



A foundation for communication SUCCESS

The IABC Research Foundation celebrates
25 years of visionary leadership and scholarship

about the foundation

Founded in 1982, the IABC Research Foundation serves as the research and development arm of the International Association of Business Communicators. The foundation provides knowledge and understanding to help organizations become more effective through communication. It helps communicators maximize their contribution to organizational success and serves as a rich source of information and ideas for developing IABC resources.

The foundation's vision is to contribute a body of knowledge that advances the practice, perception and effectiveness of communication. Its mission is to serve IABC, its members and others in the profession through research that supports and advances the practice of organizational communication.

In 1982, Johnson & Johnson recalled 31 million Tylenol capsules in response to product tampering, AT&T agreed to divest itself of 22 subdivisions, Sony and Philips introduced the CD-ROM, the Weather Channel debuted on U.S. cable television—and the IABC Research Foundation was established as a nonprofit corporation to advance the communication profession and demonstrate its value in organizational effectiveness through education and research.

Louis Williams, ABC, APR, co-chair and chair from 1984 to 1987 and one of the foundation's founding architects, said in a 1986 interview: "A major part of what we're trying to accomplish with the IABC Foundation is to help provide information and research that people can use in their everyday jobs... We need to establish communication research as an ongoing function of organizational communicators."

Twenty-five years and 17 published reports and studies since its inception, the IABC Research Foundation continues to fund research to improve communication leadership. The foundation's research measures and evaluates communication decisions that support organizational strategies, providing a platform for sound business decisions overall. 2006–2007 chair Kellie Garrett, ABC, notes, "Our predecessors had the foresight to recognize that a body devoted to communication research would add credibility and professionalism to our discipline."

Lynda Stewart, ABC, the foundation's first chair, recalls the inspiration of visionary IABC leaders that led to the incorporation of the foundation despite the realities of legalities and paperwork.

"It's thrilling to have experienced 25 years of reality that was once just



Lynda Stewart,
pictured here in 1979:
"It's thrilling to have
experienced 25 years
of reality that was
once just a vision."

foundation leaders

IABC Research Foundation trustees include organizational communication professionals, senior business professionals and academic experts. There are more than 50 distinguished communication professionals from around the world who serve the foundation as trustees or as committee members.

a vision,” says Stewart. “We could have made a long list of obstacles and talked ourselves out of a foundation, but IABC’s executive board said, ‘Let’s do it.’”

“Research is not always an easy sell,” says Vicci Rodgers, chair from 1996 to 1997. “IABC took a bold step forward by investing in the foundation. We can still look back on those early studies and find value today.”

Jan Thibodeau, ABC, 2006–2007 vice chair and incoming 2007 chair, says that the foundation’s Excellence Study (see page 39) in particular remains the essential guide to the “fundamental



Louis Williams, shown here in 1980, saw that communicators needed research to do their jobs well.

and timeless elements of excellent communication.” Barbara Puffer, ABC, 1997–1998 chair, adds, “As an adjunct associate professor today, I see the study surface again and again...it is still a widely quoted piece of work in the academic arena.”

“I will always remember the day that an article appeared on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* that described how CEOs valued communicators in the organization,” says Maire Simington, Ph.D., chair from 1994 to 1996. “Most felt that [communicators] added 200 percent to the bottom line. This was based on [James and Larissa] Grunig’s findings in the Excellence Study. It really underscored the value of our profession to a wide audience.”

The question remains: Does research lead to improved organizational efficiencies, or does communication practice lead to new research and theory? Both sides are defensible. Clients and

IABC Research Foundation: A history

1982

• The IABC Foundation is incorporated as a non-profit corporation to promote and further education in business and organizational communication.

Chair: Lynda J. Stewart, ABC

1983

• The foundation grants US\$750 to the IABC Educator Academy’s annual call for papers to be awarded to two top submissions at IABC’s International Conference.

Chair: Richard Charlton, ABC*

1984

• Louis Williams, ABC, spearheads the first major research project: “To what extent and how does communication affect the achievement of organizational objectives?”

