

PRECONFERENCE ICA 2019

Title:

Are We Moving Towards Convergence? Revisiting communication disciplines, theories, models and concepts.

Organizers:

- Helle K. Aggerholm, Birte Asmuß, Finn Frandsen, Winni Johansen, Anne E. Nielsen & Christa Thomsen, Aarhus University, Denmark (contact: wj@mgmt.au.dk; aen@mgmt.au.dk)
- Cynthia Stohl, University of California Santa Barbara, USA
- Maureen Taylor, University of Tennessee Knoxville, USA

Description

Within the past two decades, communication scholars have been preoccupied with debating the intellectual boundaries between disciplines, theories, models and concepts, as well as the institutional legitimacy of the field as such. Some researchers have talked about 'convergence' (Zorn, 2002). Other researchers have talked about 'bridging' (Cornelissen & Christensen, 2011). Others again take an alternative approach promoting a new 'interdisciplinary paradigm'; see (Nothaft, Werder, Vercic, & Zerfass, 2018). The new thing about this debate is that it seems to take place both inside each discipline and across disciplines.

The purpose of this pre-conference is not only to study this debate, but also to contribute to it. We therefore invite junior and senior scholars representing one or more of the following disciplines - organizational communication, public relations, business communication, corporate communication, and strategic communication – to submit an abstract.

By convergence and bridging, we understand the process whereby we consciously or unconsciously move disciplines, theories, models and concepts towards each other. In his article "Converging within divergence: Overcoming the disciplinary fragmentation in business communication, organizational communication, and public relations" (2002), Ted Zorn warned us against the fragmentation of disciplines. It will turn us into *ignorants* when it comes to the world outside our own specialties. In their article "Bridging corporate and organizational communication: Review, development, and a look to the future" (2011), Lars T. Christensen and Joep Cornelissen suggest in detail how bridging can take place between two disciplines. It is important to understand that the criteria of success for convergence and bridging is not necessarily integration. It is more the academic quality of the process: the debate as such.

Questions addressed are among others:

- What boundaries do we see in communication disciplines today?
- Would it be fruitful to overcome the disciplinary fragmentation?
- Is it true that "communication research has sacrificed intellectual vitality on the altar of institutional autonomy" (Durham Peters, 1986/2008).
- How do we understand 'communication' within the various perspectives and traditions?
- Do we overstate the differences between disciplines, theories, models and concepts in our research?
- Which boundaries or cross-overs do we see in communication disciplines today?
- What are the advantages or disadvantages of 'bridging' for example corporate and organizational communication, or public relations and corporate communication?
- What can more 'local' debates, such as the debate about communication vs action, reputation vs relationship, and publics vs stakeholders, tell us about the development of our field?
- How does convergence in communication disciplines contribute to shape how contemporary organizations come to see, manage, and evaluate their communication activities?

- Can convergence help to solve one of the major concerns of modern organizations, i.e. that “without coherence, integration, and consistency, messages can be misunderstood, and their audiences get conflicting or inconsistent meanings which, in the end, may cause confusion and distrust in what the organization offers or stands for” (Christensen & Cornelissen, 2011)?

Topics can be but are not restricted to:

- Processes and practices of the convergence of communication disciplines
- Practice approaches across communication disciplines
- The risk of black-boxing
- Constitutive approaches across and within communication disciplines
- Methodological convergence or divergence across and between communication disciplines
- The impact of social media on the boundaries and cross-overs between communication disciplines
- The convergence of disciplines and stakeholder relationship management
- Organizing communication activities in contemporary organizations
- Convergence of communication disciplines in different contextual settings: cultural, organizational, global
- Limits and future perspectives of convergence on communication research

Conceptual, empirical and theoretical papers are welcome.

Submission guidelines

Abstract submissions to the pre-conference (500-1000 words, not including tables and references) are invited from across divisions of the communication field, and will be evaluated competitively by anonymous referees. All submissions must be completed online no later than **16:00 UTC, 1 February 2019**

References

- Zorn, Ted (2002). Converging within divergence: overcoming disciplinary fragmentation in business communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 65(2), 44-53
- Christensen, L.T. & Cornelissen, J. (2011). Bridging corporate and organizational communication: Review, development and a look to the future. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 25(3), 383-414.
- Nothaft, H., Werder, K., Vercic, D. & Zerfass, A. (Eds.) (2018). Future Directions of Strategic Communication. Special Issue, *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 12(4).