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MOTIVATING LANGUAGE THEORY

Effective Leader Talk in the Workplace

Jacqueline Mayfield
Milton Mayfield

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Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Abstract This chapter gives an overview of our book and motivating language's role in leadership and the workplace. Motivating language theory provides a framework for understanding effective leader communication. It classifies all major leader-to-follower communications into one of three categories: meaning-making, empathetic, and direction-giving language. Leaders use meaning-making language to convey cultural knowledge, values, and vision, and connect follower and organizational goals. Leaders use empathetic language to provide followers with emotional support and guidance. And leaders use direction-giving language to clarify the steps to attain the organizational vison, goals, follower job tasks, and reward expectations.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leadership · Communication Organizational culture · Emotions · Task clarity · Rewards

This book reaches out to everyone who wants to know more about effective and ethical leader spoken communication. Why does such language matter, what is it, what's the best way to use it, and how does it affect others? We will respond to these questions and others with a journey through motivating language (ML). Motivating language is a compass that seeks to align follower aspirations with organizational vision using leader talk. Simply put, ML helps leaders to better connect with their followers and improves follower and firm well-being. To help you understand how ML fulfills this mission, our introduction gives an

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overview about why ML matters, what it means, and its influence on organizations and their employees. The introduction also lays out this book's architecture.

Too often communication is implicit in leadership behavior, an elephant in the room. That is to say that effective leader communication is assumed to be important, but its definition is hard to grasp, and its application is not strongly emphasized. Effective leader communication ushers in positive results for the organization and its stakeholders, including employees. Researchers, managers, aspiring leaders, students, and other observers have long wondered about what successful leader communication entails, especially spoken words.

Talk is a vital part of what most leaders do (We adopt Neck and colleagues' definition of leadership as "a process of influence for directing behavior toward accomplishing goals" (Neck et al. 2016, p. 4)). A leader's work is often accomplished through talk, accounting for up to 80% of their time (Mintzberg 1973; Van Quaquebeke and Felps in press; Wajcman and Rose 2011). Plus, most of this oral communication happens with followers (Tengblad 2006; Van Quaquebeke and Felps in press).

When speaking with subordinates, language bridges leader intent and purpose. In fact, leader talk transmits signals which can arouse follower motivation—"observable changes in the initiation, direction, intensity and persistence of voluntary action" (Kanfer et al. 2017, p. 339). Simply put, motivation is our drive to contribute. All humans possess this need, and it can be enhanced or diminished through communicative exchanges, especially those which entail a more powerful other, including the words that a leader says to a follower (Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press). Motivation, the resulting psychological state, is translated by followers in their attitudes toward work, their relationships with leaders, their capabilities and initiatives, and in their job performance.

Yet despite this important role, guidelines for how effective leader communication works are often fuzzy, general rules of thumb, even glib. We were inspired to clarify these ambiguous rules by our own private sector organizational experiences. In these settings, we were often puzzled by just what leader talk was trying to accomplish, or worse yet, by its absence when sorely needed. To our knowledge, there are few evidence-based road maps for leaders who want to speak mindfully in order to advance the best interests of followers and the organization. Motivating language helps to fill this gap by giving a systematic, research-tested model that covers all forms of leader-to-follower speech.

So where does motivating language come from and how is it defined? Much of this question will be answered in this book's first four chapters, but here is a brief summary. Motivating language was originally called *motivational language* by its founder, Dr. Jeremiah Sullivan (1988). This scholar recognized that leaders' spoken messages could spark employee motivational states. Drawing on this insight, Sullivan asserted that most managers fail to use the full range of language or do not use it strategically. These missteps limit the motivational potential of their talk. For guidance on how to address this shortcoming, he turned to linguistics theory and reinterpreted it for organizational contexts. Sullivan's conversion was also firmly rooted in management and social sciences theory and can be captured in three types of leader talk: direction-giving, meaning-making, and empathetic language.

Here is a brief sketch of each ML facet, all of which will be much more detailed in the remainder of this book. Direction-giving language emphasizes the steps to attain the organizational vision, goal setting, giving clear task parameters, informational transparency, and articulating reward contingencies. This form of talk dominates in most organizations. Next, meaning-making language explains organizational vision and culture, often informally and by using stories or metaphors. This form type of speech also lets a follower know that her or his work is valuable and how it contributes to a bigger picture. Meaning-making language informs the follower about how personal goals can be integrated into purposeful work. The last ML facet, empathetic language, is least commonly expressed and sends messages of genuine caring for a follower's well-being. These oral messages include civility, empathy, compassion, and positive emotional support for a follower. Figure 1.1 gives a diagram of all three ML facets, also referred to as ML dimensions in this book.

Researchers have made much progress since the initial model's introduction. ML now has a robust and valid scale, the motivating language scale (MLS), that draws on follower perceptions. Compelling studies using the MLS and other qualitative methods suggest that ML has significant and positive links with many important workplace outcomes including—but not limited—to employee engagement, job satisfaction, self-efficacy, performance, creativity, innovation, perceived leader competence, intention to stay, voice, lower absenteeism, and effective decision making. While most of these studies are cross-sectional, correlational, and have dyadic or individual levels of analyses, there are notable exceptions. A few researchers have captured these ML relationships at multiple organizational levels, over extended periods of time, and uncovered

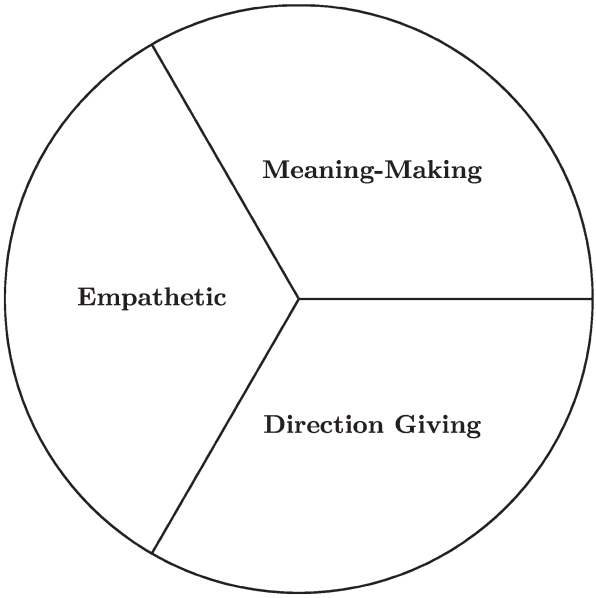

Fig. 1.1 A graphical representation of motivating language's three facets. This figure has been released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license by Milton and Jacqueline Mayfield. For full information go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

causal evidence. What's important here are the implications that organizational culture can frame ML. (Framing refers to influencing others' attitudes toward something [Conger 1998; Jian and Fairhurst 2017], often through communication practices). Thus, high or low ML use can be systemically embedded throughout an organization.

Other scholars have even extended the scope by showing that motivating language can encourage desirable results via written communication in virtual teams (Wang et al. 2009). As for potential cross-cultural applications, ML investigations are not limited to the USA. Although US settings are prevalent, scholars have or are actively exploring ML in Japan (Kunie et al. 2017), Mexico (Madlock and Sexton 2015), Taiwan (Fan et al. 2014; Wang et al. 2009), Australia (Sarros et al. 2014; Luca and Gray 2004), Turkey (Özen 2013, 2014), Kuwait (Alqahtani 2015), Poland (Wińska 2010, 2013, 2014), and China (Zhang 2009) as well.

It's vital to note that ML's positive influence is only fully realized when the four following assumptions are met. First and foremost, the leader must walk the talk. Leaders' actions must match up with their words. A recent study supported the presence of such behavioral integrity with ML use (Holmes and Parker 2017). Secondly, leaders must appropriately integrate all three dimensions of ML to reap optimal benefits. Thirdly, even though the normal scope of motivating language is confined to leader talk, followers must accurately perceive these intended ML messages. And fourthly, as conceptualized by Sullivan, motivating language refers to almost all important work-related forms of leader-to-follower speech.

The preceding overview will be expanded in our book. We have designed a structure that begins with why leader talk matters in Chap. 2. In this chapter, we confront the dilemma of W*hat does oral leader communication really mean?* by giving a full background on motivating language theory (MLT) and its influence on employee and organizational well-being. Then in Chaps. 3, 4, and 5, we tackle each dimension of motivating language, their connections with existing research, and their implications for practice. The following chapter, Chap. 6, explains why coordinating the three ML dimensions is critical, and how this skill is reflected in practice. Furthermore, the roles of moderating factors such as national culture will be explored in the integration of ML dimensions. Next, in Chap. 7 our book highlights the benefits and practical implications of motivating language that are drawn from evidence. Chapter 8 takes motivating language up to the organizational level by showing how it can boost strategy and be implemented on a broader platform. Chapter 9 lays out the measurement of motivating language, its generalizability, and potential causality. We again discuss cross-cultural extensions here. In Chap. 10, we focus on future directions for ML research and practice. Finally, Chap. 11 integrates motivating language into the bigger context of a positive communication culture, lays out training and development applications, and offers concluding thoughts.

All of these chapters describe motivating language in support of our book's overarching goal: to present a systematic, understandable program for optimizing leader spoken language that benefits both employees and their organizations. This goal is targeted for both research and practice. For both audiences, we strongly believe that ML is not an inborn trait. Somewhat akin to emotional intelligence, it can be learned, and ML training possibilities will be discussed in Chap. 11.

We now welcome you to a journey through motivating language and sincerely hope that it inspires you as much as it has us.

