence within the business sector and visibility across society. One study in 2010, for example, found that 90% of the Fortune 500 saw CSR as an essential element of the business strategy (Grayson & Nelson, 2013). The CSR arena has evolved from primarily charity driven engagement to strategic bottom line-driven engagement to approaches that embrace collaborations such as public-private partnerships and other forms of multi-stakeholder initiatives to leverage resources and talents across society to address important issues (Vogel, 2005; Zadek, 2005). The shift to values-creating networks is a subtle but profound one that ultimately places shared problems and opportunities at the center of networks of actors who each have multiple, even competing, stakes in the problem or opportunity. The direction of change toward values-creating networks points to the need for engagement competence in enabling multiple stakeholders to jointly create value by solving a jointly shared problem or opportunity.

As organizations and professionals seek to develop their engagement competence, they encounter many ideas that inform their judgment about effective stakeholder engagement practice. Much managerial advice, however, has been developed around a stakeholder perspective that presumes the company to be the central node in the value-creating network. A stakeholder perspective is a managerial strategy to broaden an organization's perspective about its environment and its capacity to identify and persuade its various key stakeholders and influencers in order to manage risks

(e.g., Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Friedman & Miles, 2002). As important as that advice is, it runs counter to the demands of building a collaborative stakeholder network focused on solving a shared problem through multi-sector, multi-expertise cooperation.

In the past, when collaborations between non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and business have failed, lack of trust and the fundamental differences between the cultures of the collaborating organizations have been cited as the reasons for failure (Huxham, 2000; Dahan, Doh, Oetzel, & Yaziji, 2010). More recently, attention has been drawn to the professional competencies required for successful partnerships. For instance, in 2012, Business for Social Responsibility commissioned a study to determine existing and emerging competencies related to sustainable business practices and found that among the new competencies required is stakeholder engagement. Similarly, Boston College's competencies for corporate citizenship leaders emphasize the ability to work collaboratively with stakeholders and call for qualities such as optimistic passion (Kinnicutt & Pinney, 2010). There are an increasing number of ideas in professional discourses about strategy for business in society and socially responsible collaborative engagement found in the popular business press, among practitioner networks, and by experts/think-tanks/consultants promulgating their services.

The new paradigm is colorfully and recently illustrated by Christine Bader in her new book chronicling her CSR work with British Petroleum (Bader, 2014). Implicit in Bader's narrative account are the new competencies required by external affairs professionals within the private sector. Critical to Bader's experience was the competency to build and activate networks as well as the ability to connect and engage with multiple stakeholders. There is a need to further articulate, understand, and assess these new approaches and the engagement competencies that are promoted for organizations and professionals, especially public affairs and communication professionals.

We argue that an underlying challenge in developing stakeholder engagement competence calls for organizations and professionals to reflectively update their premises about how communication works and how it ought to work in generating values-creating stakeholder engagement. The aim here is to introduce a new means for a deeper appreciation of stakeholder engagement competence. Toward this end, we advance the perspective that stakeholder engagement can be more usefully understood as a *communication design practice* where

competence and expertise are found in the concepts, skills, and methods for making forms of communication possible that were once difficult, impossible, or unimagined (i.e., Aakhus, 2007; Aakhus & Laureij, 2012).

We advance an original framework for articulating, comparing, and assessing stakeholder engagement competence for organizations and professionals based on the underlying ideas about communication that comprise principles for designing collaborative stakeholder engagement. We argue that external engagement is a new practice demanding a new approach. The adoption of this new approach will require a dramatic shift for companies at all levels of management. In essence, it is a new way of thinking that will not be adopted through training but rather through a complete re-thinking of all engagement processes. As Browne and Nuttal note, a change like this 'requires the same discipline that companies around the world apply to procurement, recruitment, strategy, and every other area of business' (Browne & Nuttal, 2013). Toward this end, we reconstruct rationales about communication design found in some key contemporary discourse about collaborative efforts between business and society to tackle the world's most pressing issues. Our proposed framework will help to frame emerging practices around stakeholder engagement at a time of increasing pressure for corporations to measure and report on their interactions with stakeholders as part of formal sustainability reporting.

