Public Lecture

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The Lost Art of Listening –

The Missing Key to Democratic and Civil Society Participation

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Organised society

Communication – the theoretical framework

- "Society exists … in communication" … **conversation** (Dewey, 1916; Carey, 1989/2009)

- Communication is **two-way** interaction (Griffin, 2009; Littlejohn & Foss, 2008)

- **Dialogue** (Bakhtin, 1981, 1963/1984; Buber, 1923/1958, 1947/2002)
  - Not monologue and "monologue disguised as dialogue" (Buber, 1923/1958, 1947/2002)

- **Openness** to the 'other' (Gadamer, 1989)

- Dialogue is **not turn-taking at speaking** (Baxter, 2011)

- **Transactional**, not *transmission* of information (a la Shannon & Weaver, 1949)

- "Communication is **talking and listening**" (Craig, 2006, p. 39)

- Voice is "the implicitly linked practices of **speaking and listening**" (Couldry, 2009, p. 580)

Theoretical framework – what we say we do!

- *Vox populi* – **voice of the people** – central to political and government communication
- '**Open Government**', **open policy**, *'Gov 2.0'*
- **Engagement** a buzzword in politics, government, marketing and PR
  - A "new paradigm of PR" (Johnston, 2014)

Communication

Writing

Art

Listening

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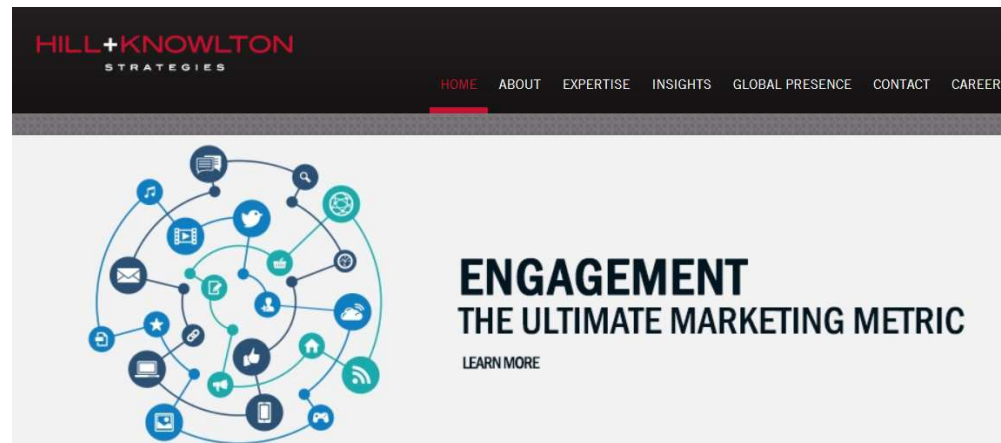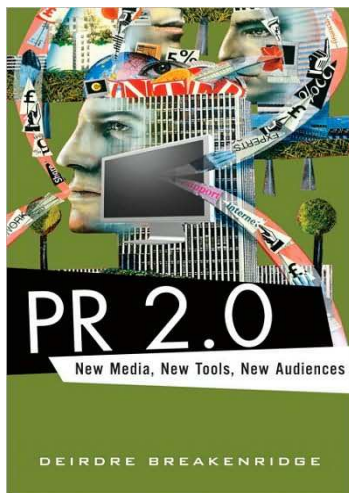
Talking

ation

Advic

Defining listening – the 'Seven Canons of Listening'

- **Recognition** of others – that they have a right to speak and something to say (Bickford, 1996; Husband, 2009; Honneth, 2007; Young, 2000)

- **Acknowledgement** (Obama campaigns, 2008, 2012)

- **Attention** (Bickford, 1996; Honneth, 2007; Husband, 2009)

- **Interpretating** what others say as fairly and receptively as possible (Husband, 1996, 2000)