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CHAPTER 2

A Few Words to Get Us Started

Abstract In this chapter, we introduce the inception, foundations, research findings, and current inquiry about motivating language theory. This theory was originally conceptualized by professor Jeremiah Sullivan as a communicative path to enhance follower motivation and related outcomes through mindful and strategic leader speech. These forms of talk are embedded in meaning-making (giving significance and cultural guidance to work), empathetic (sharing human bonding at work), and direction-giving (dispelling ambiguity and transparently sharing work expectations) languages. The three dimensions of ML represent most types of leader to follower work-related speech and elicit the best results when the leader walks the talk, employees accurately perceive what the leader intends, and all ML dimensions are used appropriately.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication Meaning-making language · Empathetic language · Direction-giving language

Overview

In this chapter, we introduce the inception, foundations, research findings, and current inquiry about motivating language theory. This theory was originally conceptualized by professor Jeremiah Sullivan as a communicative path to enhance follower motivation and related outcomes

J. Mayfield and M. Mayfield, *Motivating Language Theory*,
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through mindful and strategic leader speech. These forms of talk are embedded in meaning-making (giving significance and cultural guidance to work), empathetic (sharing human bonding at work), and direction-giving (dispelling ambiguity and transparently sharing work expectations) languages. The three dimensions of ML represent most types of leader to follower work-related speech and elicit the best results when the leader walks the talk, employees accurately perceive what the leader intends, and all ML dimensions are used appropriately.

Empirical tests are convincing about motivating language's reliability, validity, and influence. Findings show significant and positive links between ML and employee job satisfaction, performance, creativity, willingness to express voice, self-efficacy, intent to stay, and lower absenteeism among other outcomes. These tests have also been conducted in diverse settings and countries. Topics for future motivating language investigations include applications for part-time workers, multi-level analyses, ML processes, ML training effectiveness, companion employee feedback loops, and national culture as a moderator.

Why Motivating Language Was Created and How It Is Defined

We often hear that the boss needs to communicate better. But what does that really mean? To further muddle such fuzziness, a leader's communication is too often an assumed, marginalized behavior that lacks emphasis and explicit guidelines in management scholarship, teaching, consulting, and practical advice. Ironically, research tells us that leaders spend the majority of their time communicating. Most of this communication—up to 80% according to studies (Mintzberg 1973; Tengblad 2006; Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press; Wajcman and Rose 2011)—is spent talking. In reality, oral communication is a prime way that leaders accomplish their goals (Gronn 1983), especially when talking with subordinates (Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press). As stated in the introduction, our working definition of leadership is influencing others to reach goals.

Language is a crucial part of leader communication, especially when it flows through speech. Talk empowers leaders to articulate their visions, intentions, and goals. Just as important, talk allows leaders to reach out and connect with followers and other stakeholders. Effective leader speech inspires community and shared purpose among organizational

citizens. Think about the powerful words of good leaders who have motivated and inspired you. On the other hand, ineffective leader talk is dysfunctional and dispiriting. Evidence shows that poor or abusive leader oral communication is linked with the voluntary departure of employees (very costly) and their failure to speak up about critical issues leading to negative consequences, i.e., the tragedy of the Columbia space shuttle (McClean et al. 2013; Morrison 2014).

Drawing from a vast body of research, we can conclude that leader talk is highly relational and impacts employee psychological states, including motivation (Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press). These psychological states are in turn expressed with distinctly positive or negative outcomes, for the follower, the leader, and the organization, along with its stakeholders and customers included (Mayfield et al. 2015). Our book will focus on how to foster the positive outcomes for both employees and organizations by giving a constructive, systematic framework for leader talk called motivating language (ML). This chapter begins our journey by offering a background and overview of motivating language theory (MLT). By the end of this chapter, you will understand why motivating language has been developed, its conceptual framework, its three-core dimensions, and its links with desirable results for employees and their organizations. You will also grasp the scope of ML, namely what it can and cannot do as well as where we need to direct future research.

As we begin, we emphasize that motivating language does not advocate monologues! MLT stems from the belief that leadership is both relational (built from interpersonal connections) and reflexive (has the responsibility to be ethical, authentic, and to engage in creating shared meaning) (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Fairhurst and Connaughton 2013; Jian and Fairhurst 2017; Monnot 2016). Within this framework, motivating language focuses a lens on what a supervisor can vocally contribute to distributed or interactive leadership. As the chapters unfold, you will see how leadership inquiry (respectful and open questions), mindfulness, and encouragement of a follower's voice are all part of what constitutes MLT.

Motivating language was initially conceptualized as *motivational language* by professor Jeremiah Sullivan (1988). This highly accomplished scholar proposed a linguistic framework for enhancing employee motivation. Drawing from the axiom that a leader's spoken words will elicit psychological responses by followers, Sullivan asserted that more

extensive and strategic language choices by leaders will be perceived as helpful, then in turn nurture higher motivation and desirable follower attitudes and behaviors, such as performance, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. The potential benefits of such talk are unfortunately restricted in common leadership theory and practice by limited, automatic applications. Many predominant leadership theories marginalize spoken communication and take their cues from the Ohio State and University of Michigan studies, which are constructed around two leadership functions, task, and people orientations (Miner 2005; Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press; Yukl 2013). And, a lot of managerial talk relies on task orientation, a more narrow spectrum of spoken language that sets goals and outlines task expectations with lower impact on employee motivation.

Sullivan believed that these constraints can be lifted when leaders mindfully expand their linguistic ranges. To create this enriched leader communication model, he used linguistics theory to define three leader speech categories (Mayfield et al. 2015) as follows: (meaning-making language) those that "facilitate cognitive schemas and scripts, which will be used to guide the employee in his or her work," (empathetic language) "those that implicitly reaffirm an employee's sense of self-worth as a human being," and (direction-giving language) "those that reduce employee uncertainty and increase his or her knowledge" (Sullivan 1988, p. 104). Sullivan predicted that employee motivation and other valuable outcomes will grow when leader talk combines all three dimensions effectively.

Meaning-Making Language

To better explain why Sullivan's model is so tantalizing, we begin by presenting each dimension of ML, accompanied by examples and theoretical foundations in management and other social science research. These theories are drawn from multiple disciplines. When theoretical understanding is necessary to grasp ML, we have defined the models. Otherwise, these theories are cited to support ML and are not necessary for understanding it. Still, we do encourage their further exploration in the associated references.

Meaning-making language is a compelling tool that—based on evidence—is not frequently expressed. In brief, meaning-making talk grafts a follower's personal goals with a higher purpose through work. This

form of speech lets an employee know that her/his talents are uniquely appreciated and helps that person guide these skills toward organizational contribution. To effectively use meaning-making language, leaders must overcome personal psychological noise to raise their own awareness of follower strengths and aspirations. Drawing from this awareness, leaders communicate respect for a follower's unique abilities and hopes and offer guidance on how to intersect these attributes with work goals. In doing so, the leader must also paint a lucid picture of organizational vision, values, and cultural norms. Communicating an inspiring vision and congruent set of values are paramount. Most of us want to believe that our work serves a higher cause.

Often, such talk is informal and conveyed through metaphors and stories. For example, tales of organizational heroes and heroines who go above and beyond to serve a commendable organizational purpose (as well as narratives about those who have failed to do so) are all forms of meaning-making language. Importantly, meaning-making language also informs a follower about cultural rules that must be respected in order to succeed. When a boss tells an employee that the CEO's annual dinner is a command performance or that a representative from information systems must be included in the new product task force, meaning-making language is happening. This ML dimension also reduces the traditional boss-subordinate power differential because it requires the leader to actively affirm a follower's strengths.

Meaning-making language meshes well with transformational leadership because it is instrumental during times of organizational entry, assimilation, and change. Followers experience considerable sense making when they enter and find their niches in an organization. Change at work also evokes similar questioning. Meaning-making language responds to this inquiry by sharing mental models, skills coaching, and organizational norms. Relatedly, meaning-making language evokes organizational identification (a sense of belonging in the work place) and self-efficacy (felt confidence in one's abilities) because followers are treated as *persons of consequence*. Lastly, meaning-making language imbues significance to what a follower accomplishes on the job.

Meaning-making language springs from theories in management, psychology, and communication. It is firmly rooted in the management theories of interpersonal sense making, the job characteristics model (task significance, task identity, and experienced meaningfulness of work), positive leadership, and transformational leadership (Bass and Riggio

2006; Cameron 2012; Dutton and Spreitzer 2014; Mayfield et al. 2015; Sullivan 1988; Weick 1995; Wrzesniewski et al. 2003; Yukl 2013). In psychology, meaning-making echoes Viktor Frankel's logotherapy, where the ultimate human aspiration is to embrace meaning (Frankl 1985, 2006; Pattakos 2010). In communication, this dimension of ML draws influence from Jablin's models of workplace entry and assimilation, symbolic interactionism, and the communicative construction of organizational culture (Blumer 1986; Jablin 2001; Smircich 1983; Smircich ad Morgan 1982).

Empathetic Language

In comparison to meaning-making language, the second dimension of ML, *empathetic language*, is more rarely used. Our research data show that it is the least commonly spoken of all three ML dimensions. This observation is curious because when we bring our whole selves to work, we are more engaged and productive. Existing studies also sustain this contention. When empathetic language is not present, an employee's natural response is self-compartmentalization at work, which suppresses emotional ties with the boss. Such constriction augurs poorly for giving one's best to the job. When an employee doesn't bring the whole self to work, creativity and innovation suffer.

So what exactly is empathetic language? It refers to the leader's ability to walk in another's shoes, to connect emotionally with a follower. Through empathetic language, a leader bonds with a follower in a wide array of scenarios. They can be positive, such as an accolade when a worker executes a challenging task successfully, "Good job, Dana!" Or these situations can be negative, such as giving reassurance when a worker encounters a setback in project progress, "I know this is tough, but you can overcome this setback." Many times, a leader's use of empathetic language conveys a certain vulnerability and humility, too. The leader has to be willing to lower the employee–boss power differential in order to identify with an employee's experience through speech. He or she becomes more (and refreshingly) human through such openness. The scope of empathetic language is not limited to task-related events either. Empathetic language includes messages of support, compassion, and shared happiness for personal life events. For example, a leader using empathetic language would communicate heartfelt concern about a serious illness in a follower's family. Another type of empathetic message

would be to congratulate a follower about their child's scholarship award.