COMMUNICATION DESIGN AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE

A new consciousness about communication competence

From stakeholder consultations to social media campaigns to CSR initiatives, there has been ongoing experimentation over how to engage stakeholders in an evolving cultural and media context. New models of stakeholder engagement are evolving in all business sectors, while the more mature efforts are typically found in the area of environmental sustainability. For example, Burchell and Cook (2006) and Hansen and Spitzack (2010) illustrate how organizations are turning to dialogue methods to respond to criticisms of their social and environmental actions. Vogel (2005) examines how CSR shifted from a more charity-driven approach to a more bottom line-driven approach and in so doing illustrates how the instruments and tools for engaging stakeholders changed. Perrini (2005, 2006)

documents how instruments and conventions for non-financial reporting are adapting to the changing stakeholder expectations and new media conditions. There is advocacy for 'design thinking' in the social sector to promote problem-solving that takes on a more humane and collaborative dimension (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). This ferment reveals that governance and transparency are at the forefront of business leaders' attention (e.g., Cummings, 2001; Ruggie, 2004; Vogel, 2005; Hunter, Le Menestrel, & de Bettignies, 2008; Bhattacharya, Sen, & Korschun, 2011), but it also reveals an emerging consciousness about the way communication shapes the grounds for how stakeholders come to understand and act upon problems and opportunities.

The experimentation with new modes of stakeholder engagement is a search for a new competence and expertise in stakeholder engagement. To understand the professional and organizational competence in stakeholder engagement requires seeing it as work undertaken to shape and discipline human interaction into particular forms and qualities of communicative activity. The work involves interventions through inventions for communication, such as roles, rules, procedures, technologies, and messaging. It is design work that involves making specifications about how communication functions and how it ought to function based on premises and ways of reasoning about communication's design (Aakhus, 2007).

The Hunter *et al.* (2008) analysis of the 2001 Danone Boycott helps illustrate the point. They show how Danone misapprehended the new media and cultural landscape by responding to a crisis through traditional media to address the general public using persuasion and control strategies rather than through stakeholder media to engage key, even adversarial stakeholder groups, using dialogue and conflict management strategies. Danone's loss of reputation and market value resulted from their persuasion and control strategy unexpectedly causing a loss of credibility with the key stakeholders (i.e., investor and advocacy communities) that Danone did not directly engage. The technological and cultural shifts highlighted by Hunter *et al.* are important, but the case actually illustrates something more profound by revealing the underlying premises and ways of reasoning about communication within Danone's organizational culture and among its professionals. The underlying logic for designing communication for stakeholder engagement (i.e., recognizing stakeholders, selecting media, and relating to stakeholders) failed, but it highlights a new consciousness about competence in designing

communication among stakeholders that requires articulation to advance the practice of stakeholder engagement.

Societal and technological shifts create an opportunity to see and question the communication values and norms for communication practices and expertise in the culture of companies and the competence of the professional class that leads the business sector (e.g., Dimitrov, 2008; Moss, McGrath, Tonge, & Harris, 2012). It is not clear, however, to what degree or in what ways professionals and organizations are reflective, or even conscious, of their work as a communication design practice. This is an important issue because the design of communication among stakeholders is a central issue for governance (Aakhus, 2011). As the instrumentations and the infrastructure for engagement change, so do the types and qualities of relationships among stakeholders and the affordances for collective action (e.g., Kuhn & Deetz, 2008; Ziek, 2012).

It is noteworthy that scholars have highlighted differing norms and values about communication for organizational and professional practice because this is an important step in realizing the competence of their communication design practice. For instance, Cummings (2001) captures the disruptive shifts in the cultural terrain for organizations and practitioners, and then succinctly characterizes the implications in terms of changes in societal expectations for organizational communication as the shift from *tell-me*, to *show-me*, to *involve-me* communication cultures. Similar to the Hunter *et al.* (2008) analysis of Danone, each change in expectations highlighted by Cummings points to alternative premises for imagining what is communicatively possible in terms of communication and the practical reasoning about how to make it happen. Notably, Cummings insights are similar to Deetz's (2007) point that choices about communication have consequences for stakeholder relations and governance—that is, leadership competence at informing and persuading emphasizes hierarchy and control among stakeholders while competence at dialogue and conversation emphasizes cooperation and mutual creativity (Deetz, 2007). While such insights are essential for recognizing communication competence, they do not go far enough in articulating communication design practice. A better understanding of governance through communication and the values and norms underpinning stakeholder engagement can be achieved through better reflection on communication design practice. This is an important perspective from which to appreciate engagement competency more fully.

Communication design practice

Communication practices in general can be reconstructed in terms of how the practice frames what counts as a communication problem, what is understood to be sound technique for addressing the problem, and what rationale justifies the solution to the problem (Craig & Tracy, 1995, 2014). Communication design highlights communication practice aimed at crafting preferred communicative activities out of a given situation and thus the manner through which people interact and reason together (Aakhus, 2007; Jacobs & Jackson, 2006; Harrison, 2014).

