Category 4, Not Jargon But Still Annoying

- best practices   "anything good that is done by our favorite people"
- community   "a corral for keeping people together in your own mind"
- comprehensive   "due consideration of a great many things, maybe even everything
- impactful   "anything that has any effect whatever on anything else"

Other words dissected include benchmarking (surveyor's term), strategy (military lingo), parameter (from applied math, now misused for perimeter), throughput (industrial engineering), extrapolate (statistics), input & output (computers).

HINTS FOR AVOIDING TOMORROW'S JARGON   Once a major foundation told its consultants, "Papers for our board may not contain contractions. We write 'does not' but never 'doesn't'; 'will not' but never 'won't'." To which the pamphlet's author, Tony Proscio, asks "Who on earth talks like that?" He offers 4 tips for avoiding the trap:

1. **Conjure your audience while you write.** Pick out a typical target reader, write for him or her

2. **Make up your own jargon list.** Write down buzz phrases you hear others overusing

3. **Write outlines, & in plain phrases.** Helps point you to plain words – & fewer of 'em

4. **Read your finished work out loud.** Jargon + long, convoluted sentences & dense phrases leap out

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ITEMS OF IMPORTANCE TO PRACTITIONERS

¶ **"Your Lawyers Should Be Your Advisors (Or Your Defenders), Not Your Strategists"** counsels Larry Newman in a review of the Firestone pr debacle for a business mag. Since Firestone's dpr came to the job from the legal dep't & is a lawyer, perhaps its pr effort was doomed from the start. Newman offers 10 insightful lessons learned. Another review – a case study prepared by Notre Dame's Fanning Center for Business Communication – highlights the company's "blame the victim" approach. When the first complaints came in, Firestone called them a "customer usage issue" & has continued on that course – i.e. drivers had underinflated tires, drove in unusually hot weather or extreme driving conditions. Case study ends with 8 questions that would be an exemplary issue training exercise for pr dep'ts or mgmt groups. (Copies of both from prr)

¶ **New CEO Employs Symbolic Com'n to Set Tone & Expectations** for his leadership. An early decision before David Brandon when he took over as head of Domino's Pizza, a worldwide outfit with $3.5 B in sales, was whether to keep stores open on New Year's Eve 2000. Customers depend on the chain for those midnight snacks & it's a high volume day. Still, a night off would play well with employees, at a time when finding enough of them is difficult. He decided to do business as usual – but to symbolize his understanding of employees having to miss the festivities, he & his wife joined the crew at his local store & worked thru the night taking orders & rolling out dough alongside the regulars. It didn't take long for workers everywhere to learn of this. You can guess where he was last New Year's Eve – again accompanied by his wife. The picture of the boss at 2 am with flour all over his apron – what better symbol for a pizza chain?

HOW E-COMPANIES & HI-TECH PR FIRMS ATTEMPT TO COPE; AS E-CONOMY GOES THRU TRANSITION, ORG'NS LOOK FOR ANSWERS

Some trends noted as some hi-tech firms suffer devastating client defections or budget reductions:

■ **"Relationships are the new capital"** says Seurat Co (Atlanta). Its counsel, Edelman, is positioning it this way, according to ae Nuru Mugambi:

■ **"As technology continues to revolutionize how we do business,** technology service providers are finding their customers are thrilled with efficiencies management technology brings, *but are struggling with how they can maintain good customer service & build relationships with their partners, supplier & employees"*

■ Continuing: **"Relationship management is a relatively new space in the tech arena.** Companies like Seurat are quickly moving in on this space. Their challenge is to build a credible relationship in the b2b scene & brand the 'Relationship Capital' space as their own"

The old e-bravado still permeates – & the arcane lingo. But what other org'ns have been doing for years has, as predicted in these pages & elsewhere, been discovered as universal laws in the e-world. This augurs well for both e-companies & pr.

PR FIRM SWITCH   Schneider Integrated Com'ns (NYC) has become Schneider/Shapiro Strategic Com'ns. About its key tech practice group, the firm notes "When dot.coms were throwing themselves at us left & right, we used the experience we had gathered in the tech sector since '96 to ensure that only companies with strong futures became clients" – i.e. those with sound strategies. Now, the firm will emphasize strategy formulation & implementation.

How many tech firms – typically publicity & promotion houses – can make the switch?

DON'T LET DIGITAL DIVIDE DETER YOU FROM REACHING MINORITY AUDIENCES WITH E-TOOLS; ONE BLACK WEBSITE LEADS 'EM ALL

Well, actually it's 2nd on the Web overall. But BlackPlanet.com is the "stickiest" Website of its kind, *Wall Street Journal* reports. Sticky refers to the amount of time a visitor spends at a site. Average visits last 36.6 minutes, making it the stickiest site in the huge news/info/entertainment category.

