

Targeting Shared Ownership: A Framework for Leader Communications Executive/Managerial Communication

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Abstract

This article provides a theoretical framework and practical approaches toward assisting leaders in building a robust or richer relationship with an audience such that they own the message. The framework is based on constructs from the domains of social identity, leadership, and business strategy. Practical approaches are drawn from social context and social linguistic reinforcement theories. A framework is presented that targets performance of leader communication and a set of techniques are proposed that can enable leaders to more readily engage their audience. A real-time application is used to capture when leaders miss specific opportunities to advance an audience relationship based on the social architecture of their presentation.

Proposal

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise -- with the occasion. As our cause is new, so we must think anew, and act anew.

– Abraham Lincoln, 1862

Evidence suggests that most business leaders are still using last century communication techniques of telling and selling; thus missing opportunities to gain greater social success from their communications. Just as business structures and strategies have clearly broken with past traditions, the structures and strategies for leader communications must also seek a new order. Progressing from basic communications to a higher order is a requisite action by business leaders. This new order is founded on a strategy with theoretical grounding from social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Postmes & Branscombe, 2010), social intelligence (Goleman, 2006), situational leadership (Hersey, 1985), open leadership (Li, 2010), transformational leadership (Tichy & Devanna, 1986), stakeholder theory (Freeman and others, 2010), and creating shared value (Porter and Kramer, 2011).

2.1 Today's Approach

Today, leaders and business communicators typically approach their audiences with a goal of transferring information and believe they have done a good job when that is accomplished. This goal is grounded in what we call 1st Order where the objective is to focus on content. More skillful leaders go beyond a focus on content and engage or persuade their audience to complete a transaction. We refer to this strategy as 2nd Order where the objective is to complete a transaction: to sell it.

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2.2 A Novel Approach

Although these two Orders are achievable with proper communication performance, neither is socially sustainable. Neither 1st nor 2nd Order takes advantage of the opportunity to build a robust, rich relationship with an audience where the audience not only understands and believes in the communicator's message but also willingly advocate for the communicator's goals. This creation of shared ownership, where the audience members become stakeholders, is achieved via a 3rd Order communication strategy. Under this approach, sustainable and meaningful relationships are enabled.

Gaining shared ownership is not a trivial matter. Nor should 3rd Order be seen as an "add-on" to your communications strategy via achievement of one or both of the first two Orders. During a recent interview Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg suggested, "My advice is fight for the things that you care about. But do it in a way that will lead others to join you" (*New York Times*, October 24, 2015). We believe that the default strategy for leader communication should be 3rd Order.

2.3 The Current State

Although there are times when telling and/or selling are appropriate strategies for a business leader, executives should be prepared to deliver a 3rd Order presentation at all times. And yet, our preliminary research suggests that most leader communication includes less than 10% in targeting a 3rd Order strategy. Part of the reason may be that many business leaders spend much more time involved with the content of the message than with the process or strategy for the communication event. This article investigates the key questions surrounding business leader communications:

- How do we define a successful executive's communication event?
- What are the leader's unique social levers to gain trust and ownership?
- Is the leader aligned with the organization practice to achieve authenticity?
- What sustained outcomes were achieved by the communication event?

Our investigation begins with two key assumptions about leader communications: 1) every communication event is managing a relationship, and 2) how leaders develop a relationship is impacted by their practiced leadership style in their communications. These two assumptions are included in consideration of developing a communications social architecture.

3. Building the Communications Social Architecture Model

Leaders communicate for different purposes with different audiences. Sometimes they just want to transfer information and inform, which is called content focus, telling, or cognitive objectives. Sometimes leaders want to inform and get agreement or close a deal, which is called persuasion, selling, engagement, emotional experiences, or feature benefits. Sometimes leaders escalate to an even higher communication purpose with a goal for the audience to willingly share the ownership of the leader's purpose and advocate their cause. Each communication purpose requires different social roles and levels of trust in working with an audience.