Communication design practice is reconstructed by attending to the practical reasoning involved in recognizing the relevant problem to be resolved by changing the features of communicative activities and thus the way people interact and reason with each other. This can be seen in micro-practices, like uses of questions, meeting agendas, or web interface features, and in macro-practices, like work flows, organizational policies, or a campaign (e.g., Aakhus & Laureij, 2012; Barbour & Gill, 2014; Sprain, Carcasson, & Merolla, 2014). Communication activities, within and among organizations and stakeholders, are typically designed—that is, roles, rules, procedures, technologies, and messaging are invented to intervene so that a given state of interaction is transformed into preferred forms of communication activity where people generate knowledge, action, and commitments that address the exigencies of their circumstances (Aakhus, 2007).

Reconstruction aims to articulate the logic of communication design practice embedded in the work of practitioners, organizational systems, and technology (e.g., Jacobs & Aakhus, 2002; Jacobs & Jackson, 2006). Drawing on insights from theories such as message design logic (O'Keefe, 1988) and dialogue theories (Walton, 1999), the reconstruction of communication design practice goes beyond message design by focusing on dialogue and context while also focusing on practice rather than advocating for particular dialogic ideals typical of dialogue theory. In this way, a design stance is complementary to dialogically inspired theories of organizing (e.g., Kuhn & Deetz, 2008) while drawing attention to the overlooked specialized practice and knowledge of constructing communication. Aakhus (2002) outlines a method for reconstructing communication design practice by attending to four key elements. First, identify the *exigency* in the circumstances to be resolved through different communication. The exigency is often communicative—that is, the way the parties are currently interacting

is contributing to or causing the exigency. Second, describe the *purpose* of the proposed type of communicative activity for resolving the exigency. Third, specify how the communicative activity is *orchestrated* through particular design features for interaction, such as rules, procedures, roles, and technologies for shaping or disciplining interactivity. Fourth, articulate the *systemic-rationality* that justifies the effectiveness and legitimacy of the communicative activity—that is, the orchestration delivers the purpose that resolves the exigency. The logic of design practice can be reconstructed and analyzed by observing practitioners doing their work, investigating the tools with which they do their work, and examining the way practitioners discuss how to do their work.

While attention can be given to communication design practice as conducted, attention can also be given to the meta-discourse about practice. Communication practices entail ideas and rationales about what constitutes good and effective communication that can be debated and cultivated. Communities of practice, such as found in organizations and among professionals, develop and cultivate frameworks and schemes for making sense of and interpreting their circumstances in terms of the appropriate communication problems to be solved and how best to solve them. Such matters are often expressed in the popular business press, among practitioner networks, and by experts/think-tanks/consultants promulgating their services. These meta-discourses about communication are an important way to understand communication in society (Craig, 1999). Thus, it is worth attending to how the emerging consciousness about communication in stakeholder engagement is expressed and what it reveals about the broader struggle over how communication should be valued in the communication competence and expertise cultivated by various professional communities concerned with stakeholder engagement.

TWO RATIONALES FOR DESIGNING COMMUNICATION FOR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Professionals and organizations alike are challenged to make sense of organizational communication relative to the demand for increased competence in stakeholder engagement and the shifting conditions of globalization and information-communication technology. New frameworks, as well as re-workings of old frameworks, have emerged to model how companies should engage in multi-

stakeholder initiatives and collaboration for solving social, environmental, and economic problems. To draw attention to the values and norms about communication that underpin the stakeholder engagement frameworks propagated to influence and advise on the formation of multi-stakeholder initiatives and collaborations, two rationales for designing stakeholder engagement were reconstructed from professional discourse on stakeholder engagement for business in society. There are likely other rationales available, but the two identified are important, contrasting perspectives on the nature and purpose of communication in devising stakeholder engagement. Articulating these rationales helps clarify at least two underlying models of governance through communication vying to occupy the minds of communication professionals.

The shared value communication design rationale

The concept of shared value has been developed by Michael Porter and Mark Kramer, of the Harvard Business School and Foundation Strategy Group, as an overarching framework for guiding organizational decision-making about the relationship between business and society in addressing social and environmental problems (Porter & Kramer, 1999, 2006, 2011). Shared value is a general, prescriptive theory and a rationale for organizational leaders to frame and invent stakeholder engagement and the implications for governance through communication.