- **Understanding** others' views and perspectives (Bodie & Crick, 2014; Habermas, 1984, 1987; Husband, 1996, 2000; Lundsteen, 1979; Silverstone, 2007)

- **Consideration** of what others say (Honneth, 2007; Husband, 2009)

- **Response** of some appropriate type (Lundsteen, 1979; Purdy & Borisoff, 1997)

The Organisational Listening Project

- Two-year, three country study (UK, US, Australia)
- **36 case studies** of medium to large organisations
  - 18 government; 14 corporate; 4 NGO

Sites of potential organizational listening examined

- **Research** – often referred to as *insights*
- **Corporate communication / public relations**
- **Government communication**
- **Organizational internal communication**
- **Customer relations**
- **Public consultation**
- **Social media**
- **Correspondence** units in government (inquiries, letters, e-mail, complaints)

Methodology – triangulation

1. **In-depth interviews** with senior communication-related managers
    - Up to seven interviews in some organizations
    - 1,000 pages of transcripts
    - Analysed in NVivo

2. **Content analysis** of communication, engagement and consultation plans, reports, evaluation dashboards, even job descriptions

3. **Field experiments** to test organisational listening
    - Inquiries, questions and comments on organisations' Web and social media sites

Key findings – the crisis of listening

- **20% of organizations contacted did not respond**
- **On average, 80% of organizations' communication resources and effort are devoted to speaking**
  - Advertising, media releases, speeches, Web sites, tweeting, posting, etc.
- **Up to 95%** of so-called 'communication' in organizations is speaking

Key findings – the crisis of listening

- When organisations do listen, it is mostly **instrumental** and **organisation-centric**
    - Research to and public consultations to answer questions organisations want to ask
    - Research to gain insights and 'intelligence' for '**targeting**'
    - Customer relations either pacification or *CRM* focussed on **upselling**
    - Social media mostly used for distributing **organisations' messages**

- "**Listening gives foundation for knowing what to say and thinking strategically of the best ways to frame and present appealing messages.**" (Heath & Coombs, 2006, p. 346)

Key findings – the crisis of listening

- The terms that most frequently occurred in communicators' descriptions, written reports, and evaluations of their activities were "**informing**", "**disseminating**", "**educating**", "**showing**", "**telling**", and "**distributing**"

- The study concluded that "**most organisations listen sporadically at best, often poorly, and sometimes not at all**"

An 'architecture of listening'

- Technologies alone cannot provide a solution
- Effective organisational listening requires an 'architecture of listening' informing organisation design comprised of:
  - **Culture** for listening
  - **Politics** of listening to be addressed
  - **Policies** for listening
  - **Structures and processes** for listening
  - **Technologies** for listening
  - **Resources** for listening
  - **Skills** for listening
  - **Articulation** of listening to decision-making and policy making

The Listening Organization

Organisations can listen through:

- **Social and market research**
  - *Qualitative* as well as *quantitative*
- **Public consultation**
  - Office and online (e.g., Citizen Space)
- **Stakeholder relations / engagement**
  - E.g., Meetings; forums
- **Customer relations**
- **Correspondence, inquiries and complaints**
- **Social media listening**

Organisational listening best practice

- **The MasterCard Conversation Suite**
- **Behavioural insights**
- **Listening posts**
- **Citizen juries**
- **Trust networks**
- **Study circles**
- **Customer engagement summits**
- **Reconciliation committees**
- **Ombuds**
- **Community liaison officer** appointments
- **Advisory boards and committees**
- **Turn taking** at presenting with reciprocal listening

Other advanced methods of organisational listening

- **National Commission for Public Debate (NCPD)** [*Commision Nationale du Débat Public*]
- *Argumentation* **tools and** *argument mapping* **– e.g., MIT Deliberatorium** (Klein, 2007, 2015)
- **Deliberative polls** (Fishkin, 1995)
- **Sense making methodology** (Dervin & Foreman-Wernet, 2013)

Organisational Listening Project Stage II

- **Participatory action research** to implement and test methods for increased insights and better engagement

Latest findings

- **Public consultation** ☒
  - Listens to the '**usual suspects**'
  - Submissions **not acknowledged**
  - Submissions **not analysed** in detail
- **Correspondence** – replies, but no overall analysis ☒
- **Complaints** – processed, but no overall analysis ☒
- **Lack of data sharing and data management** ☒
  - '**Data siloes**'
  - No data centre of knowledge management system
- **Social media listening** ☒ ☑

Other causes of organisational deafness

- **Polling**
- **Campaigns**
- **Mediatization**

Why is this significant?