3.1 Our Observations

Since 2006, we have observed each of these communication efforts with a variety of audiences by a variety of presenters and have considered both success and failure outcomes. The classic Communication and Public Relations models work with great skill targeting words, emotional, nonverbal, presentation, persuasion and decision-making elements with audiences based on communication theories, message testing, big data, and agile adaptation as noted by Daniel Goleman (2006) in Chapter 6 of his book on social intelligence. Beyond these elements, we wanted to understand communication success in a more social context or social framing contexts, especially since the world is trending toward democratizing and going more social.

One key issue to be considered: Is there a social architecture to our communications that we can model that is complementary to the classical communication theories and techniques?

3.2 Defining Social Architecture

Defining the social architecture in a leader's communication goes beyond the content, persuasion, and purpose of the message. The social architecture profiles the social framing in three dimensions: 1) the audience perception of the leader's social identity, 2) the social linguistic character of the leader's words, and 3) the resulting ownership and advocacy outcome with the audience. To exercise this definition, the authors bring together elements of social identity, self-categorization theory, neural coupling, brain-to-brain coupling, social linguistics taxonomy, and ownership advocacy theory.

3.3 Social Identity/Role

Social identity is a person's sense of who they are based on their social group membership(s). Tajfel & Turner (1979) proposed that the social groups which people belonged to were an important source of pride and self-esteem. We also use social groups to interpret and assign meaning to communications when we are the receiver. Most people have experienced the sales person who has just asked for an order even when we have no faith in the company's product., or the financial advisor who assumes we will now turn over a \$100,000 401K because the advisor just finished talking for one hour about how great s/he is. And then there is the teacher in everyone's life who went beyond the school classroom, past the normal hours of teaching, and personally helped us learn that subject. Why does this matter? The social role assigned to a presenter by an audience member during the presentation varies with our individual social biases. When a leader speaks the words "I want to talk to you not as a CEO, but as another caring American citizen," the leader is attempting a social reframing with the goal of positioning for a more desirable interpretation - that is, if members of the audience decide to use the CEO's suggested social framing.

3.4 Why has this never been much of a communications factor before?

The authors propose this is possibly due to three reasons. First, the vast majority of communication has been with people familiar with our institutions, our professions, or us as individuals. In the past, audiences tended to stay in a credible world and leader social roles had a favorable audience default. Audiences today are a much more global society and communicate more frequently with others who are not as familiar with today's leaders and as a result are more tentative and default to guarded social roles. Second, our society has grown to be much more advocacy centric and sophisticated in techniques to persuade. Automatic trust of a doctor, a CEO, or a religious leader is no longer to be assumed. Advocacy relationships have increased the need to not trust, but to question. Third, the internet is democratizing communications and bringing many more interpretations of a message to the attention of all audiences. Communications are no longer controlled by a corporate communications channel with selective interpretations to reinforce the leader's message. Critics of any leader's message are everywhere today and will have a voice, an audience, and an agenda (remember advocacy) within minutes on the internet.

When leaders communicate representing their organization, they are also speaking for their profession and for themselves as individuals. The audience decides the social role to interpret the leader's message no matter how much the leader tries to frame a preferred social role. Recognizing that an audience will assign social roles by default will greatly limit a traditional leader's communication effectiveness. Planning specific leader communications to position a leader's preferred social role can become a critical factor affecting communication success.

4. 3rd Order Model

The 3rd Order Communications model tracks the social role of the executive or leader from the observer's biased perceptions. The percentage of presentation time in various social roles is currently the measurement criterion. Our preliminary data suggests a relationship between the social roles and audience willingness to advocate.

For example, a typical CEO will spend 90% of the time in the CEO organizational role which could be a perfect fit for a group of technical investors but not a general audience. Warren Buffett, on the other hand, spends about 15-20% of the time in his CEO role and the remainder of the time in the role of a fellow investor or professional. There is not one right role, but there is a proper role to leverage for the right audience at the right time.