Shared value is part of the ongoing ferment and innovation regarding the relationship between business and society. It has gone further than prior managerial movements such as management by objectives or Total Quality Management in thinking about how to engage society in the question of value creation. The fundamental exigency that companies face is finding their competitive advantage, which is confounded by CSR programs Porter and Kramer argue. Shared value seeks to dismiss traditional CSR and corporate philanthropy in a quest to reinvent capitalism. The basic principle of the shared value approach is that companies should see their responsibilities in terms of developing their competitive advantage by seeking points of profitability at the intersection of business opportunity with social values (Porter & Kramer, 2011). The purpose of engagement with stakeholders is to discover the points where business can be conducted in a profitable manner that innovates on social and environmental problems. As Aakhus and Bzdak (2012, p. 237) explain that the purpose of engaging

stakeholders from the shared value perspective is to find the sweet spot where business and social value come together.

The particulars about orchestrating engagement are not specified, but, in the numerous examples Porter and Kramer (1999, 2006, 2011) offer, the main premise for orchestrating dialogues is clear in that the company drives the dialogue among stakeholders and does not deviate from finding business value (i.e., profitability). The participation is intended to be sincere as the business participants listen to other stakeholders and influencers about their view of the environment and framing of problems. Dialogue and engagement are undertaken to reframe problems to prospect for profitable opportunities. It is a discussion geared toward solutions where stakeholders are essentially consultants or subjects to managerial driven decision-making (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2012). While there is a stakeholder network, the business remains the central node where the aim of the participating network is in helping the business achieve competitive advantage. This expands the concept of engagement between business and society but also reveals shared value model's (SVM's) particular systemic-rationality about fostering dialogue and stakeholder engagement. The design of engagement is effective when the communication among the stakeholders finds a business opportunity, and it is legitimate if social or environmental problems are addressed.

In light of the exigency, purpose, orchestration, and systemic-rationality characteristics of communication design work, we explain SVM's design logic (Table 1). SVM recognizes that any business operates within a social context and through a network of stakeholder relations. While SVM sees the changing context for business and society discussed earlier, it frames the communicative exigency of that context as the risk that business and capitalism will lose credibility, and thus business must work to reshape its context to support business. The purpose of dialogue and engagement is to generate

communication that identifies where business and social value intersect. Business should contribute to social value so long as the activity generates economic value (Porter, 2003, p. 4). The orchestration of dialogue and engagement should foster topics and contributions that generate commitments to finding the business value in social and environmental problems that enables the company to derive the greatest competitive advantage (Porter & Kramer, 2006, p. 92). The systemic-rationality of the dialogue and engagement—its underlying effectiveness and legitimacy—derives from solving social or environmental problems in a manner that defines business opportunity for the organization. The content, direction, and outcomes of dialogue and engagement are judged in these terms (Table 2).

Although SVMs popularity in the private sector is carrying over to the civil and public sectors, the shared value logic for communication design encounters voices that challenge its premises and mode of reasoning, thus drawing into further relief the overall logic of communication design for creating dialogue and engagement with stakeholders. In terms of orchestration, John Mackey (2013, p. 53), for instance, argues that 'business is part of a complex interdependent and evolving system with multiple constituencies' and that not acknowledging this interdependence can lead to financial loss and reputational damage. Similarly, McKinsey promotes the concept of 'integrated external engagement', which means that stakeholders should be incorporated at every level of the organization (Browne & Nuttall, 2013). In terms of purpose, shared value is criticized for its failure to acknowledge the inherent tension between social and economic goals (e.g., Aakhus & Bzdak, 2012; Crane, Palazzo, Spence, & Matten, 2014). Shared value 'draws its boundaries at the precise point where the business-society relationship becomes most complicated and contested' (Aakhus & Bzdak, 2012, p. 242). While Bhattacharya *et al.* (2011) emphasize the importance of consumers and employees in helping corporate responsibility

Table 1 Communication design logic underlying shared value

Exigency	Account for the social context without losing sense that the purpose of business is to return profit to shareholders.
Purpose	Identify 'sweet spots' where business and social value overlap.
Orchestration	Construct topics, turn-taking, commitments to discover 'sweet spots'.
Rationality	Dialogue is justified if it is effective in finding business opportunity and legitimate because social and/or environmental problems were addressed.
Dialogue and engagement design logic	Organized around dialogue, not persuasion and proceeds on the topic of business value. Some shared process and content control but the contributions and outcomes judged on finding the overlap of business and social value.