Although the use of empathetic language is uncommon, a number of management and other social scientists have demonstrated its benefits, including higher follower performance, job satisfaction, and engagement (Cameron 2012; Dutton and Spreitzer 2014; Dutton et al. 2014; Goleman 1998; Miller 2013). Empathetic language is closely tied to the theories of positive organizational behavior, people-oriented leadership models, compassion in the workplace, the supportive factor in path goal theory, empathy in emotional intelligence, and compassionate communication (Dutton and Spreitzer 2014; Dutton et al. 2014; Goleman 1998; House 1971; Miner 2005; Sullivan 1988; Yukl 2013).

Direction-Giving Language

The third dimension of ML, *direction-giving language*, dominates most leader talk, and its role is vital in effective leader communication. Direction-giving language is a key to getting the right things done in the right ways—in other words, effectively and efficiently. This form of speech dispels ambiguity through transparency. The leader articulates all the information that is important for performing one's job. Specifically, direction-giving language clarifies the actions needed to reach the organizational vision and its goals (including a task's time, quality, and process requirements) and the rewards that are associated with attaining them. In addition, direction-giving language comprises task feedback, which—if given constructively—has the potential to enhance employee learning, self-efficacy, and performance. Another advantage of direction-giving language is the reduction of role ambiguity and its partner, stress. We lose valuable time and energy when we worry about how to fulfill our work requirements.

In a sense, direction-giving language offers us the psychological safety of knowing what is expected and what to expect in return. An example of direction-giving language happens when a boss details an assignment to an employee including how it fits into the big organizational picture, what successful assignment completion looks like, how the results will be measured, processes and policies that should be followed in task fulfillment, preferable and acceptable time frames for assignment delivery, and reward contingencies. Direction-giving language should also continue throughout the task and after its completion via coaching and constructive task feedback. Similar to the preceding two ML dimensions,

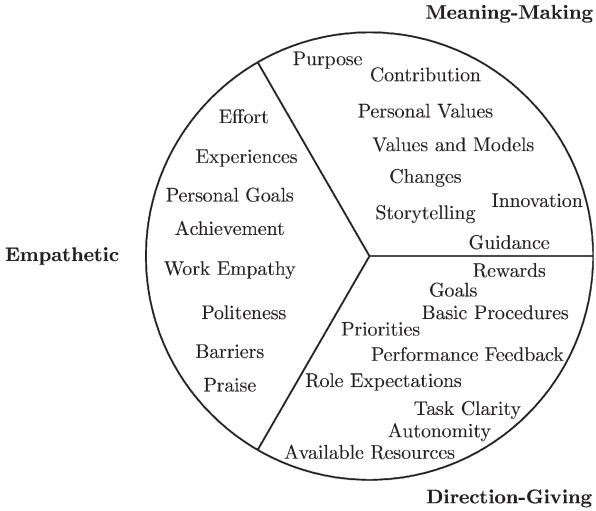

Fig. 2.1 A graphical representation of motivating language's three facets and their aspects. The figure shows the major aspects of each motivating language facet within each area. This figure has been released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license by Milton and Jacqueline Mayfield. For full information go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

direction-giving language adds equilibrium to the power balance between a leader and follower. Information is power, and with direction-giving language, such power becomes more accessible.

Management and social science literature are replete with theories that refer to direction-giving language. It is embedded in task identity, feedback, and the critical psychological states of experienced responsibility for a work outcome and knowledge of work results in the job characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham 1980; Sullivan 1988). Direction-giving language is also related to goal setting, expectancy, and (directive leadership) path goal theories (House 1971; Locke and Latham 1990; Miner 2005; Sullivan 1988; Vroom 1994; Yukl 2013).

All of the three preceding motivating language dimensions are shown graphically in Fig. 2.1. Before going any farther, we now introduce four assumptions for motivating language that optimize its positive influences for employees and their organizations. *The leader must walk the talk.*

Evidence and human behavior tell us that credibility comes from actions that reflect spoken words. This assumption has been tested with conclusions that high motivating language leaders are viewed by followers as having strong behavioral integrity and credibility (Holmes and Parker 2017). More support for this assumption comes from numerous social science studies which show that people rely on actions for sense making cues when they perceive a disconnect between actions and words. The next assumption is that *motivating language reflects most leader-to-follower work related communication*. This same assumption springs from Sullivan's translation of linguistics theory and its boundaries (Sullivan 1988).

Two other assumptions partner with motivating language. *Followers must accurately decode the leader's intended message. Even though the domain of ML is confined to leader talk, employees must correctly understand what the leader is trying to say.* To incorporate this assumption, measures of motivating language use are often based on follower input. (The motivating language scale is drawn from employee perceptions, for instance.) There is also an implicit feedback loop from employees to the boss since high-ML leaders must be keenly aware of follower experiences to use dimensions such as meaning-making and empathetic language well. We envision this sensitivity to include open-ended questions and active listening. Nonetheless, this feedback loop has not been explored to date.

Lastly, Sullivan proposed that *all three dimensions of motivating language must be strategically coordinated to achieve the best results.* This assertion has been backed by empirical research (Mayfield et al. 2015; Sullivan 1988). The integration most likely happens over time and is influenced by organizational events. For instance, a leader would probably use more meaning-making language with new hires and during times of organizational transition. During periods of more organizational stability, direction-giving and/or empathetic language might prevail. Moreover, a kind and caring boss can give lousy directions and fail to communicate how a task aligns with the overall company objectives. In such a case, we predict that there will be weaker positive outcomes, if any. Fortunately, we believe that motivating language is a learned skill, so its appropriate combinations can be acquired through training and development.

Research Findings: What We Do and Do not Know

Motivating language has been tested through both quantitative and qualitative methods. But the most commonly used measure is the motivating language scale (Mayfield et al. 1995). This instrument has consistently demonstrated robust reliability and validity in several applications and diverse settings over the past twenty-four years (Mayfield and Mayfield, in press, 2017). Both the original and an updated, revised MLS will be discussed in Chap. 9, which treats ML evaluation. Other qualitative methods have been used for exploring motivating language too, including conversation and content analysis.

Motivating language research findings are promising and bode well for improving employee and organizational well-being. (Chapter 7, on evidence-based benefits, gives more in-depth treatment of these results.) Cumulative motivating language studies show significant positive relationships between ML and employee job satisfaction, performance, engagement, self-efficacy, self-leadership, creativity, innovation, perceived leader competence, communication satisfaction of one's leader, lower absenteeism, voice, intent to stay, and effective decision making (see Chap. 7 for details). Although motivating language generally refers to the communication channel of spoken words, Wang and colleagues (Wang et al. 2009) found that ML could be expressed in writing to nurture creativity in virtual teams. These authors made this discovery with a quasi-experimental design, thus suggesting causality.

All of these findings come from application of a relatively new model. So much remains to be known. In most studies, motivating language has been investigated on a dyadic level of analysis (immediate boss to a direct report) with a focus on individual (employee) outcomes. Yet, a few scholars have looked at ML at team (group) and organizational levels of analysis and uncovered convincing outcomes, including higher performance (Holmes 2012; Wang et al. 2009). These extensions are fruitful areas for future research.

Despite motivating language's benefits, there are limitations and uncharted territory that need clarification. (These unanswered questions will be addressed more fully by Chap. 10 on future directions.) One germane topic is the influence of ML on part-time workers. A study showed that while motivating language improved part-time employee job satisfaction, it did not boost their performance (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006). Also, the MLT model is limited to oral leader communication.

True, there is a strong relationship between motivating language and employee willingness to express voice (a follower's confidence to speak up about work issues). Still, voice cannot fully represent two-way communication (Mayfield and Mayfield 2017). Thus, the relationship between motivating language and employee feedback is an open area that is ripe for investigation.

Other important progress needs to be made on questions about motivating language processes, training, and modifications in non-USA national cultures. (Training and development potential is a main topic of Chap. 11.) Regarding ML processes, some meaningful steps have been taken. Holmes and Parker (2017) found that behavioral integrity and credibility are significant antecedents. Relatedly, Mayfield and Mayfield (in press) used a simulation to suggest that motivating language spreads pervasively throughout an organization when top leaders model it. Still, more relevant insights need to be gathered.

For training, conducting longitudinal instructional effectiveness tests, ideally with control groups, will enhance ML knowledge and application. We cannot overemphasize our vision of motivating language as a learned behavior. Many leadership communication problems are not intentional. Rather, they reflect an educational deficit that can be corrected through effective training and coaching. Lastly, we need to find out more about how motivating language is modified within a cultural context, particularly national ones. To date, we do know that motivating language generalizes to other national cultures such as Mexico, Japan, Taiwan, Kuwait, China, Australia, Turkey, and Poland (see Chap. 9 for details). What we need to discover are the possible ways that national culture changes the use of motivating language. For instance, how is empathetic language expressed in low-context cultures that don't place high value on emotions at work?

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CHAPTER 3

Fitting into the Big Picture: Meaning-Making Language

Abstract This chapter explores the meaning-making dimension of motivating language. We define workplace meaning and discuss why it is vital to employee motivation, performance, and well-being. We also link meaning-making language to key related theories, such as the job characteristics model, sense making, interpersonal sense making, the theory of purposeful work, logotherapy, job Calling, and respectful inquiry. This chapter portrays the breadth of meaning-making language as captured by various categories: *cultural storytelling, links between personal and work values, organizational/cultural changes, behavioral guidance, cultural values and mental models, collective/higher purpose, task significance/individual contribution,* and *innovation*.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication
Meaning-making language · Organizational culture · Sense making
Personal values

Overview

This chapter explores the meaning-making dimension of motivating language. We present a definition of workplace meaning and discuss why it is vital to employee motivation, performance, and well-being. Key related theories, such as—but not limited to—the job characteristics model, sense making, interpersonal sense making, the theory of purposeful

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work, logotherapy, job Calling, and respectful inquiry sustain our viewpoint and meaning-making language's relevance.