Co-chairs: Louis Williams, ABC, and Roy Fotz, ABC

1985

• IABC Research Foundation Profile 85 finds that communication continues to gain importance as part of overall organizational planning, and that communicators are playing a more significant, more influential role in overall



Louis Williams



policy development and decision making.

Chair: Louis Williams, ABC

1986

• The foundation publishes *The Velvet Ghetto*, a study of the impact of women in the communication profession, and launches the Excellence Study to identify the characteristics of excellent communication as related to organizational success.

Chair: Louis Williams, ABC

1987

• Profile 87 finds that the major issues facing communication programs are employee morale, cost containment and productivity.

• The foundation establishes the Jake Wittmer Memorial Fund.

• Publishes *Corporate Doctrine*

Research Project: *How Companies Handle the Communication Function*, a study that takes a hard look at doctrine and how it relates to organizations of all shapes and sizes.

Chair: Wilma Mathews, ABC



Wilma Mathews

1988

• Robert Berzok, a strong foundation supporter, establishes the Sharon Berzok Memorial Fund.

Chair: Wilma Mathews, ABC

1989

• Profile 89 finds that the use of technology is the most important change affecting communication programs.

• The foundation publishes *Beyond the Velvet Ghetto*, showing the progress of women in the communication profession since 1986.

Chair: Wilma Mathews, ABC

1990

• The foundation’s chapter/district representatives encourage chap-

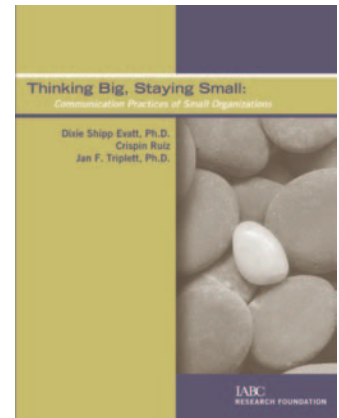
* deceased



bosses expect communicators' decisions to be based on a foundation of established theory, as well as on ongoing research that tests, perfects and introduces new knowledge to reflect a changing business and political environment.

The foundation's aim is to satisfy both. *The Business of Truth*, published last year, helps business communicators understand their role in a post-Enron era of increased public and governmental demand for corporate transparency. The 2003 study *Communication Behavior of Virtual Workforces* took into account new media and other innovations in technology that have led to the increasing prevalence of remote workforces, and explored the challenges and characteristics of today's virtual teams.

Current foundation trustee Greg Gordon points to best-practice studies such as *Thinking Big, Staying Small* and *Best Practices in Employee*



ters to hold special events, and the amount of contributions double.

Chair: Fred Halperin, ABC

1991

- The foundation hosts a special event luncheon at the International Conference that includes reporters from Czechoslovakia, Germany and Romania discussing the role of the press in their countries' political changes.

Chair: Fred Halperin, ABC

1992

- Publishes *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*.

Chair: Carolyn A. Douglas

1993

- Publishes *Excellence Quick Diagnostics Kit*.

Chair: Carolyn A. Douglas

1994

- Establishes the Sharon Berzok Memorial Lecture and Jake Wittmer Award for Research, both awarded through IABC's Gold Quill program.

Chair: Maire Simington, Ph.D.



Maire Simington

1995

- Publishes *Manager's Guide to Excellence in PR & Communication Management*.

Chair: Maire Simington, Ph.D.

1996

- Designs research agenda to accommodate the foundation's responsibility to serve the profession with significant new research.

Chair: Vicci Rodgers

1997

- Profile 97 finds that customer satisfaction, technological advances and management's perception of value have the strongest impact on communication.

Chair: Barbara Puffer, ABC



Barbara Puffer

1998

- Think Tank 1998 identifies measurement, technology and the role of the communicator as hot issues.



Charles Pizzo Jr.

1999

- The foundation publishes *Key Elements of Effective Supervisor/Employee Communication*, a

review of 200 communication studies that suggests communication leads to job satisfaction and organizational commitment, which in turn increase and sustain productivity.

