Facilitating Synergy

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Synthesis Reflection – Insights and Actions

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The department of Strategic Communication at Ithaca College has given my peers and I an enormous amount of potential to initiate change. Being trained in a diverse set of disciplines empowers us with an enlightened view on the professional world, and society in general. The variety of skills and perspectives that we've been granted allows us to think critically about complex issues and how best to remedy them. As communicators we've been infused with the abilities to think systematically, facilitate collaboration, and design solutions. I've also learned that a robust and exuberant culture that fulfills and motivates its employees is essential for organizational success. As a strategic communicator I am charged with viewing problems through a variety of lenses, and utilizing my creativity and my logic to analyze, design, and implement improvements to my organizations and my society.

I believe the most imminent and critical issue that we as professionals must face is to live and work more sustainably. Sustainability encapsulates a range of areas that need to be improved through innovation, critical thinking, and leadership in the public and private sectors. Advancements in renewable energies, performance buildings, sustainable urbanism and infrastructure, and community-based economies are just some areas in the greatest need of leadership, collaboration, and ingenuity. Recent trends in capitalism have possessed some institutions with a robber baron mentality that has dominated industry and dictated economic direction. As stated in *Ethics in Business: Is the balance of Personal Values with Capitalistic Business Principals Possible?*, corporations are not socially conscious and have "minimalist interpretations of corporate responsibility" externalizing damages to people and planet (Ethics in Business, 2013, p.4). Disregard for external consequences has resulted in alterations to the Earths climate that will likely

have detrimental effects on the world population. In addition to the enormity of the

environmental concerns that must be addressed, social issues are equally as dire.

Exploitation and a shrinking middle class can be attributed to economic dominance by a

few elite commercial and political forces. A dedicated, versatile, and interdisciplinary

force is required to combat these critical and impending issues. As world citizens and

strategic communicators we are obligated to reform these systems and values to enhance

our quality of life and avoid disaster.

The abundance of economic, social, and environmental problems will necessitate

actions of varying scale. As communicators we must conduct a cycle of comprehensive

analysis, planning, and implementation to find the most effective resolutions. In the

pursuit of solutions to these complex problems professionals must first fully comprehend

the problem by investigating all data and perspectives. A communication professionals

role is to reach out for expert knowledge, and facilitate the collaboration of diverse expert

perspectives in a to crusade to find solutions. Dr. Harold Nelson expressed that through

systems thinking professionals can navigate the complexity of a problem to discover

insights (H. Nelson interview, 11/10). Applying new insights to the expertise of the

collaborating professionals can result in innovative new ways of thinking.

Communicators must facilitate these diverse professional networks to foster and initiate

designed action.

As communicators, designers, and strategic thinkers it is our responsibility to

participate and coordinate these collaborative teams who can design action.

Incorporating multiple disciplines to address a problem, communication professionals

must serve as the catalyst for synergy. These collaborative teams often lead to experts

synthesizing their knowledge, enabling them to further share their enlightened perspective. According to the report, *Collaboration and Generations within Organizations*, "Some, who hold collaboration as a top priority define it as "harnessing human skill, ingenuity, and intelligence more efficiently and effectively"(Collaboration, 2013, p.7). It is imperative to acknowledge how collaboration fosters organizational development and ingenuity. Acting as the action catalyst, strategic communicators must coordinate these mission-based teams to proactively generate solutions. The multitude of current issues requires a variety of individuals to take action, as strategic communicators we are uniquely positioned to design and coordinate these necessary initiatives. As stated by Meg Wheatley, "Change must start with the individual, not society" (M. Wheatly, 12/4). Her statement verifies that as strategic thinkers we have the potential to ignite change through our actions, and the organized actions of others.