4.1 Role Identity

The shorthand for role identity check comes down to these observations by an audience member:

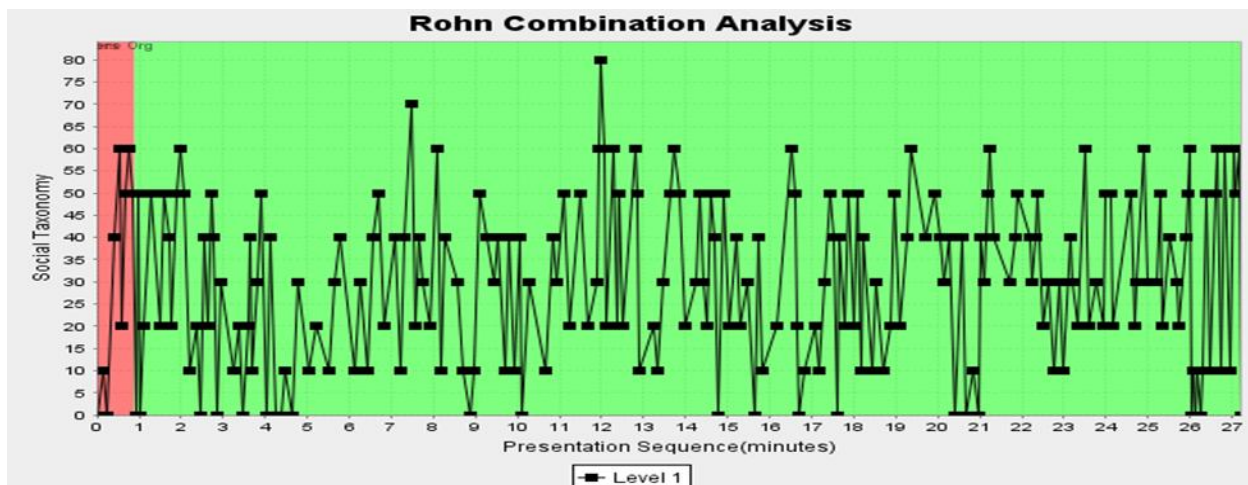
Institutional/Organizational - The leader is dependent on the organizational identity for "communication credibility" or "positional power" such as speaking only as the CEO, the College Dean, the Public Relation person, or the owner of the company. The audiences have a sense that the leadership expect the audience to comply, agree, and dutifully perform just because of the leader role. Would you listen or comply with this person if they did not dress in the institutional/organizational leadership position? Institutional social roles include official social groups from nations to companies to a boss.

Professional/Expert - "OK, forget the company the leader represents. The leader is here to talk as an experienced executive. "As your doctor I want to give you my medical advice!" "As a PhD scientist I just want to help you understand climate change and I am not representing the company." "Can we talk professional to professional?" "I need financial advice - do you know a professional that is not just pushing their company?" And it goes on ...