Table 2 *Communication design logic for collaborative governance and open innovation*

Exigency	That social–environmental–economic problems are products and by-products of current forms of social organization and institutions in which multiple actors share a stake.
Purpose	Identify opportunities for enhancing the enabling conditions for civil society.
Orchestration	Construct topics, contributions, and commitments to focus stakeholder network on the problem or opportunity for enhancing social value.
Rationality	Dialogue is justified if it is effective in enabling the stakeholder network to discover how social–environmental–economic problems are generated and legitimate when the stakeholder network engages in co-design.
Dialogue and engagement design logic	Stakeholder network shares in shaping the content and the process of their communication while sharing responsibility for the outcomes of their interaction.

initiatives return business value, the future requires attention to how corporate responsibility initiatives return social value. In terms of systemic-rationality, questions are raised about the effectiveness and legitimacy of the primacy of shareholders among all other stakeholders. Lynn Stout, and others have challenged the prevailing wisdom of shareholder primacy by offering compelling arguments about the absence of a legal basis for shareholder primacy (Stout, 2012). Moreover, Stout examines the identity and trading behavior of the typical shareholder, suggesting that shareholder primacy is based on a convenient but untrue characterization that investors lack prosocial inclinations. The consequence is that principal-agent reasoning underpinning shareholder primacy is fallacious reasoning about the business–society relationship that limits sustainable stakeholder networks.

In short, the reservations expressed about shared value's logic for communication design point out that it appears committed to orchestrating interaction as many dyadic encounters rather than an ongoing multi-actor, multi-issue discourse; purpose is about the negotiation of interests and identities more than an evidence-based conversation for co-designing; and the rationality of the dialogue legitimizes organizational management at the center because of the primacy of stockholders over other stakeholders and influencers. These reservations reveal a particular competence for communication design proffered by the SVM model, which invites a search for additional and alternative logics for communication design in stakeholder engagement.

Collaborative, open governance design rationale

Another logic for communication design can be reconstructed from examples of current practice in CSR and philanthropy. The alternative highlights a different way of conceptualizing communication's

governance role in building a stakeholder network that is more comparable with collaborative governance (Zadek, 2005) and open innovation (Chesbrough & Appleyard, 2007). The alternative view more deeply embraces the relatively new approach of 'design thinking' in the social sector where problem-solving takes on a more human-centered and collaborative dimension (Brown & Wyatt, 2010). The Rockefeller Foundation's InnoCentive initiative, for example, combines design thinking and open innovation to solve social issues.

Beginning in 1997, the senior management team at Starbucks took the unusual step of engaging with an NGO to help improve conditions for a group of their coffee growers in a developing economy (Austin & Reavis, 2010). The new partnership was based on the belief that Starbucks and Conservation International (CI) each had a 'stake' in the future of coffee growing and the well-being of the coffee farmers. In 2011, CI and Starbucks renewed their commitment to sustainable coffee production with a 3-year agreement. This new model of stakeholder engagement between CI and Starbucks reveals three important attributes for engagement: (i) their relationship was long term and focused on social and economic issues of mutual importance; (ii) the collaboration involved exposure to risk for both organizations; and (iii) the partnership engaged a third stakeholder group, the consumer.

In the same spirit of collaboration, in 2011, Dow announced an innovative partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to collaboratively explore water conservation. Dow's partnership with TNC clearly placed the 'environment' as a key stakeholder and engaged an NGO to help. The collaboration is approaching the various linkages among business operations and the environment "with the goal of making sure that Dow can value nature and its services in everything the company does" (Tercek, 2013, p.42). The collaboration

involves TNC's counsel and technical support in developing assessment models quantifying its environmental footprint to foster innovation in environmental performance. In addition, the partnership was projected to result in shared findings and publicly available research results. Important attributes for engagement from this partnership include the following: (i) partnering with a potential adversary; (ii) evidence-based practice; and (iii) putting an environmental value at the center of the network.

Starbucks, Dow, and many other companies are shifting their stakeholder engagement efforts from a vertical orientation to a more horizontal inclusiveness and from the short term to the long term. These companies have also recognized that their CSR practices and reputation allow them to create credible engagement opportunities for them and their stakeholders. Whether deliberate or not, these engagements lead to strengthening and building the social capital that can enable multiple actions in a given community. As Bhattacharya notes, 'social capital is considered to be the glue that empowers social action and helps to create a successful community of virtue' (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 2011).

Since the late 1990s, the concept of community engagement by corporate and private funders as well as academic institutions has become an increasingly common approach to solving social issues. Over the course of the last 20 years, specific principles of engagement, especially in community health, have become more or less formalized in many communities (National Institutes of Health, 2011). There are many lessons to be learned from academic-based health interventions in communities in the USA. The key element in these engagement efforts is the deliberate and deep involvement of community members. This type of engagement, especially for funders, represents a shift away from *noblesse oblige* to a more inclusive model. The new model focuses on long-term engagement and recognized the need to build relationships and trust by moving from consultation and information sharing to shared responsibility.