Chair: David Kistle, ABC



David Kistle

2000

- IABC/PRSA's joint study of Profile 2000 finds that the most important communication job factors are job satisfaction, access to technology, compensation and creative opportunity.

- The foundation publishes *Measuring Organizational Trust*, which finds that trust is an economic imperative for business resilience in a global marketplace.

- Think Tank 2000 identifies virtual workforce, intangible assets and crisis communication as hot issues.

Chair: John Gerstner, ABC

2001

- The foundation publishes *How Communication Drives Merger Success*, which explores the key trends in mergers and acquisitions.

- Publishes *Communication Competence and Business Success*, which finds that clarity of purpose, effective interfaces and the sharing of information have a positive correlation to business success.

- Think Tank 2001 identifies the use and reuse of

history continues on next page

Communication, calling them “a platform to move from tactical to strategic communication.”

“There are three things that I value about the foundation’s studies,” says Irene Monley, ABC, another trustee of the foundation. “The topics are cutting-edge, the findings are surprising, and the tools are practical.”

Despite the widespread, critical success of such reports, articulating the foundation’s importance to practitioners has proven challenging at times.

“Communicators are a busy lot, often consumed with the tasks at hand,” says Warren Bickford, ABC, chair from 2002 to 2003. “Collectively, we often pay more attention to the art of what we do, at the expense of the science behind what we do. We need to continue to build the body of knowledge, critically examining the value we bring to our organization.”

There are also those concerns that surface year after year simply because the issues cannot be conclusively solved by a research study. With an eye toward continuing those discussions and developing and debating strategic direction, the foundation’s annual think-tank activities provide in-depth analysis of current issues and forecast trends that

will affect organizational communicators.

“Knowing that there’s an organization taking the 50,000-foot view, continually monitoring emerging issues that may have an impact on the profession and tapping into member needs, is extremely valuable,” says Karen Vahouny, ABC, a foundation trustee.

“Baseball great Yogi Berra once noted that ‘you’ve got to be very careful if you don’t know where you’re going, because you might not get there,’” adds 1987–1990 chair Wilma Mathews, ABC. “Research not only helps you figure out where you’re going but also can tell you when or if you get there. It has certainly helped keep me from going astray.”

Tamara Gillis, ABC, chair from 2001 to 2002, says, “It is my hope that the foundation continues to challenge and propel the development of cutting-edge communication research that communicators can use in their daily practice.” Today, achieving this goal requires a special focus on communication practices and practitioners operating internationally. According to Gloria Walker, ABC, chair from 2004 to 2005, “The foundation provides a window on the larger



History continued

natural resources, social capital and the use of technology as key issues.



Tamara Gillis
Chair: Tamara Gillis, ABC

2002

- Profile 2002 finds that management’s commitment to communication and the use of technology rank as having the strongest impact on the profession.



Warren Bickford
Chair: Warren Bickford, ABC

Primer, a study that provides grounding to help communication professionals make informed decisions about research.

- Think Tank 2002 identifies measuring return on investment, structuring a communication department and communicators’ role as change-agents as top picks for future research.

Chair: Warren Bickford, ABC

2003

- The foundation publishes *Communication Behavior of Virtual Workforces*, which explores the communication characteristics



Kit Jenkins and challenges faced by virtual employees. *Intangible Assets*, a study that finds that there is a link between communication and intangible assets, particularly when it comes to relationship capital.

- Think Tank 2003 identifies building communities through technology, branding and measuring communication behavior as hot issues.

Chair: Katherine “Kit” Jenkins, ABC

2004

- Think Tank 2004 focuses on the areas of globalization, generational values and the role of communicators as culture brokers.

Chair: Gloria Walker, ABC

2005

- The foundation publishes *Thinking Big, Staying Small*, groundbreaking research that finds that



Paul Sanchez the communicator’s key role in small organizations is in building relationships rather



Gloria Walker

than publicity. Publishes *Best Practices in Employee Communication*, a study that provides hard data as well as stories about and examples of the issues that organizations are struggling with in employee communication.

- Think Tank 2005 identifies generational values, trust, return on investment and information overload as worthy research topics.