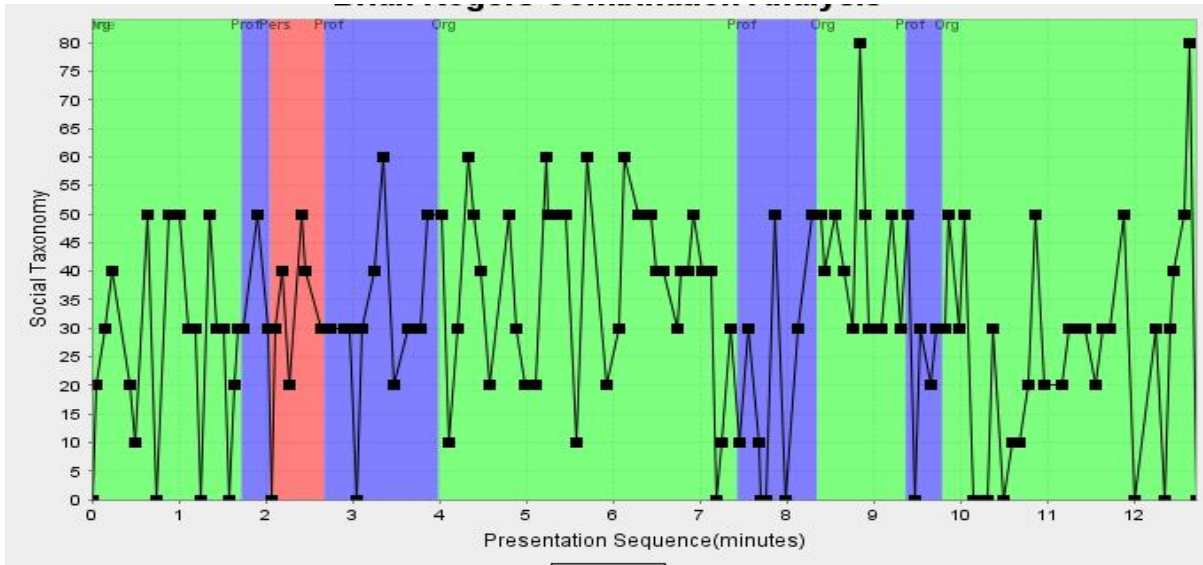
Personal - "Ok, forget the company the leader represents and their professional training and experience. The leader is here to talk as just another American citizen. "I want to share my personal values, and how they relate to my work. Let me talk to you as a friend." There is no dependency on the leader's company role or the earned professional credentials, degrees, certifications etc. The leader is presenting as a fellow human being, a parent, or a citizen.

4.2 Traditional Messaging

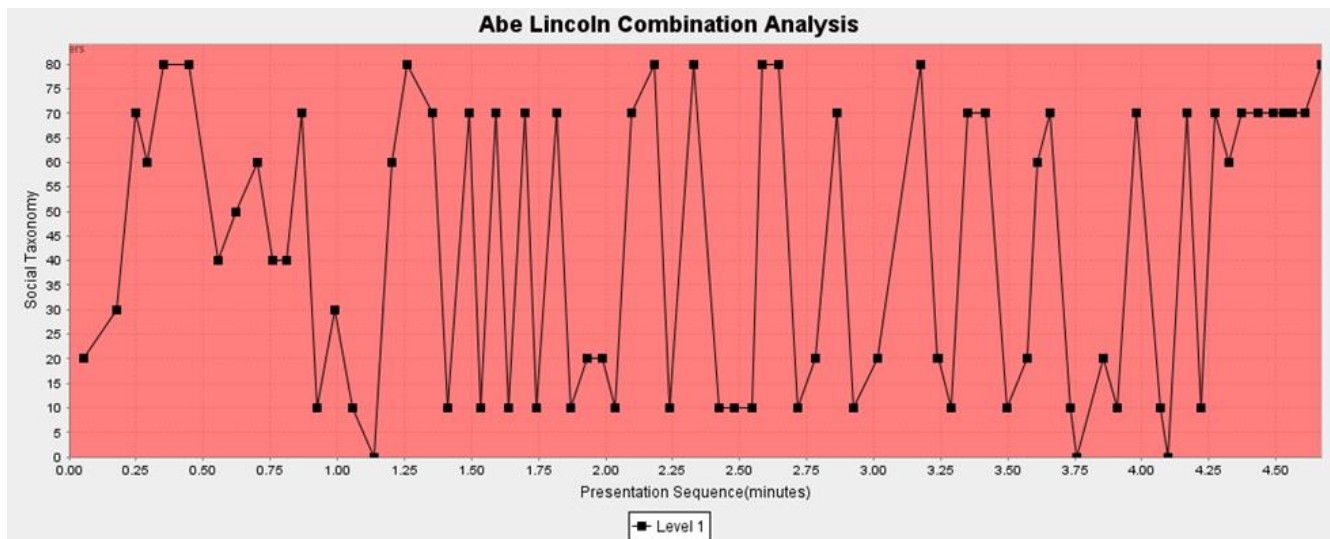
The traditional messaging employed by most leaders tends to be institutional and professional. Persuasive techniques will go personal. A 2016 Edelman survey titled the 2016 Edelman Trust Barometer included a question asking about employee expectations of CEO communications. It is reported that 79% of employees expect the CEO to share their personal values, the personal obstacles they have overcome, and their personal success stories. Yet we find very few CEO's that ever go beyond a Toastmasters personal introduction in their communications. For example, in the following figures, focus on the colors which represent the identity role and the social taxonomy graph (the data points) is our next topic:



Green is a perceived Organizational Identity and red is a perceived Personal Identity: Classic Toastmasters. And with practice or with certain audiences the CEO can also be perceived as in the Professional Identity role seen here in blue.