■ BlackPlanet had 1,768,624 members when prr visited it. Given the inaccuracy of so much data about the e-world, we chose to visit on a Friday just before midnight – assuming that would be a slow time & thus a true test. 24,147 members were at the site then

For comparison, among search engines more people spend time at Yahoo, 13.4 minutes a visit. In the Web services category, BlackPlanet also wins the gold, with average visits lasting 34.4 minutes. Net address follows at 14.9 minutes per visit. "To top it off we were only second on the entire Web to lottery.com," the site brags.

Blackplanet calls itself a "groundbreaking" online community for the African Diaspora. "We enable members to cultivate meaningful personal & professional relationships, stay informed about the world, and gain access to goods & services that allow them to do more in life." It offers many categories.

DIGITAL DIVIDE IS SOMETHING ELSE   It's true poor blacks, indeed most impoverished people in all groups, are *divided* from the rest of society by their lack of *digital* participation. Few have computers or e-skills. Technophobes regardless of economic or other status are also on the other side of the divide. Assuming that minority audiences cannot be reached by e-tools, therefore, is shown by BlackPlanet to be erroneous.

SHE'S BIG, SHE'S BAD & SHE'S IN CHARGE; WHEN BOSSES MAKE WORKERS SICK, THEY ALSO CAUSE PR PROBLEMS INSIDE & OUT

Tho their mind games are probably more instinctive than planned, bosses who mentally abuse employees use "mind control" or "brainwashing" techniques, says a group called "Justice Dammit."

- **This is a prominent reason org'ns have problems** of absenteeism, disloyalty, inefficiency & difficulty forming effective teams

- **Employees enduring such treatment are likely** to talk negatively to outsiders, leak proprietary data – & are unlikely to serve as volunteers, ambassadors or be engaged in improvement or quality projects

THE MOST COMMON METHODS ABUSERS USE TO CONTROL THEIR VICTIMS:

1. **Isolating the victim.** Setting up an environment in which the employee is ignored, doesn't know who to trust & is kept out of the loop of information, which can eventually make him feel as isolated as though he were locked in a windowless room

2. **Exerting control.** Whoever decides which employees get raises & bonuses, and who gets fired, has control. In a healthy, fair work environment, an employee can influence those decisions by the way he works, so he is not powerless. In an abusive environment, the boss may vacillate at will between being fair & harsh, friendly & unreachable, complimentary & critical, and nothing the employee does makes any difference, so he is powerless

3. **Destroying self-confidence, respect.** Treating a person as though she is stupid and inept, searching for excuses to criticize her, ignoring her input and suggestions & questioning all her decisions, very quickly makes her doubt her intelligence & abilities, and destroys her self-confidence & -respect. A person in that state of mind doesn't feel she deserves to be treated better so the abuser has her right where he wants her. "As self-confidence & -respect diminish, we become less likely to stand up for ourselves; we gradually surrender to our abusers." As a result, psychologically abused employees:

a. ***become confused,*** because they can't reconcile their so-called "stupidity & ineptness" with their previous job & life successes

b. ***isolate themselves,*** because they feel inferior to their co-workers

c. ***obsess*** with being perfect to avoid criticism & please their impossible-to-please bosses

d. ***become paranoid,*** thinking people are talking about their "poor work" & "stupidity"

e. ***become so insecure*** about their jobs they expect to be fired at any time, tho confused about why

f. ***grow so weary*** of trying to prove their worth & failing they lose their "fight" & stop defending themselves or trying to convince anyone, including themselves, that they are doing good work

g. ***doubt*** their work is worth defending

> **Every mgr needs to recognize these traits – but practitioners have a particular need.** And a problem. Altho resulting pr issues, both internal & external, will require attention, how do you intervene with another manager to stop psychologically abusive behavior? This is another instance where mastery of OD skills is a benefit. So is a tight alliance with hr.

PLAIN WRITING BOOKLET SPEAKS TO PR's CONDITION

Among org'ns plagued by jargon, foundations are in a league with gov't agencies. But one – Edna McConnell Clark Foundation – wants to change that, so it sponsored *in other words: a plea for plain speaking in foundations*. What makes it effective is humorous definitions of misused words, labeled "A Verbal Bestiary":

Category 1, Favorite Buzz Words – "When foundations raise or lower their verbal hemlines, much of America swiftly follows"

- at risk   "headed for trouble for reasons we'd rather not mention"
- empowerment   "used liberally, it shows you care"
- learnings   "precious little nuggets of what-we-found-out"
- technical assistance   "advice on almost anything"

Category 2, Genteelism – synonyms for ordinary, natural words used to rise above the common herd

- proactive   "aggressive in a passive sort of way"
- funding   "a lot more tasteful than cold, hard cash"
- utilize   "best utilized in place of use to mean use"

Category 3, Meaningless Words – that mean much less than they seem to mean

- analysis   "any thinking process that takes time & money"
- mechanisms   "discrete but inscrutable processes, laws or forces"
- linkage   "a connector for every association, including pure coincidence"