The literature on community empowerment strongly supports the idea that the community should define problems and potential solutions. Communities and individuals need to 'own' the issues, name the problem, identify action areas, plan and implement strategies, and evaluate outcomes (National Institutes of Health, 2011). This applies also to a recent reframing of global development efforts at the bottom of the pyramid. Calton *et al.* (2013) offer a new model of creating value *with* (not *at*) the bottom of the pyramid. The model calls for multi-stakeholder, open-system interactions

with business being recast as an equal stakeholder as opposed to being in the center of a traditional stakeholder model.

In these new models of engagement, NGOs and other civil society members are held accountable not only by the funder and/or regulator but also by those they serve. In many cases, the metrics are developed to measure the social benefits for the common good rather than a particular business benefit. In the case of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), numerous multi-sectoral partnerships, such as the MDG Health Alliance, have evolved to tackle the complexities of the problems behind the MDGs. The private sector has become part of many coalitions involving NGOs, government, and other funders to focus on making a measurable difference in solving one or more global issues. As opposed to SVM, this new paradigm of collaborations involves collaborative governance, transparency, and multi-stakeholder engagement efforts.

The new model of collaboration also involves assessing all elements of value that the company can bring to an issue rather than determining how the company can find value in participation. For instance, the Johnson & Johnson Bridge to Employment program is grounded in a partnership model among multiple stakeholders in targeted communities without expectation by the corporation that the student will become a company employee (Bzdak, 2007). When the principle of shareholder primacy is relaxed to recognize that centrality of solving social-environmental-economic problems for a stakeholder network, then the need for new, relevant measures of social value becomes apparent. In an effort to create a new set of measures for well-being that go well beyond economic indicators, a group of entrepreneurs released The Social Progress Index at the Skoll World Forum in 2013 (Humanosphere, 2013). The Index is a step forward in monitoring country progress on a variety of quality of life measures including access to higher education, personal freedom and choice, and equity and inclusion. It responds to a major report challenging gross domestic product as an adequate indicator of economic and social progress (Stiglitz, Sen, & Fitoussi, 2009).

The broad ferment and innovation relative to dialogue and engagement can be reconstructed in terms of exigency, purpose, orchestration, and systemic-rationality to articulate a logic of communication design for collaborative governance and open innovation. The communicative exigency of the changing context for business and society is framed as the risk in ignoring how social-environmental-economic problems are products, and by

products, of current forms of social organization in which multiple actors share a stake. The purpose of dialogue and engagement is to identify opportunities for enabling conditions for civil society, in particular, addressing how current forms of social organization generate social–environmental–economic problems. The orchestration of dialogue and engagement should foster topics and contributions that construct commitments among stakeholders to organize the network to create social value. This includes, in particular, the development of schemes for evidence-based co-design of solutions and for shared learning about the problem. The dialogue and engagement of a stakeholder network are justified by its effectiveness in discovering how social–environmental–economic problems are generated and legitimate when its premises are updated relative to evidence based on efforts to co-design solutions to problems. The content, direction, and outcomes of dialogue and engagement are judged in these terms.

The communication design logic for collaborative governance and open innovation differs from SVM in at least the following ways. The concept of stake shifts from the stakes of a focal company to the in an issue, problem, or opportunity in a common resource (water, air, wellness, human rights, and culture). The relationships in the stakeholder network thus shift along with updates to the conceptualization of success, progress, and how these are measured. The network may include actors who are opposed to each other in some way. Innovation is open rather than closed in that all members share in articulating and circulating knowledge about problems and solutions. The competence involved with collaborative governance and open innovation requires valuing communication in a different manner that enables professionals and organizations to see a new range of topics as relevant, new ways to take turns, new grounds for objecting, and new lines of reasoning about what works.

DISCUSSION

Where stakeholder theory opened up the black box of organizations to reveal the influence of stakeholders on companies, communication design practice opens up the black box of stakeholder engagement. A design stance provides an approach for understanding the underpinning knowledge and values about communication brought to bear in designing engagement, and thus the substantive consequences in subtle differences in communication practices by professionals and organizations.

Thus, an essential question is as follows: what knowledge and competence about communication design is being cultivated among professionals and within organizations in their effort to engage stakeholders? Here, we have illustrated two competing design logics for constructing dialogue and engagement at the intersection of business and society, evident in the professional discourse about engagement practice. The purpose was to facilitate deeper appreciation of the differing premises and reasoning about communication available for designing engagement to address the new demands and aspirations for multi-stakeholder, cross-sector collaboration in solving pressing social, environmental, and economic issues. As stakeholder engagement continues to evolve and mature, there is a need for a better appreciation about the communication choices and competence that underwrite quality of collaboration and the governance of multi-stakeholder enterprises. Some implications for practice and theory are highlighted subsequently.