Is there a time when the CEO should deliver a message at a 100% Personal Identity role? How about our American President (CEO) giving a speech - the Gettysburg Address?



4.3 Why Does Social Identity Role Matter?

It is one pathway to what Stephens and others (2010) call neural-coupling. Their research on the neuroscience of the brain provides evidence of successful communications. They conclude that the most successful communications occur when the receiver's brain runs the same neural pattern as the presenter's with about a one second delay, AND the receiver can anticipate portions of the message. There are two dimensions to neural coupling: 1) a common experience which is more probable in the personal identity role, and 2) a common experience that has involved one or a few persons. The compelling neuroscience evidence is that today's communications will require leaders to exercise higher skills in the personal communications social role.

The second pathway to neural-coupling is how common are the words and social groups being spoken in the communications message? The authors have modeled a communication architecture called Social Taxonomy: the categorization and organization of the social context of communications. This is original to the model to the best of the authors' knowledge and is based on classical Group Theory. (Note: some early work by Eleanor Rosch in Principles of Categorization in 1978 worked with structure but not social hierarchy.) The social taxonomy supposes that all human communications has a social context; all social context ranges in scale from one human to all humans and all levels are present in any communications; we participate in multiple (hundreds) of social groups during the time we are born to our death; and, our communications always has one or more social group context(s) within the Taxonomy.

For example, answer the question "Where do you live?"

Table 1: Comparison of Biological and Social Taxonomies

<p>Biological Taxonomy: The Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus is regarded as the father of taxonomy, a system known as Linnaean classification for categorization of organisms.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Life Domain Kingdom Phylum Class Order Family Genus Species</p>	<p>Social Taxonomy: Example; Geography – Where do you live?</p> <p style="text-align: center;">80 - Global/Earth 70 - Continent 60 - Nation 50 - State 40 - Region 30 - City/Town 20 - Neighborhood 10 - Street Address 0 - This room</p>
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Using the geography example, all answers are correct and we intuitively use the social level that helps construct a successful communication event. One can be asked a question in one context such as "What are the environmental consequences in our city for the current use of nuclear energy," and respond in any of the other social context such as "My personal experience in my 40 years living at House #..., The Energy and Security relationship for America has to preempt ..., and As a Global citizen, I can no longer pass on to my great grandchildren an environment impacting climate."

There are social taxonomies that are very simple such as gender; two levels of all people and male, female, and mixed. There are social taxonomies that can be 10 layers deep such as environmental impact. All taxonomies begin with one person and aggregate to RELATED higher social groupings until all people on earth are included. RELATIONAL is the key social theme and the common thread in communications.

4.4 Scoring Levels

The scoring of the levels is arbitrary. The authors' experience is that scores of zero (0) to 80 accommodate most social architecture maps. A zero score (0) is always ONE PERSON whether oneself, another individual, a story but always one person (a unique social footprint). A score of 10 is usually immediate family, work team, Seal team, or very small groups. A score of 40 is usually an organization such as Virginia Tech, DOD, or the White House. A score of 50 is an industry. A score of 60 is a Nation (USA) or national economy. A score of 70 is an alignment of nations such as ASEAN, NATO or a terrorist organization. A score of 80 is global and encompasses all humans such as the Global Economy, Security, and human values/principles as hope, justice, and more.

In general, scores in the middle range of 20 to 60 tend to be data and group oriented. This is also the range of an anti-group for every pro-group. This range normally has very self-oriented motivations such as corporate profit, political lobbying and influence, or control of markets and territories. This is more cortexes based and is the domain of understanding the data with knowledge and logic arguments.