This chapter portrays meaning-making language as having breadth, which is captured by various categories of examples: *cultural storytelling, links between personal and work values, organizational/cultural changes, behavioral guidance, cultural values and mental models, collective/higher purpose, task significance/individual contribution*, and *innovation*. Lastly, meaning-making language is also noted by depth within these categories. Each group of examples incorporates diverse skill levels. Meaning-making language and the other two ML dimensions are progressive communication abilities, which can be learned and practiced. Excelling in them is both an art and a science.

Spirit in the Workplace

Meaning-making language is not emphasized as much as directive leader communication in management literature. Yet meaning-making is a core dimension of motivating language. This form of speech occurs when a leader articulates cultural norms, unwritten behavioral expectations, organizational vision and values, and sincere appreciation for a follower's unique talents and aspirations. Meaning-making language also guides a follower to channel these same talents and values into organizational contribution. This chapter will explain how meaning-making language happens by first defining meaning at work, its criticality, its intersection with leader talk, and the progressive motivating language stages through which it is shared. Throughout this process, we'll highlight important theoretical foundations.

What is Meaning at Work?

To define meaning at work, we turn to scholars of interpersonal sense making theory who view meaning as "employees' understanding of *what* they do at work as well as the *significance* of what they do" (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003, p. 99). Congruent with these researchers, we assume that meaning is a prime motivator and a dynamic interplay between environmental cues (social exchanges with others—including bosses, job design, society,) and personal values. In this framework, meaning is also a form of symbolic interactionism where other people

influence how an employee interprets her/his perception of self and merit at work (Blumer 1986; Wrzesniewski et al. 2003).

More specifically, our model of work meaning derives from (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003) two part concept: the actual job itself—tasks, location, responsibilities, etc.—and the individual's perception of the job's value. The second part includes an individual's personality and social interaction with others—one's boss, peers, subordinates, customers, and society. This latter part of the meaning is also *relational* and, for this book's purpose, will focus on oral communication links between leader and follower (Monnot 2016). In other words, we believe that bosses significantly influence how employees evaluate the meaning of their own work through speech.

Why is Meaning at Work Important?

The luminary psychiatrist, Viktor Frankl (1985), proposed that seeking meaning is the prime motivator of people. Other studies have demonstrated that subjective well-being—referring to life satisfaction, mood, and most importantly, flourishing (i.e., living up to one's potential)—are strongly linked with meaning (OECD 2013; Seligman 2012). We agree. We turned to Frankl's work and created a model of logoleadership, where a leader facilitates a follower's quest for meaning through attentive communication, which ties implicit goals with organizational vision (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012). Frankl's and the positive psychology perspectives have been extended by organizational behavior research. Case in point, the well-supported job characteristics model identifies the motivational aspects of work that strongly impact employee attitudes and behaviors; namely task identity, skill variety, task significance, autonomy, and feedback.

These motivators connect with work outcomes via three *critical* psychological states, "experienced meaningfulness of the work, experienced responsibility for the outcomes of the work, knowledge of the results of the work activities." (Barrick et al. 2013, p. 12; Hackman and Oldham 1980; Miner 2005). Humphrey and colleagues (2007) conducted a meta-analysis (a quantitative summary of multiple study results) to conclude that *experienced meaning* (the crux of meaning-making language) is the most influential mediator of these states (Barrick et al. 2013). The more recent theory of purposeful work behavior (Barrick et al. 2013) also embraces the significance of work meaning in motivation. Related to our earlier

definition, the theory of purposeful work behavior asserts that *communion striving* or the desire for harmonious interpersonal connection is intertwined with perceived meaning. Thus, this theory and associated studies have evolved to integrate social and internal cues with an employee's interpretation of meaning, which leads to motivation (Barrick et al. 2013; Monnot 2016; Parker 2014).

Events frame the importance of meaning. Major changes can accelerate an individual's desire for sense making (Weick 1995). While such major changes are always subjective (from employee perceptions), they typically include organizational entry and assimilation, new job demands, and cultural transition. During these times, the need for meaning often becomes acute, and leader communication assumes a greater role in sense making.

Meaning's influence extends to energy and felt stress, two factors that impact an employee's motivation and engagement levels. For example, when a leader guides a follower to clearly see the positive significance of what he or she does, motivation grows and stress decreases. This view stems from conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll 1989), which builds on psychological research to propose that people naturally seek fulfilling, meaningful lives. Detraction from this basic human quest causes anxiety and excess energy expenditure, manifesting as stress and lack of focus. On the other hand, social support (via leader talk in this book) can augment follower well-being, commitment, and engagement.

Categorical and Progressive Forms of Meaning-Making Language

Meaning-making language can be best understood through examples. These can be categorized by types and the evolution of a leader's ML skills, namely breadth and depth. Meaning-making examples can be categorized into *cultural storytelling, links between personal and work values, organizational/cultural changes, behavioral guidance, cultural values and mental models, collective/higher purpose, task significance/individual contribution,* and *innovation*. Figure 3.1 graphically displays these categories. Bear in mind that meaning-making language can be informal at times and event dependent. A boss may tell a direct report not to wear pink shirts at a casual social gathering (certainly not our advice, but we've heard it said!). Also and as previously noted, meaning-making

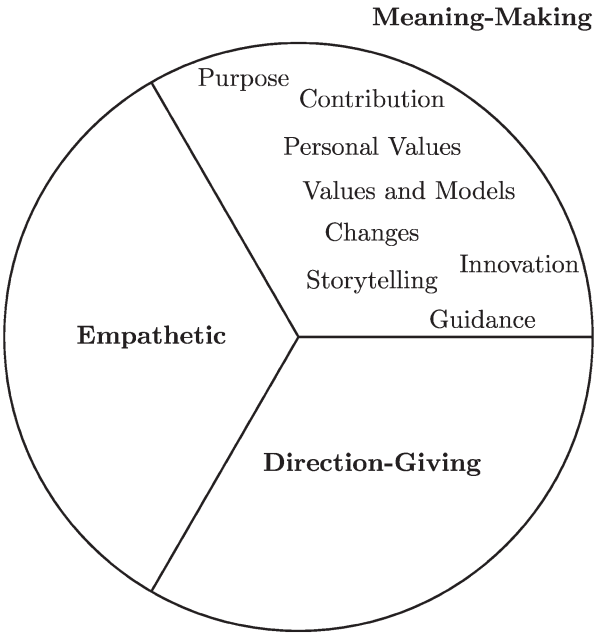

Fig. 3.1 Meaning-Making. The figure highlights meaning-making language and the various communication behaviors within this dimension. This figure has been released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license by Milton and Jacqueline Mayfield. For full information go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

language becomes more prevalent during organizational socialization and periods of major change at work, the times when more sense making is likely to take place.

Now we'll explore this typology further. For *cultural storytelling*, the most common examples are the narratives about cultural rules, sometimes in the form of metaphors or allegories. "Accountants should not be like foxes in the hen house" (emphasizing the importance of ethics to a junior CPA). Or "We are more like tortoises than hares" (advocating an organizational strategy for thoughtful consultation with customers versus aggressive marketing to a new client service representative). Sometimes, these stories will portray organizational heroes and

heroines—those who went above and beyond to fulfill the company mission or pariahs—those who miserably failed to advance organizational goals. Interspersed in the tales are accounts about how these characters were rewarded or punished.

Ideally and with more capable motivating language users, the stories will be tailored to positively invoke inspiration and spring from a follower's personal values. In the case of a registered nurse who aspires to help children, the supervisor could share a narrative about a dedicated pediatric nurse who courageously helped to save lives and enhanced their hospital's reputation as well. This last example portrays more sophisticated motivating language speech since it involves leader mindfulness and emotional intelligence. A leader must be consciously aware of and sensitive to a follower's values in order to guide their integration of personal and organizational goals.

Intentional sensitivity embodies the relational and reflexive attributes of ML. All motivating language dimensions draw from personal connections (leaders are not autonomous) and managerial responsibility for ethical, thoughtful behavior (Cunliffe and Eriksen 2011; Fairhurst and Connaughton 2013; Jian and Fairhurst 2017; Monnot 2016). Although not yet formally tested, motivating language is expected to embrace respectful inquiry. This theory asserts that interpersonal leadership communication skills such as posing open ended questions, attentive listening, and soliciting/supporting honest follower feedback will grow follower intrinsic motivation (Van Quaquebeke and Felps, in press).

You might be asking for a better description of the communication practices that a leader can use to facilitate this process. The next part of our meaning-making language speech typology, *linking personal values to work/organizational values,* helps to answer this question. To begin with, a boss has to take the time and effort to find out what a follower holds near and dear. For the boss, this entails asking, listening, and leaving her/his ego aside. Once these values are learned, the leader helps the follower find *matches* with organizational objectives. The truth is that in some circumstances these connections may not be attainable. In such situations, we have seen good leaders facilitate employee internal transfer, give training for more meaningful tasks, and even assist the person to secure a more compatible job externally. Above all, it is vital that the motivating language speaker expresses acceptance and respect for the personal values of an employee, regardless of the leader's own viewpoints.

Employee respect from leaders becomes acutely critical during times of organizational transition. Thus, the category, *organizational/cultural changes,* captures motivating language use when these events happen. High-ML leaders prioritize vision framing, timing, transparency, and other directed concern when explaining such changes. In change contexts, meaning-making language intersects with direction-giving talk. Clearly and persuasively articulating (framing) organizational vision (the organization's overall purpose, values, and future directions) is always a top leadership priority. Without understanding an organization's vision, employees can't fulfill it. And organizational vision is often woefully under communicated, especially during times of change when uncertainty looms and the need for a compelling, unifying path is the greatest (Kotter 2007).