Practice

Decisions about engaging stakeholders are pervasive in organizational life and central to the purpose and quality of how companies relate to society. Among those who are at the forefront of stakeholder engagement decisions are public relations, public affairs, corporate contributions, marketing, CSR, and other communication-oriented professionals. The communication design thinking introduced earlier can be used by communication professionals to lead the way in advancing stakeholder engagement competence by generating reflective awareness of how communication is valued, by inventing communicative solutions for polylogue, and by developing new models for organizing communication functions. Moreover, communication design thinking calls for reinvention and reinvestment in organizational communication resources and infrastructure for engagement (Aakhus & Laureij, 2012). As Browne and Nuttal (2013) emphasize, these changes require that the same discipline companies and agencies would apply to any other area of their operations.

First, how is communication valued? Organizations and professionals should be understood as developing knowledge, competence, and technologies in communication design. This knowledge is more than awareness of multiple stakeholder relationships. It is a consciousness of the nature of engagement and how engagement constructs relationships and values. For instance, the development

of stakeholder theory has emphasized that managerial choices about engagement depend on strategic goals and interests of an organization (e.g., Mitchell *et al.*, 1997; Friedman & Miles, 2002); this instrumental focus misses how these choices depend on what norms of communication are valued. Is communication valued as a means for selling ideas to stakeholders or negotiating agreements to meet interests or co-designing solutions to mutually framed problems (Schön & Rein, 1994)? Each way of valuing communication will make different ways of engaging stakeholders seem more or less plausible, effective, and legitimate (Jacobs & Aakhus, 2003). Each way of valuing will frame choices about investing in organizational communication resources and infrastructure for building and maintaining stakeholder relations.

Second, is the communication design logic up to the task? Engagement is more than a series of bilateral negotiations of interests and identities. The disruptive changes of the new global, mediated context, and its consequences for decision-making about stakeholder dialogue and engagement, mean that stakeholder engagement cannot be seen simply as dialogue, which implies a conversation among two parties. Instead, the new context entails polylogue, which has unique dynamics for conflict and collaboration (e.g., Lewiński & Aakhus, 2014). For instance, the many stakeholders an organization has to engage each have their own cross-cutting interests, goals, and values that do not neatly align with the organization or other stakeholders as illustrated in Hunter *et al.* (2008). This will only be exacerbated when multiple stakeholders engage to solve a joint problem or develop an opportunity for the social, environmental, or economic spheres. What seems clear is that interventions and inventions for stakeholder engagement must recognize that organizational communication involves ongoing multi-actor, multi-issue discourse that is more than a set of dyadic relations with primacy always given to stockholders. Shared value posed one logic for such design thinking, while the Collaborative Governance/Open Innovation proposed another.

Third, how is organizational communication organized? There is a conventional division of labor and knowledge in business about communication. It is evident in the various functions organizations commonly establish to carry out communication-related work such as marketing, advertising, public relations, public affairs, human resources, and investor relations. The boundaries among these functions are often fuzzy or overlapping, and exactly how these functions are labeled and configured can vary across organizations and industries. However, the

disruptive changes of the past few decades have complicated ordinary conventional communication functions and premises about communication foundational to the design of engaging stakeholders. Organizations are thus struggling to reformulate their organizational communication competence for the new global, mediated context. For instance, Moss *et al.* (2012) point to a lack of cross-functional communication knowledge, and Dimitrov (2008) points out how given competence in advocacy has not been adapted to the demand for more dialogical engagement. A design approach can build on such insights and contribute to new approaches that reinvent how organizations and professionals organize communication functions and learn how to evolve their communicative knowledge.

Theory

Each implication for practice mentioned earlier hinges on an underlying theoretical issue about designing communication for multi-stakeholder collaborations. There has been a dialogical turn in understanding the work of professionals oriented toward organizational communication. The introduction of a dialogical conceptualization of public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) represents an important transition from the strategic influence on which much advice about stakeholder engagement has been developed. However, as Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012) point out, embracing the idea of dialogue in conceptualizing public relations has fallen short of offering useful suggestions on 'how to create the conditions for dialogue to thrive' (p.6). This is due, they argue, to a very specific conceptualization of dialogue as two-way symmetrical communication that glosses over the strategic and ethical complexities of organizational communication. Moreover, the underlying systems theory actually discounts the importance of persuasion and conflict to dialogue. That is, there are naïve normative assumptions made about open communication and information transmission serving as an antidote to social ills and about politics, language, and bodies as obstacles, as has been the case in formal communication theory and everyday common sense about communication during the 20th century (cf. Peters, 1999).