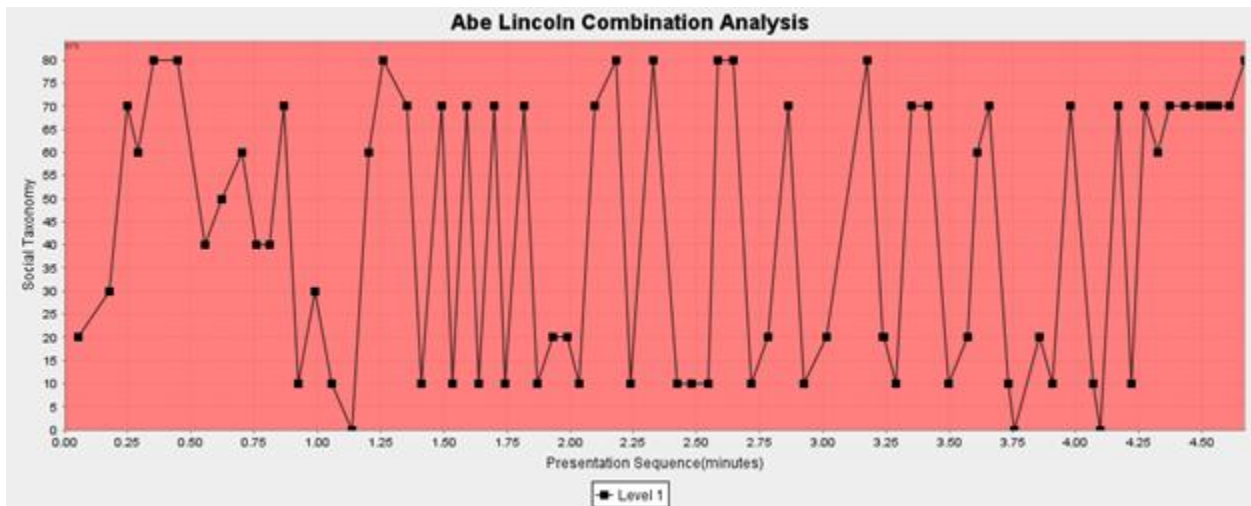
Scores of zero and 10 tend to be personal and empathic which can evoke affective responses. This is the domain of shared human experience and perhaps our most social subconscious bonding. This is the range of neural coupling. This is the personal range and the affective message as to why I should care about your message. Trust and credibility are fostered in this domain. Authenticity is critical.

Scores of 70 and 80 bring all humans together for common purpose, understanding, or motivation. This is the domain of social action and my willingness to advocate for your cause. This is also the range for neural coupling.

The range of social patterns suggests that communication in our new world needs data to understand (20 to 60), a personal connection to trust and experience affectively (0 to 10), and a social motivation (70 to 80) to engage in a willingness to advocate. If using advocacy as an end goal, anything less seems to be boring and neutral as well as ineffective.

4.5 Mapping the Gettysburg Address

Here is Abe Lincoln at Gettysburg again and now we focus on the graphing:



We have included the Address and our assignment of taxonomy values.

Four score and seven years ago [20] our fathers [30] brought forth on this continent [70], a new nation [60], conceived in Liberty [80], and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal [80].

Now we [40] are engaged in a great civil war [50], testing whether that nation [60], or any nation so conceived [40] and so dedicated [40], can long endure [70]. We [10] are met on a great battle-field [30] of that war [50]. We [10] have come to dedicate a portion of that field [10], as a final resting place for those [10] who here [10] gave their lives [0] that that nation [60] might live [80]. It is altogether fitting and proper [70] that we [10] should do this. But, in a larger sense [70], we [10] cannot dedicate [70] -- we [10] cannot consecrate [70] -- we [10] cannot hallow [70]-- this ground [10]. The brave men [20], living and dead [20], who struggled here [10], have consecrated it [70], far above [80] our poor power [10] to add or detract. The world [80] will little note [10], nor long remember [10] what we [10] say here, but it [80] can never forget [80] what they [10] did here.