- **Declining trust in government**
- **Declining participation and disengagement** in democracy
- **Declining trust in business**
- **Declining employee loyalty and retention**
- **Declining customer loyalty and retention**
- **Increasing radicalization**

Source	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
The President	44%	41%	41%	39%	**32%**
Congress	25%	23%	23%	18%	**14%**
The Supreme Court	45%	44%	45%	40%	**36%**
The Federal Government	29%	27%	27%	22%	**20%**
United Nations	40%	38%	38%	34%	**34%**
Your state government	_	28%	32%	30%	**28%**
Your local government	_	33%	37%	34%	**33%**
Wall Street	11%	_	13%	12%	**12%**
Mass media	17%	_	_	11%	**11%**

Harvard University (2015)

Potential benefits

- **Increased trust in government**
- **Increased participation** in democratic politics and civil society
- **Increased trust in business** and improved reputation
- **Increased employee loyalty, retention, and productivity**
- **Customer retention**
- **Reduced issues and crises**
- A **more equitable society**

Conclusion

- "We build too many walls, and not enough **bridges**"
- "We need to talk" … no 'we need to **listen**'

Free downloadable research report:
http://www.uts.edu.au/node/134066
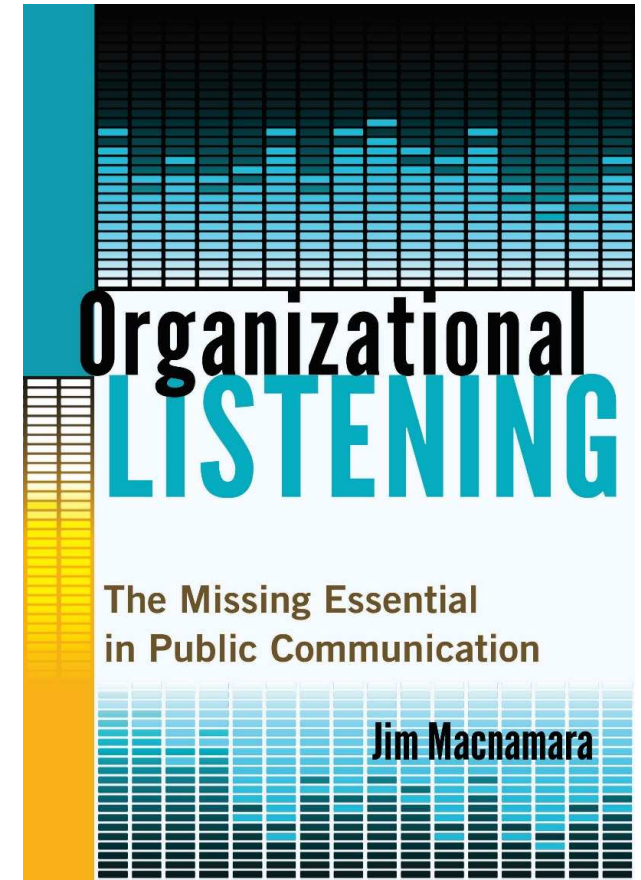
Report and full findings

- Macnamara, J. (2016). *Organizational Listening: The Missing Essential in Public Communication*. New York, NY: Peter Lang
  - http://bit.ly/OrganizationalListening

Thank You

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The Lost Art of Listening: the missing key to democratic and civil society participation

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