Timing is shown by the immediacy with which a leader informs a follower of major changes that could impact them. This tactic also is effective in managing the *grapevine* or informal communication network in an organization, which—when left to its own devices—can make harmful gossip contagious. The leader's communication primacy is partnered with relevant knowledge updates on change as soon as they are needed. Organizational cultures where high-motivating language is prevalent are distinguished by comprehensive orientation and socialization processes for incoming employees. Zappo's *Culture Book,* which describes cultural values to new hires from a worker's viewpoint, typifies the entry process in high-ML organizations (Hsieh 2010). This guide was created by Zappo's employees and serves as a focal point for leader—newcomer discussion.

Transparency is the hallmark of all three dimensions of motivating language and is visibly present with meaning-making language during organizational and cultural change. High-ML leaders readily share important facts and honestly discuss projected outcomes from change with followers, even worst case scenarios or admissions of what is not yet known. This candor includes explanations of how the change connects with the organization's vision. Furthermore, such talk shows other directed concern since a highly competent ML leader articulates what specific consequences an organizational transition will have for an individual follower.

Each individual follower must respect certain processes and rules of organizational etiquette in order to effectively accomplish task goals. The next category of meaning-making language, *behavioral guidelines/artifacts*, incorporates the leadership coaching that nurtures this end. Directly outlining desirable comportment is a basic form of leader talk in this example set. One of us had a boss who carefully discussed a set

of *ropes* with newcomers. "The president's annual party is a command performance where a *no show* will raise eyebrows… And no blue jeans in the office at any time." Whether the follower agrees or not, the rules have been made clear. Such talk takes the all important factor of person-organization (P-O) fit into consideration. Research tells us that P-O overrides an employee's cognitive and technical abilities when it comes to turnover, performance, and career advancement. It's very difficult to succeed when P-O is not good (Cascio 2012).

Behavioral guidelines include informal political advice. A leader using meaning-making language can point out who key organizational stakeholders are and how to be persuasive with them, especially in terms of a relevant project. Moreover, the majority of jobs today are knowledge based and demand some level of team cooperation. Meaning-making talk incorporates mentoring to optimize such collaboration. According to a meta-analysis of Gallup workplace studies, these relational ties are critical drivers of employee engagement (Harter et al. 2003).

The same meta-analysis of Gallup organizational research found that most employees sincerely desire contribution to a purpose greater than themselves. These findings are in concert with Viktor Frankl's logotherapy and the concept of logoleadership that we drew from his teachings. Leader responsiveness to these follower needs is embedded in the next two categories of meaning-making language: *expresses collective, higher purposes* and *task significance/individual organizational contributions.* The first category captures macro-level aspirations while the latter portrays individual ones. Our discussion of both factors combines them since even though they are separate, there is much interrelatedness between them.

For both types of meaning-making, a tantalizing portrait of the organizational vision is paramount in leader-to-follower communication. This vision should be inspirational and transcend financial and productivity goals. Examples can be stories about how the organization benefits society—manufacturing low-cost computers for school-age children or developing life-saving drugs, for instance. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) actions can also be emphasized. Participation in the ALS Ice Bucket or raising money to feed the hungry (HEB supermarket chain's Feast of Sharing) both demonstrate CSR initiatives.

Leader talk that evokes a collective, higher purpose also should connect with a follower on a more personal level. An employee must understand how her/his specific job contributes value to the big picture for

deriving motivation from meaning. This link is especially important for lower level and sometimes lower status employees (Wrzesniewski et al. 2003). Their recognition as integral players in the organization's vision is critical because they are often its bedrock. Cascio and Boudreau (2011) observe how groundskeepers are among the most valuable employees in Disney theme parks because they maintain the cleanliness that promotes the customer desired mood of escapism. The groundskeepers are also likely to answer customer questions making the overall visitor experience more pleasant.

Furthermore, individually tailored meaning-making language, including telling an employee how their specific work advances society as well as the organization, can promote job crafting and subsequently, a job Calling orientation in followers (Wrzesniewski 2003). Job crafting occurs when deeper levels of meaning are encountered by an employee at work. Such discovery then nurtures a job Calling orientation. This employee mindset views a job as a means of giving back to a higher purpose. According to research, the benefits of a Calling orientation are multifold. These positive effects include more employee exerted effort and time spent on work tasks, and higher job and life satisfaction—including gaining pleasure from leisure activities (Wrzesniewski 2003).

To illustrate how meaning-making language can evoke job crafting and a job Calling, consider the case of Mary. She is an executive assistant with a networked pharmaceutical firm that partners with researchers worldwide to conduct drug trials. The drugs being evaluated are targeted for hard to treat diseases, such as ALS and congestive heart failure. For these maladies, research and development to improve treatments are not always prioritized by major pharmaceutical manufacturers. In other words, Mary's company serves disregarded, but deserving markets. Her boss is a high-meaning-making language user and frequently reminds Mary how her work helps her organization and the patients who are afflicted with terrible illnesses. Her leader's oral communication evokes strong emotions of commitment and pride in Mary who goes above and beyond in fulfilling her job duties, even participating in company sponsored volunteer work during her leisure time.

The preceding vignette is a true story that describes the impact of task significance—the extent that one's task contributes to others, a pivotal factor in the jobs characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham 1976). Another key piece of this same model—skill variety or the diversity of work tasks—is related to meaning-making language's last category of

examples, *Innovation*. Meaning-making language encourages the development of novel skills and approaches to problem-solving. Put simply, meaning-making language spurs garden variety creativity or "new and better ways to perform often routine jobs" (Amabile 1998; Mayfield 2009, p. 10). The strong relationship between meaning-making talk and garden variety creativity is constructed through spoken leader emphasis on the importance of innovation for organizational values. In addition, a high-ML leader visibly credits an employee's specific creative initiatives that contribute to organizational goals. Our research supports these expectations since motivating language is significantly and positively related to how supported employees feel in their creativity and their reported innovation as well (Mayfield and Mayfield 2004, 2017).

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CHAPTER 4

Speaking from the Heart: Empathetic Language

Abstract This chapter explores motivating language's empathetic language dimension. We begin with including a broad scope of empathy—civility, perspective taking, empathy, and compassion—to capture this form of leader talk. This chapter also explains how leaders incorporate diverse and progressive categories of empathy or emotional bonding with followers into their speech through empathetic language. These categories include *politeness/cordiality, work empathy, achievement, personal goals, performancepraise, personal experiences, effort,* and *barriers.*

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication Empathetic language · Emotions

Overview

This chapter explores the empathetic language dimension of ML. We begin with including a broad scope of empathy—civility, perspective taking, empathy, and compassion—to capture this form of leader talk. We then discuss why this wide domain of leadership empathy matters for employees, the leader, and the organization. These compelling factors range from employee performance, job satisfaction to overall well-being. The leader's perceived competence and personal fulfillment are also impacted by her or his level of empathy. Furthermore, the demands of emotional labor strongly influence how empathy is adapted.

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Next, this chapter explains how leaders incorporate diverse and the progressive categories of empathy or emotional bonding with followers into their speech through empathetic language. These categories include *politeness/cordiality, work empathy, achievement, personal goals, performance praise, personal experiences, effort,* and *barriers.* Expressing the full spectrum of empathetic language is a rich, challenging, and rewarding process for leaders. And this form of talk encourages employees to bring their whole selves to work.

Bringing Emotions to Work

We now arrive at the next dimension of ML—empathetic language. This leader behavior refers to being polite toward, understanding, accepting, and emotionally supporting followers through oral communication. In brief, empathetic language encourages employees to bring their whole selves to work and forges interpersonal bonds between a leader and a follower. Historical data and management literature tell us that such talk is not often used. Yet these sources also tell us that it is very much desired by followers and enrich the leader as well. Perhaps the stereotypical *tough leader* image has convinced some managers that caring messages will frame them as weak and ripe for manipulation. Perhaps certain leaders are never trained to talk this way. Whatever the rationales for leaders' scant use of empathetic language may be, extensive research says that they are misguided. In reality, the opposite approach—expressing empathetic language more frequently—is tied to positive organizational, leader, and follower outcomes, as this chapter will demonstrate.

Our discussion of empathetic language is organized by giving a broad, inclusive definition of empathy, explaining why empathy matters, and by offering progressive examples of its practice in motivating language. Throughout this process, we will examine historical, theoretical roots of empathetic language. We will also show how empathetic language (even though it's a distinct factor) intersects with meaning-making speech. The link between the two modes is quite important since, based on our studies, we contend that all three motivating language dimensions must be coordinated to achieve optimal benefits.

What Is Empathy?

Empathetic language is not confined to just empathy per se—an understanding and sensitivity to the needs of others. Instead, empathetic language conveys a broader spectrum of human caring. This more inclusive definition resolves some boundary overlaps between empathy and related constructs in the literature. It also reflects motivating language's assumption that most forms of leader to follower talk are in its scope. Moreover, empathetic language underscores our belief that ML is not a monologue. Instead, motivating language is relational, reaching out to connect with followers.

The bases of our expanded view of empathy are interrelated and spring from civility, perspective taking, empathy, and compassion. Civility represents politeness and treating people with respect and dignity. Civility is not necessarily organizational citizenship behavior since it doesn't specify going the extra mile for the firm. But it does mean expressing the recognition and appreciation of others. In comparison, perspective taking is the ability to envision what it's like to walk in someone else's shoes (Galinsky et al. 2005) and "occurs when an observer tries to understand in a non-judgmental way, the thoughts, motives, and/or feelings of a target, as well as why they think and/or feel the way they do." (Parker et al. 2008, p. 151) Communicatively, perspective taking occurs through verbally acknowledging another's experience and by checking in on their opinions and attitudes via questions and active listening (Ku et al. 2015; Van Quaquebeke and Felps in press).