Virtual work interfaces have made collaboration extraordinarily easier for professionals. Gathering diverse perspectives on a complex problem requires the convenience and commitment of the targeted experts. Collecting these expert insights is easier now than ever through electronic communication, shared documents, calendars, and agendas. Collaborative work interfaces make experts and their useful input more accessible and utilizable to their virtual teams. Communication professionals should take initiative to establish these virtual groups articulating a well-defined shared purpose, group objectives, and assignments. As stated in *Improving Virtual Work Team Relationships Through Socially Interactive Design,* "Collective identity among members can be fostered by a purposeful aligning of goals, and incentives"*(Virtual Work Team Relationships, 2013, p.12).* These communications technologies enable willing

professionals to lend their expertise to a span of projects. Strategic communicators should recognize these valuable tools and leverage them to their fullest extent to gain the greatest insight. This convenient shared media should motivate professionals to pursue even more cross-collaboration and intentional vagrancy.

To address the economic, environmental, and social issues of our generation, we as strategic communicators must stimulate collaboration and bring designs to fruition. Corporations have a keen ability to swiftly implement reforms faster than policy makers (Eccles, 2013). This unique ability to modify corporate behavior gives communicators the power to influence their organizations direction. Communication professionals can contribute to these reforms by assembling the proper networks and establishing a progressive vision for their organization and their interdisciplinary working groups. Fostering these developments and innovations can lead to a change in organizational values and hopefully resurgence in economic and social vitality. Sustainability champion Gifford Pinchot III stated that intrapreneurial warriors, individuals that can initiate and coordinate changes within their organization, are needed more than ever to be innovative and influential within their corporation, motioning to mold their company culture to be socially conscious (G. Pinchot III interview 10/30).

Another concept that has stood out throughout my classmate's final reports for Critical Issues in Organizations is the importance of company culture and employee satisfaction. This theme has emerged in every communications course I've taken, and I've come to the conclusion that organizations that are dedicated to employee satisfaction are often the most innovative and most successful. Furthermore,

organizations that are committed to recognizing their workers value, building employee

relationships, and granting autonomy often have the most productive workforce. A

culture that gives employees the option to provide input to upper-management, and

feedback to their colleagues empowers each employee with a voice. Stewart Clegg spoke

of this principal during our in-class interview saying that organizations should be

"polyphonic" allowing for multiple voices and perspectives (S. Clegg interview, 10/9).

By listening to employee opinions the organization can proactively seek to solve

problems, maximize productivity, and increase stakeholder satisfaction.

       Another guest expert that expressed the same ideals was Sue DeWine who said

that organizations that listen to employees and possesses empathy find the practice is

mutually beneficial (S. DeWine, 9/25). Informing upper-management about concerns,

suggestions, and insights otherwise unseen supplies them with valuable feedback.

Employees who feel they have true impact are usually more self-motivated and further

inclined to pursue innovations. According to the report, *Psychological Fears in the 21st*

*Century Workplace, "*If employees have the opportunity to try and fail, it gives them

room to exercise their creativity" (Psychological Fears in the Workplace, 2013, p.17).

Affording employees the liberty to try out new ideas allows them to use their imagination

to solve workplace problems. This causality was proven when consumer product

manufacturer 3M instilled a policy to give all employees 15% flex-time. This initiative

was intended to stimulate innovation, and it worked, as they attribute many new designs

to creative employees utilizing their flextime (*3M Gave Everyone Days Off,* 2011).

       Principals that now frame my professional outlook include systems thinking,

strategic communication, and design management. Critical Issues in Organizations and

the CMD program has trained me to design strategies, facilitate innovative problem

solving, and be the catalyst for action. The concepts and perspectives I've been exposed

to prepare me to address complex organizational and societal problems through deep

critical analysis, a systems thinking approach, and strategic execution. My analytical,

design, and coordinating capabilities combined with my widened perspective has given

me a foundation to succeed by finding valuable opportunities and where action could and

should be taken. I can now go fourth with my professional abilities and an eye for design,

facilitating synergy and strategic action in the pursuit to better my world.

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