Chair: Paul Sanchez, ABC

2006

- The foundation publishes *The Business of Truth*, a study that finds that ethical considerations

world of communication and the issues that affect communicators everywhere.”

The legacy of the IABC Research Foundation will continue to be one of supporting research that provides measurement, improves practices and promotes a better understanding of organizational communication worldwide. And, of course, the foundation will continue to provide a forum for practitioners and researchers in constant search of progress, both in the field and in all their professional dialogues and relationships. After all, although the tools of the communication profession have changed substantially over the past quarter century, its goals remain the same.

“Let’s not lose our heads in the technical avalanche,” says Stewart. “Our internal and external communication ‘customers’ still are human beings who see, touch, hear, smell, speak, think, interpret—and have needs and expectations. Just as they did 25 years ago. Just as they will 25 years from now.” ●

editor’s note

We would like to extend our thanks to past chair Tamara Gillis for her assistance with this article.

should be a vital part of executive decision making regarding how core values are translated into operating procedures and standards.

- Think Tank 2006 identifies trust, creating a maturity model and fragmentation of messages as worthy research topics.



Kellie Garrett

Chair: Kellie Garrett, ABC

2007

- 25th anniversary
- The Profile project is split into two parts. Part one is a salary survey of IABC members; part two



Jan

Thibodeau

- Future projects include information overload, return on investment and generational values.

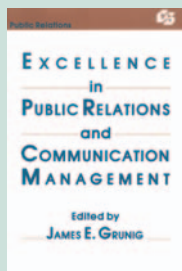
Chair: Jan Thibodeau, ABC

is a comprehensive study of organizational structure and function of communication departments.

A study in excellence

In 1985, the IABC Research Foundation committed itself to the largest research project in the history of public relations: a US\$400,000, three-nation study of public relations and communication management. Led by James Grunig, Ph.D.; Larissa Grunig, Ph.D.; and David Dozier, Ph.D., along with William Ehling, Ph.D.; Jon White, Ph.D.; and Fred Repper, the Excellence Study, as it came to be called, included a literature review; a survey of 321 organizations in Canada, the U.K., and the U.S. from 1990 to 1991; and follow-up case studies in 1994 of 25 organizations that participated in the original survey.

The fruit of this study was a series of books, beginning with a report titled *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management: Initial Data Report and Practical Guide*, published in September 1991. This was followed by



the 666-page book *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1992); a qualitative analysis of the case studies titled IABC

Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management, Phase 2: Qualitative Study, Initial Analysis: Cases of Excellence (1994); a practical summary of the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies titled *Manager’s Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1995); and finally *Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries* (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002).

The Excellence series—and especially the final work—discusses theory and data related to several ongoing discussions in the communication profession, including these issues: How can we show the value of public relations? What is the value of an organization’s relationships with its publics? How do relationships affect reputation? What does it mean to

practice communication strategically? How can we measure and evaluate the effects of public relations programs? Should communication programs be integrated?

James Grunig, professor emeritus at the University of Maryland, shares what he considers the significance of the Excellence Study:

The Excellence Study began in the early years of discussion about how to show the value of the communication function. The IABC Research Foundation asked for more than how to evaluate individual communication programs such as media relations, employee relations or marketing communication. It asked how the total function contributed to organizational objectives. Our research explained why organizations need public relations and how the function should be organized to maximize this value.

We found that a communication function has value when it provides an outside perspective and cultivates relationships with stakeholders. Good relationships have monetary value because they reduce the risks of decisions, reduce the costs of poor decisions, and increase revenue and support. To identify stakeholders affected by decisions and cultivate relationships with them, a public relations unit must:

- Participate in strategic decisions.
- Be more than a technical, messaging function supporting marketing, human relations, finance or other management functions.
- Provide publics a voice in decisions through two-way and symmetrical communication programs.

Current research continues to confirm the conclusions of the Excellence Study and to provide tools communication managers can use to play a strategic role. The study continues to articulate why public relations is one of the most valuable management functions in the 21st century, a period when cultivating relationships and managing conflicts are key to organizational success.