Empathy is genuinely caring about others and manifesting these sentiments. It differs from perspective taking because its emotional core is more invested in someone else's feelings. With empathy, we place ourselves in another's shoes instead of cognitively understanding what it's like to walk in them. Empathy is a main attribute of emotional intelligence and can be measured by the degrees to which someone shows sensitivity to others' feelings and needs for growth and is responsively willing to serve them—especially in their development. Empathetic leaders do not only listen attentively. Similar to perspective taking, they engage in active listening by paraphrasing questions to ensure comprehension as well as coaching and sharing their own stories when relevant. In so doing, communicating empathy lowers the power differential between leader and follower, allowing for the development of personal rapport (Gentry et al. 2007; Goleman 2004).

The most intensive kind of empathy is compassion, "an interpersonal process involving the noticing, feeling, sense making and acting that alleviates the suffering of another person" (Dutton et al. 2014, p. 278). Suffering in the workplace is widespread, a phenomenon for which there are multiple reasons. Suffering at one time or another is a universal human condition. So when people bring their whole selves to work, they may carry grief and other stresses with them. Moreover, economic and organizational challenges, such as the recent widespread rupture of traditional psychological contracts between employers and employees, have exacerbated suffering in the workplace. Leadership compassion soothes this discomfort through articulating real concern, signaling rules for expressing suffering at work, and adding meaning to follower suffering via recognition and discussion. Compassion, like meaning-making language, also eases suffering through verbal reinforcement of mutual values and goals. Similar to meaning-making language, compassion reduces the power gap between boss and employee (Dutton and Spreitzer 2014; Dutton et al. 2014).

Highly competent ML leaders will incorporate the entire spectrum of spoken empathy in situationally appropriate ways. Later in this chapter, we will illustrate how this can be done. At this point, it's important to note that a leader's ability to do so is biological, psychological, and learned. Recently, social scientists and evolutionary biologists have found robust evidence that humans are other oriented, which makes a great deal of sense when we recognize that we are social animals—we need others to survive (Brown et al. 2011; Dutton et al. 2014; Keltner 2009; Wilson and Wilson 2008). Psychologically, personality traits of openness to experience, extroversion, and prosocial orientation have been associated with altruism (Dutton et al. 2014; Shiota et al. 2006). Most significant, empathy is a skill that can be acquired through training and organizational norms (Dutton et al. 2014; Gentry et al. 2007; Goleman 1998).

Why Is Empathy at Work Important?

There are many compelling reasons why empathy matters. Let's begin with the work of emotional labor. This job function has become vital because developed nations produce more service and technological transfer as economic goods than in the past. The end result of this transformation is more service and knowledge workers who collaborate in teams as well as engage with customers and other stakeholders.

Such interpersonal demands require psychological strategies, namely emotional labor, on the part of employees and leaders. Emotional labor strategies are often governed by the organizational rules for acceptable public display of emotions. In some organizations, norms dictate a *stiff upper lip*. In others, such as with the online apparel retailer Zappos, employees are encouraged to more honestly display emotions at work (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Hsieh 2010).

There are different approaches to emotional labor too. S*urface acting* shows inauthentic feelings (saying *thank you* to a rude customer and not meaning it), and *deep acting* attempts to induce emotions that conform to organizational display norms. While both types of emotional labor can enhance task performance, they can also lead to stress, alienation, and burnout, which undermine performance—including customer satisfaction—and employee well-being, especially when *deep acting* occurs (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Hochschild 1983; Humphrey et al. 2015). The bottom line is that research suggests that employees work and feel better in conditions that promote emotional authenticity (Ashforth and Humphrey 1993; Burch et al. 2013)

Leader empathy can ease and translate emotional labor into positive energy. Simply put, leaders can foster authentic organizational cultures where employees do bring their whole selves to work. Leaders have discretion to set and change emotional display rules for employees. Zappos has the core cultural value of "Build Open and Honest Relationships With Communication." (Hsieh 2010) There are many other ways that negative emotional labor can be countered through leader communication. For example, a leader can reassure an employee that showing anxiety is normal during an organizational merger. He or she can also give verbal support to followers in challenging situations, including their affective reactions to personal events. Our own research and related studies find that leader emotional displays serve as role models in building acceptable communication norms and organizational culture. When leaders speak honestly and show genuine concern for others, followers are more likely to do the same (Burch et al. 2013; Daniel Goleman et al. 2004; Mayfield and Mayfield, in press). These altruistic signals may well increase the ethical behavior of employees, as a recent study implies (Dietz and Kleinlogel 2014).

There are a few caveats, however, which allow leaders to harness empathy in these fruitful ways. Leaders must first be vigilant since higher organizational rank tends to reduce their sensitivity to the emotions of followers

(Dutton et al. 2014; Ku et al. 2015). Second, but just as important, leaders must effectively manage their own emotional labor through personal reflection, setting healthy boundaries and employing self-nurturing practices before they can best help their followers (Burch et al. 2013; Goleman 1998). Understanding oneself is a prerequisite to mindfulness which unlocks the nuanced communication codes (*spatial dimensions*) of followers (Barlow and Nadeau 2016; Goleman 2004; Hall 1977).

Leader empathy matters for other important reasons. Civility from leaders enhances the self-perceived value and power of followers. It's ironic that kind leaders are sometimes labeled as weak. The inverse appears to be the case. Research shows that leader civility is strongly related to higher performance plus being viewed as competent and likeable by followers, thus enhancing her or his power (Grant 2013; Porath et al. 2015). As noted earlier, incivility not only damages employee attitudes and encourages turnover, but it also has a negative impact on customer relationships (McClean et al. 2013; Spreitzer and Porath 2014). Perspective taking enhances team creativity and ethical decision making (Ku et al. 2015). Likewise, empathy is linked to higher leader job performance (Gentry et al. 2007; Goleman 2000; Rosete and Ciarrochi 2005). Finally, compassion and altruism are both beneficial to the giver and the receiver. Compassionate leaders physiologically handle stress better and feel happier after helping behavior (Boyatzis et al. 2006; Lyubomirsky 2008). Upon receiving leader compassion, followers often have relief from suffering, more connectedness with their boss, and show higher work engagement (Dutton et al. 2014; Miller 2013).

At this point, you may be asking the question "So why do toxic leaders get ahead sometimes?" This inquiry is natural considering recent, discouraging examples of abusive leadership. Our reply is that in most cases, empathy and empathetic language are wise choices for leaders. Data confirm this response. Adam Grant (2013) adeptly calls out a lot of research that supports the benefits of altruism. So do top scholars of emotional intelligence (Goleman 2007; Goleman et al. 2004). But negative leaders can still advance because of their own personalities, follower, and situational characteristics. For instance, some narcissists and those who hold a high need for personal power are skilled linguistic manipulators. Padilla and colleagues (2007) propose that toxic leaders can be sustained by these personality traits, followers who are conformist (with unmet needs, fear of change, etc.) and/or collusive (with strong ambition, low ethical standards, similar values, etc.). These scholars also assert that certain

environmental conditions, such as high uncertainty or a perceived external threat, can promote the rise of poor leaders. Remember too that ML does have a built in defense against positive follower perceptions of poor leaders through its tested assumption of walking the talk (Holmes and Parker 2017; Mayfield et al. 2015). Nonetheless, there still will be exceptions which are beyond the scope of motivating language.

Categorical and Progressive Forms of Empathetic Language

Just like the meaning-making ML dimension, empathetic language can be best understood through examples. These are categorized by types and the evolution of a leader's ML linguistic skills—namely breadth and depth. Categories of empathetic language include *politeness/cordiality, work empathy, achievement, personal goals, performance praise, personal experiences, effort,* and *barriers*—which are captured in Fig. 4.1. Overall, the typology is closely tied with the preceding scholarship on empathy and with a long history of management and social sciences research,

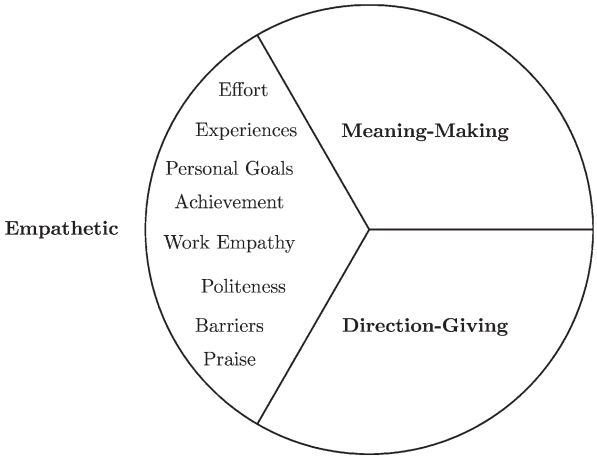

Fig. 4.1 Empathetic language. The figure highlights empathetic language and the various communication behaviors within this dimension. This figure has been released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license by Milton and Jacqueline Mayfield. For full information go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

including the human relations movement, the Ohio State and University of Michigan studies on people orientation, communicative compassion, path goal theory (supportive leadership), LMX, servant, and authentic leadership (House 1971; Miles 2012; Miller 2013; Miner 2005; Shafritz et al. 2015; Sullivan 1988; Yukl 2013).

The first category, *politeness/cordiality*, reflects civility and showing respectfulness to followers in talk. These attributes are not trivial since reported incivility in the workplace has grown to be a common experience, spoken leader to member rudeness has been linked with higher turnover, and leaders serve as very influential role models for follower behaviors. The lack of civility is also associated with lower follower motivation and engagement (Goleman 2007; McClean et al. 2013; Porath et al. 2015).