The irony is that conceptualizing dialogue from the perspective of the systems approach only reinforces the idea that communication can and should be controlled by management (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). This runs counter to the idea of dialogue, even though abstract and complex refers to 'an ongoing communication process where the

content and outcome are not controlled in the strictest managerial sense' (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012, p. 11). There are alternatives, such as in the important work of Cheney and Christensen (2001) and Deetz (2007), that have gone much further in drawing deeper attention to how communication is constitutive of stakeholder relations, which they argue is an imperative for cultivating a normative stance about organizational communication within and across organizations that embraces democratic principles of governance. Deetz (2007; Kuhn & Deetz, 2008) points out that organizational communication, in particular CSR and governance communication, is traditionally about hierarchy and control and not dialogic. As Deetz notes,

'Leadership' training is still primarily conceived in the form of directing or taking charge of others Theories of control, persuasion, and motivation are treated more centrally than cooperation, facilitation, and group creativity (Deetz, 2007).

The attention to dialogue highlights deficits in conceptualizations and knowledge about organizational communication where professions have given considerably more attention to building knowledge about persuasion than dialogue. The more critical approaches serve an important role in reimagining what organizational communication should be like and thus inspires innovation in inventions for stakeholder engagement. This is an important way in which critical theory intersects with the design approach introduced here.

Communication design practice can contribute to advancing theory about engagement by providing an approach that embraces critique but ultimately seeks to develop principles for design thinking and design processes in interventions and inventions for stakeholder engagement. Much of the debate in public relations and public affairs about the need for dialogue pushes back against conventional practice by encouraging attention to the limits of two-way symmetrical, controlled communication. The challenge, however, is in developing approaches for the global, mediated context, which is one of multiparty, multi-issue, value-laden, ongoing conversations. A fundamental challenge happens when the problem or opportunity is put at the center of a values-creating network. Namely there is no one actor who is in charge of developing the engagement process, but instead, all the actors involved are given a stake in the design of engagement. This calls for much more than advocating a particular normative model or offering criticism of existing models because what is needed are principles for enabling stakeholders to design the engagement they will

use to address the problem or opportunity they see. By contrasting SVM's prescriptive model and design thinking with the communication design logic for collaborative governance and open innovation, this issue becomes clearer, as do the new competencies needed for multi-stakeholder initiatives. There is a need, then, for further developing and advancing communication design practice.

CONCLUSION

As leaders of the Collective Leadership Institute state,

...the capacity for constructive, result oriented dialogue and value-based collaboration is at the core of humankind's ability to master challenges such as climate change, poverty, economic justice, energy security, resource management, peace, and population growth, among others (Kuenkel, Gerlach & Frieg, 2011).

In the 30 years since Freeman's landmark work on stakeholders, the public sector, the private sector, and civil society have been moving toward a more interdependent existence. As Browne and Nuttal note,

the success of a business depends on its relationships with the external world—regulators, potential customers and staff, activists, and legislators. Decisions made at all levels of the business, from the boardroom to the shop floor, affect that relationship (Browne & Nuttal, 2013).

How to deal with this overarching trend is the province of stakeholder engagement competence for which communication design practice helps sharpen understanding of the role of communication in governance. Communication design practice, and logics for design, provides an original path for opening up the black box of stakeholder engagement to advance communication competence in professional practice and organizational communication.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Mark Aakhus is a Professor in the School of Communication and Information at Rutgers University. He investigates the uses of language, argumentation, and social interaction in professional practice, organizational processes, and information systems. His research articulates the competence and creativity involved in managing complex situations through communication and design. His current

projects focus on collaborative governance and open innovation in multisector, multistakeholder enterprises and methods for mapping controversy over business practice in global production networks.

Michael Bzdak, as an Executive Director of Corporate Contributions at Johnson & Johnson, Michael Bzdak manages the Corporation's strengthening the health care workforce strategy as well as leading efforts around program evaluation. He also manages a volunteer support program as well as philanthropic support of K-12 education, including a signature school-to-career program. Michael has been an employee of Johnson & Johnson since 1990. He serves on the New Jersey's Governor's Advisory Council on Volunteerism and Community Service and on the advisory board of Columbia University's The One Million Community Health Workers (1mCHW) Campaign. Additionally, he has served on the Council on Foundations Corporate Committee. He received a BFA from Virginia Commonwealth University and an MA and Ph.D. from Rutgers University. He is a visiting part-time lecturer in the in the School of Communications and Information Studies at Rutgers University and an adjunct faculty member at New York University.

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