

# Society for Conceptual Logistics in Communication Research

## Welcome to SCLCR

*The Society for Conceptual Logistics in Communication Research (SCLCR) provides its members and audience with a forum for innovation.*

### **What Communication Studies Does Now**

Communication studies increasingly concerns itself with plugging in and swapping out concepts from theoretical models designed for past projects. Graduate students are encouraged to fit their ideas into the templates and theoretical structures laid before them as authoritative. It is often the case that a graduate student is perceived as a conduit for prolonging and promoting research styles rather than as a thinker who constructs new theories and methods. Rather than asking graduate students to repeat their mentors' research methods or pressuring younger faculty to publish only in "important" journals, what if they were encouraged to identify new problems and to invent new concepts (models & methods) to solve them?

Despite its emphasis on new media, Communication Studies relies heavily on print culture resources—textbooks, reference works, journals, and books. The concepts used in the field are formatted as definitions. There are benefits to definitions of concepts published by well-know scholars and authorized by "leading" journals or "established" presses. However, definitions, by definition, set boundaries on the use of terms. Thus, by their very nature, they constrict exploration and creativity. Given the rapid advances in communication technologies, researchers—whether professors or students—need to be given the opportunity to conceptualize their research in less restrictive environments in order to respond to technological innovations with conceptual innovations.

In a field increasingly entrenched in publish or perish cycles, professional success is usually based on publication records. To establish a publication record, scholars must generate research that is, to some extent, unique (mostly in the sense of adding to what is already known), but that, to a greater extent, complies with the conventional wisdom in a field ("received opinion") as adjudicated by established reviewers. Another metric of success is grant work. If scholars can bring in research dollars by responding to a funding agency's research agenda, they are rewarded. In short, in order to succeed, research must be acceptable to the "establishment," that is to say, what is acceptable is what is already accepted. This environment does not promote innovation or creativity.

## **Why the Society for Conceptual Logistics in Communication Research is Needed**

SCLCR exists to provide an environment for innovation and creativity. Because we believe that communication research is a fundamentally trans-disciplinary endeavor, we do not limit ourselves to self-identifying "communication researchers." We welcome work from students, faculty, researchers, and practitioners in any number of fields whose research is related to human communication.

### **The Problem with Institutions**

We understand that existing national institutions for communication studies— namely the national communication association and the international communication association — serve a function and have a role to play in shaping the field. SCLCR was not founded to replace those organizations or similar ones. However, as social structures, these institutions tend to reproduce themselves; they pay little attention to ideas that do not conform to traditional methods and structures. SCLCR is designed as an online forum where untraditional concepts are constructed, explored, debated, used, and published.

### **Why “Conceptual Logistics”?**

Part of the problem of institutional reproduction has to do with the limitations of print culture. Print is a “fixed” medium. It crystalizes the cognitive activity of conceptualization into concepts. Once set by definition, terms resist change. The glossaries in Communication textbooks, for instance, have a tendency to remain fixed through revision after revision. Definitions not only fix conceptions but they also de-contextualize them. Our corrective for this type of conceptual reproduction is to provide new venues for communication researchers by enabling them to more easily analyze "logistical" issues in the uses of research concepts—how they are planned, implemented, and adjusted. Hence, we describe our work as "conceptual logistics."

The SCLCR Toolkit is a dynamic database that enables collaboration and discussion related to conceptual logistics. It is designed to make available innovative conceptual tools—visualizations, collaborative work spaces (known on server provider sites as sandboxes), and interactive pedagogical tools. With these tools in hand, a researcher is equipped to innovate.

Our mantra is "if you do not know history you are doomed to repeat it." Not knowing how terms have been used in the past tends to make those terms seem appropriate in the present. The history of the use of research conceptions is rarely studied despite the circumstance that research terms refer to conceptions of research problems. When the problems change, the conceptions need to change. Providing definitions that are not contextualized, that are taken out of the context of the problems they describe, only encourages the imposition of existing concepts onto data they were not intended to describe.

One reason why past uses of research concepts are not studied is because the "information overload" would be impossible to handle. To record all of the different uses of the same term for all of the terms used in the study of communication in a print publication is impossible. This does not alter the fact that the match between a problem and a conception of it is not adequately described by a de-contextualized definition of a term even when given by an authority.

The SCLCR toolkit is designed to address this problem so that current researchers can have access to a database that relates conceptions to their contexts of use. The problem of information overload mentioned above is addressed by techniques of visualization. In the light of the axiom that "one picture is worth a thousand words," concept maps are a tool for addressing the problem of information overload. Ultimately, the Toolkit is a way of managing the enormous task of conceptual logistics, a task that cannot be accomplished by an individual or even groups of individuals. In today's wikipedic culture, it is possible to make this information available to researchers if they are willing to contribute to an accessible online data base such as the SCLCR Toolkit.

SCLCR also sponsors virtual conferences and a multi-modal electronic journal. The conference is a virtual video conference where people are invited to upload and share their work through video presentations. These might take the form of conference style presentations, recorded classroom lectures/discussions, animations or visualizations, and any number of yet-to-be-thought-of ways of sharing and collaborating on conceptual logistics. The journal is designed to provide a forum for extended work. As an electronic journal, it includes several formats for submission including traditional full length articles, short concept or experience papers, and "working notes" which are first forays into conceptual logistics and are no longer than 1000 words.

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*SCLCR provides tools for conceptual innovation.*