To promote civility and respectfulness, empathetic language articulates politeness. In other words, the ML competent leader employs cultural norms of good manners with followers. In most cultures, this includes using a friendly greeting at encounters. (In France, saying *bonjour* to a follower is a must for social interactions [Barlow and Nadeau 2016]). Harsh language is not permissible. And verbally interrupting a subordinate should only be done in extenuating circumstances. More skilled ML speakers will often rely on questions instead of issuing commands to followers. Adam Grant (2013) has extensively investigated leader altruism and discovered that polite inquiry is a key tool for leader success.

The next category, *work empathy,* happens when a boss communicates that a follower's job satisfaction is a priority. These messages also entail non-judgmental inquiry and genuine listening to discover how a subordinate feels about her/his work. There is an intersection between work empathy and meaning-making language since a leader may coach an employee about job crafting to improve their job experience. Perspective taking, empathy, and compassion all play roles in work empathy too when leaders express support for follower task setbacks.

Empathetic language includes spoken words for work *achievement and setbacks.* Leader responses to these two situations can be boiled down to spoken support, an unconditional regard. For achievements, verbal congratulations from the boss are in order. As for setbacks, they are an eventuality for anyone who truly puts forth effort. Leaders who use empathetic language effectively talk to encourage dispirited followers. These bosses also use speech to help discouraged employees learn valuable lessons from negative experiences. Thus, the attributes of empathetic

language echo management theories of perceived leader support. Scholars have found that feeling supported by one's leader elicits follower motivation, new knowledge, and creativity (Amabile et al. 2004; Prusak 1996; Wayne et al. 1997). We were not surprised to discover that motivating language has a significant and positive relationship with employee creativity (Mayfield and Mayfield 2017; Wang et al. 2009).

Similar to meaning-making language, empathetic speech also embraces respect for the *personal goals* of the follower. To accomplish this step, the leader has to actively listen and use inquiry to identify just what these goals are. Then, the leader should linguistically offer solid encouragement for these goals. "It's great that you are training for a 10 K!" The end result is that a follower is more likely to bring their whole self to work.

Another form of empathetic language is *praise*. It's curious that leaders don't always congratulate followers on successful efforts or achievements. Notable scholar, Kim Cameron, observed that a leader's affirmative statements to followers should conform to Gottman's et al.'s marriage positivity ratios, five positive comments for each negative one (Cameron 2012; Gottman et al. 1998). The benefits of earnest praise are enormous. Upbeat connections at work promote several desirable outcomes, including better physical and mental health, performance, resilience, commitment, and engagement (Dutton 2014; Fredrickson 2013). Of course, praise to a follower must be genuine and specific: "That was an excellent statistical analysis in your latest report Dana." Otherwise, the leader's words will be viewed as boosterism and inauthentic.

Personal experiences need recognition and support if emotional bonding between leaders and followers is to occur. Here, in particular, empathetic language frees employees to bring the whole person to work. Such talk includes sincere congratulations for personal accomplishments and positive life events, completing a marathon, the birth of a child, etc. Conversely, empathetic language shows genuine compassion for negative life events: health issues, family problems, loss of a loved one, etc. To fulfill this more sophisticated role of empathetic language, bosses must be vigilant in their attentiveness to followers, initially through observation and listening. In speech, they can encourage followers to share their feelings via inquiry and explicitly setting emotional labor rules that permit doing so (Duan et al. 2016). Leaders can also be role models for expressing relevant personal emotions when they display their own.

It is paramount that encouraging emotional display—and all empathetic language messages for that matter—be grounded in healthy psychological boundary setting. Most leaders are not trained psychotherapists. Furthermore, unlimited expression of strong emotions can be harmful to the individual and/or others (Ames and Johar 2009; Lazarus 1991; Smith and Lazarus 1990). Followers can potentially tarnish their workplace images, even hurt themselves or other people as the result of unfettered emotionality. For these reasons, the leader must tread carefully in psychological boundary setting, at times seeking consultation from experts and referring followers to professional resources.

Empathetic language also includes *effort* or leader speech that applauds employee work initiative and endeavor apart from goal attainment. Persistence at work can be virtuous even if it does not produce a "win." For example, a high-performing research and development professional may discover that a targeted new product will not be marketable before it is launched. A leader using strong empathetic language will commend her or him for diligence. These messages about effort are also particularly important for long-term assignments where celebrating small wins helps to sustain a follower's motivation. Relatedly, the last category of empathetic language, work *barriers*, refers to leader spoken support when a follower is engaged in a challenging task. Counter to blame, empathetic language sends oral messages of support and understanding when an employee experiences a work setback. Moreover, the leader does not dictate how the worker *should* feel. Take the case of a budget reduction announcement for a follower's project. In this context, it is inappropriate for a leader to dismiss her or his follower's negative emotional response.

Mastering all the preceding categories of empathetic language is a continuous process, not an end state. In other words, showing empathy is a journey rather than a destination. Some categories, such as politeness, are more easily adopted than more progressive and complex ones such as compassion for personal setbacks or support for effort. The more nuanced and intense leader uses of empathetic language can also get sidetracked by the frequent disruptions that leaders generally face in their daily work. So perfect expression of the complete typology of empathetic language—like its meaning-making counterpart—is a courageous aspiration. Still, it is a noble quest that will deeply enrich leaders, employees', and an organization's well-being.

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CHAPTER 5

Clarity Is Key: Direction-Giving Language

Abstract In this chapter, we discuss direction-giving language, the motivating language dimension most frequently used in organizations. Direction-giving language communicates the vision's goals, what followers need to do to accomplish them, how the work should be carried out, and what rewards can be expected. Effective direction-giving talk involves transparency, goal setting, constructive performance feedback, plus reward contingency and allocation. This chapter explores direction-giving talk by defining it, outlining its value to organizations and employees, and by investigating categorical examples of its expression. These categories include *basic work requirements/procedures*, *performance feedback*, *available resources*, *role expectations*, *task clarity*, *priorities*, *goals*, *rewards*, and *autonomy/authority*. We also touch upon direction-giving language's ties with ethical behavior and its intersection with meaning-making and empathetic talk.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication
Direction-giving language · Task clarity · Rewards

Overview

In this chapter, we discuss direction-giving language, the dimension of ML that is most frequently used in organizations. Direction-giving language captures the goals of the organization's vision, telling what needs to be done, how the work should be accomplished, and how rewards for

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task completion will be adjudicated. Despite these commonsense purposes, direction-giving talk isn't always practiced. Effective direction-giving talk involves transparency, goal setting, constructive performance feedback, plus reward contingency and allocation.

This chapter explores direction-giving talk by defining it, outlining its value to organizations and employees, and by investigating categorical examples of its expression. These categories include *basic work requirements/procedures*, *performance feedback*, *available resources*, *role expectations*, *task clarity*, *priorities*, *goals*, *rewards*, and *autonomy/authority*. We also touch upon direction-giving language's ties with ethical behavior and its intersection with meaning-making and empathetic talk.

Drawing the Map

Direction-giving language has occupied center stage since leadership began, and several management communication experts view it as the backbone of motivation in modern organizations. Numerous researchers, consultants, and leaders in practice have focused on getting it right. Direction-giving talk sounds like common sense as it sparks motivation and fulfillment of an organization's mission. But often, the potential benefits of direction-giving talk remain untapped. This chapter explores this gap by defining direction-giving language, discussing why it's important, and by giving specific examples of its diverse applications. As with previous chapters, we interject theoretical/historical roots for direction-giving language and point out how it aligns with meaning-making and empathetic talk.

What Is Direction-Giving Language?

Jeremiah Sullivan (1988) wrote that direction-giving language predominates in leader talk. We agree. This type of speech is vital because it messages the work that implements the vision, informational transparency, goal setting, constructive performance feedback—both positive and negative—and reward contingencies, along with their allocation. In brief, direction-giving language dispels ambiguity by giving followers the information they need to perform their jobs well and tells them how they will benefit from doing so. Direction-giving talk is the nuts and bolts of leadership.

Contrary to popular authoritative images, direction-giving language is often more compelling when expressed with authentic humility.

Top management scholars find that the best leaders are altruistically humble with fierce devotion to a higher purpose (Collins and Porras 2004; Grant 2013). So direction-giving needs not be always voiced as a command. Inquiry, through sensitively vocalizing questions and actively listening to/addressing responses, is a positive, legitimizing way to forge direction-giving (Grant 2013; Van Quaquebeke and Felps in press; Walker and Aritz 2014). Again, motivating language is not a monologue. Rather, it's a leader's linguistic strategy for engaging in dialogue. An example happens when a leader encourages a follower to give feedback and suggestions during the goal-setting process.

Why Does Direction-Giving Language Matter?

This dimension of ML reflects the observations of Chester Barnard (1968), a founder of modern leadership theory. Barnard noted that effective leadership communication is a vital bridge for connecting individual efforts with organizational goals. If an employee doesn't understand how her or his task contributes to organizational goals or worse yet—what these goals entail along with their priorities—strategy implementation suffers along with performance. Thus, there is an intersection between straightforward and necessary information sharing (direction-giving talk) and the connective nature of meaning-making language.

Management theory has historically showcased direction-giving language for leaders, perhaps implicitly. Scholars have consistently argued that direction-giving functions such as information sharing, facilitating optimal performance, goal setting, and establishing reward contingencies—then administering them—are critical to effective leadership. These contentions are present in Mintzberg's (1973) leader role taxonomy (monitoring and disseminating information), the Ohio State, and University of Michigan studies that identify task-oriented behaviors (Miner 2005; Robbins and Judge 2014; Yukl 2013), and path goal theory's directive- and achievement-oriented leadership functions (House 1971; Miner 2005). Beyond leadership quality, direction-giving language—via information sharing—is viewed as a focal source of the leader–follower power balance (French et al. 2015). Unfortunately, the communicative nature of direction-giving has not often been explicitly spelled out or investigated.