It is for us [20] the living, rather, to be dedicated [70] here [10] to the unfinished work [20] which they [20] who fought here have thus far so nobly [80] advanced. It is rather for us [20] to be here [10] dedicated to [70] the great task remaining before us [70] -- that from these honored dead [10] we [20] take increased devotion [60] to that cause [70] for which they [10] gave the last full measure [0] of devotion -- that we [20] here [10] highly resolve [70] that these dead [10] shall not have died [70] in vain -- that this nation [60], under God [70], shall have a new birth of freedom [70] -- and that government of the people [70], by the people [70], for the people [70], shall not perish [70] from the earth [80].

5. Upcoming Research and Pilots

5.1 Summary of Research

In preliminary research that took place in July of 2016, a sample of 132 Johns Hopkins University Master's degree students, 75% foreign students and 25% American students were shown a three and a half minute video clip of an introduction of Hillary Clinton during a campaign stop in San Diego on June 2, 2016.

5.2 How the Survey was conducted

Respondents were shown four 45 second clips that had been pre-mapped by 3rd Order Communication. After each clip, the respondents were asked to determine in written survey, whether the speaker in the clip spoke from her institutional, professional, or personal identities or social roles. Respondents could choose one role, a mix of two roles, or all three roles.

5.3 Survey Results

For Clip #1, 90% of respondents felt that the speaker spoke from an institutional role, while 82% felt that the speaker spoke from a professional role, and 39% felt that the speaker spoke from a personal role. The team at 3rd Order Communication mapped the first clip as the speaker speaking primarily from an institutional role.

For Clip #2, 86% of respondents felt that the speaker spoke from an institutional role, while 80% felt that the speaker spoke from a professional role, and 30% felt that the speaker spoke from a personal role. The team at 3rd Order Communication mapped the second clip as the speaker speaking from a mix of the three roles with institutional and personal being the largest part of the clips.

For Clip #3, 40% of respondents felt that the speaker spoke from an institutional role, while 39% felt that the speaker spoke from a professional role, and 86% felt that the speaker spoke from a personal role. The team at 3rd Order Communication mapped the second clip as the speaker speaking primarily from the professional and personal roles.

For Clip #4, 62% of respondents felt that the speaker spoke from an institutional role, while 44% felt that the speaker spoke from a professional role, and 60% felt that the speaker spoke from a personal role. The team at 3rd Order Communication mapped the first clip as the speaker speaking primarily from an institutional role.

While research is ongoing, the survey of this sample audience indicates that except in the case of Clip #4, the audience mapped the communication in a similar way to that of the team at 3rd Order Communication.

5.4 The Android App Pilot

We are currently piloting an Android App that captures the perceived social identity of the leader (institutional, professional, personal) and the social linguistic reinforcement of the language (group identity ranging from personal to all humanity). The app presents a graph for interpretation and coaching. Our evidence is that each executive has a unique "social footprint" that can be leveraged in their communications to achieve 1st, 2nd and 3rd Order communication results.

6. Conclusion

We believe that with our proposed framework and suggested feedback mechanism we can aid leaders as they prepare to address specific audiences with specific goals in mind. We conclude with key questions that will be targeted as we continue to expand our outreach using Social Architecture terminology.

- How do we define a successful executive's communication event?
 - 1st Order Organizational Identity for knowledge based needs of the audience.
 - 2nd Order Organization and Professional Identity if persuasion is required
 - 3rd Order using all three and heavy Personal for shared ownership and advocacy
- What are the leader's unique social levers to gain trust and ownership?
 - 3rd Order requires a strong Personal Identity and wide ranging social taxonomy.
- Is the leader aligned with the organization practice to achieve authenticity?
 - 3rd Order results will require highly skilled Personal Identity
- What sustained outcomes were achieved by the communication event?
 - 1st Order is dependent on the institutional brand sustaining.
 - 2nd Order is dependent on persuasion and brand sustaining competition.
 - 3rd Order is dependent on personal values sustaining over time.

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