What's more, lack of communicated task clarity and unclear priorities denigrate employee well-being and organizational outcomes. *Role ambiguity* (an employee is unsure about what needs to be done in a task or job) and *role conflict* (an employee has to balance incongruent demands from the job or elsewhere) are significantly linked to harmful follower stress—including burnout, lower job satisfaction, higher absenteeism and turnover, and decreased productivity. Moreover, supervisor speech has been cited as a critical influence on role ambiguity and conflict (Kahn et al. 1964; Katz and Kahn 1978; Rizzo et al. 1970; Robbins and Judge 2014; Tarafdar et al. 2007).

Another important reason why direction-giving language matters is communication transparency—a key factor. Transparency, sharing genuine information that is relevant to an employee's work in a timely manner and showing openness to receiving it, is the foundation of perceived leader effectiveness and trust by followers (Albu and Flyverbom in press; Holmes and Parker 2017; Norman et al. 2010). Both of these attitudes influence employee commitment and engagement—"an individual's involvement with, satisfaction with, and enthusiasm for, the work he or she does" (Robbins and Judge 2014, p. 72). Greater trust can be equated with perceived caring by the leader. In this way, direction-giving talk is related to empathetic language. When supervisor empathy is felt, followers are more likely to be committed to their jobs (Gentry et al. 2007). Employee engagement is especially fragile in today's uncertain work environments where traditional psychological contracts of mutual loyalty between an organization and its members have been severed through benefit reductions, downsizing, and rapid change. In 2015, Gallup reported that only 32% of US employees were engaged; 17.2% were actively disengaged, and 50.8% were not engaged (Adkins 2016; Robbins and Judge 2014; Robinson and Rousseau 1994).

Transparent leader speech communication can also elicit follower voice—a worker's deliberate decision to speak up about work-related issues. The opposite of voice, silence, is associated with lower performance, ethics, job satisfaction, and retention. Think about Enron and the Columbia Space Shuttle disaster as dramatic examples of low voice or high silence (Morrison 2014; Morrison et al. 2011). The willingness to share needed information signals leader openness, an attribute that is tied to stronger, reciprocal voice—employee input about work-related issues (Morrison et al. 2015). The presence of this cue in direction-giving language is further supported by our recent study, which finds a very

positive link between motivating language and employee voice, including speaking up about problems (Mayfield and Mayfield 2017).

Communication transparency is similarly related to follower motivation (Kay and Christophel 1995; Norman et al. 2010). Transparency occurs in effective goal setting: a major part of direction-giving talk. Goal setting is a well-supported motivator that leads to higher performance (Locke and Latham 2002; Miner 2005; Robbins and Hunsaker 2012). When it's well implemented, goal setting increases employee task commitment and reduces role conflict and ambiguity. (We will revisit goal setting in more depth a little later in this chapter.) Likewise, constructive performance feedback—both positive and negative—is intertwined with communication transparency and motivation. Constructive performance feedback involves the follower in a dialogue about her or his evaluation process, solicits her or his own assessment, specifies and negotiates performance measures, clearly outlines desirable behaviors, offers concrete, realistic suggestions along with necessary support for improvement, involves the employee in mutual, clear, performance goal setting, and occurs frequently (Pritchard et al. 2008).

Supervisory commitment to constructive feedback decreases the leader–follower power differential because the employee has a voice in performance evaluation. In doing so, constructive feedback cultivates task autonomy, a core factor in the jobs characteristic model that impacts motivation and performance (Hackman and Oldham 1980). Thus, it is hardly surprising that major studies show constructive feedback to significantly influence follower performance and productivity (Clampitt and Downs 1993; Kluger and DeNisi 1996). Constructive feedback is also associated with perceived leader fairness by followers (DeNisi and Murphy 2017). As a bonus, learning happens and valuable knowledge is gained. Furthermore, constructive feedback, especially when it includes genuine praise, can boost self-efficacy (a follower's confidence that he or she can successfully execute a task), which is strongly related to higher job performance (Bandura 1997; Stajkovic and Luthans 1998).

Constructive feedback, transparency, and goal setting all graft with pertinent rewards for higher follower performance in direction-giving language. Expectancy theory tells us that we choose our motivation levels based on reward attractiveness and attainability. This perspective, strongly advocated by research, emphasizes a leader's role of articulating and distributing meaningful rewards that are tailored to individual follower needs and contributions (Isaac et al. 2001; Miner 2005; Vroom

1994). These rewards should ideally be a mix of intrinsic (pleasure from doing a task itself) and extrinsic (external benefits from doing a task) rewards (Amabile 1993; Kanfer et al. 2017; Pink 2013). But having rewards for successful work is not enough. They must be spelled out and negotiated at various stages in the goal attainment process for optimal motivational results (Robbins and Hunsaker 2012). Direction-giving language fulfills this important step.

It is not surprising that direction-giving language is related to ethical leadership behavior because of its transparency and shared power. Ethical leaders communicate decision-making processes and often involve their followers in them—thus lowering power differentials. On the other hand, leaders who withhold pertinent information are self-serving, low-power allocators. Such managers are often perceived as unethical by followers (Albu and Flyverbom in press; Kalshoven et al. 2011). Ethical leadership is also expressed in direction-giving talk by consistently articulating reward contingencies throughout the performance process (Treviño and Brown 2005).

Progressive and Categorical Forms of Direction-Giving Language

Types of direction-giving talk can be categorized progressively beginning with basic information dissemination and culminating with empowerment. Some leaders will be more versed in certain factors than others. But we offer the gentle reminder that being skilled in motivating language is always an ongoing process and that ML use can be learned.

As outlined earlier, these skill categories include the following: *basic work requirements/procedures*, *performance feedback*, *available resources*, *role expectations*, *task clarity*, *priorities*, goals, *rewards*, and *autonomy/authority*. Fuller explanations will be given for what these factors mean. They are also captured in the graphical model, Fig. 5.1. The first category, *basic work requirements/procedures*, refers to transactional leadership communication. Transactional leaders lay out and administer necessary operations that are not usually directly linked with change (Kesting et al. 2016; Miles 2012). Such talk clearly addresses general task requirements and organizational rules and regulations, including ethical and safety policies.

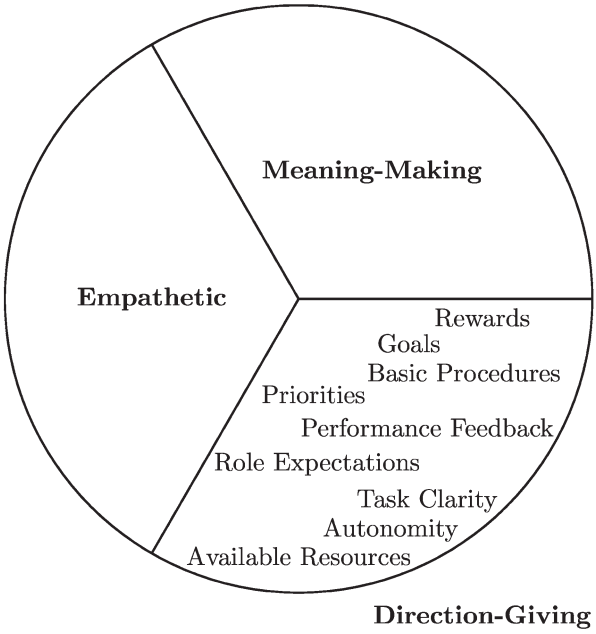

Fig. 5.1 Direction-giving language. The figure highlights direction-giving language and the various communication behaviors within this dimension. This figure has been released under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) license by Milton and Jacqueline Mayfield. For full information go to https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

The importance of transactional speech should not be trivialized. Employees must have a basic understanding of what needs to be done in a job, how to maintain workplace safety, and what is ethically acceptable. (This is not always being accomplished as anyone who has had a frustrating customer service experience can attest.) While the opposite of transactional leadership, transformational leadership—visionary, idealized, inspiring, and change focused—has often been romanticized, it cannot stand on its own. Routine and redundant procedures sustain organizations, too. In fact, they provide the very stability through which change and innovation can occur, especially during their implementation (Bass and Riggio 2006; Ensley et al. 2006; Kesting et al. 2016). Leader speech

that delivers information about basic work requirements/procedures complements an employee handbook and a written job description. Another benefit of this direction-giving factor is lawsuit prevention since misunderstandings about job performance expectations and work behavior become less likely.

With the next direction-giving category, *innovation*, leader talk extends beyond needed facts to coaching for progress. Examples of this type of direction-giving include knowledge sharing that fosters work innovation. ("Have you tried handling the situation this way?", "Have you seen the recent article about this new technique?") Such words should also be accompanied by spoken reassurance that reasonable risk taking is encouraged, and mistakes are for learning, not punishment.

In comparison, *performance feedback* is a more complex and daunting skill to master. Many leaders and employees dread performance reviews, and management experts have long pondered ways to make them better. Annual performance reviews as a forum for feedback are woefully inadequate. Research shows that performance feedback should be given much more often in more constructive ways (Cascio 2012; DeNisi and Murphy 2017; Kluger and DeNisi 1996). Let's take a look at how direction-giving language helps to fulfill such aspirations. To begin, constructive performance feedback should give the follower a participative role through soliciting her or his input and includes active, responsive listening from the leader. Praise should be straightforward, honest, and delivered promptly whenever the situation merits such messages. Its counterpart, negative feedback, should always be private, backed up by evidence, timely, targeted at behaviors that are controllable by the recipient, impersonally focused on specific actions, and accompanied by attainable steps for improving the performance problem(s) (Robbins and Hunsaker 2012). Such recommendations for improvement must include vocal leader support and, if the problem is serious, a follow-up schedule for re-evaluation. None of these recommended steps can be fulfilled without being partnered without a leader's dialogic orientation.

Constructive performance feedback should also be tailored to the individual follower's personality, another area where direction-giving language intersects with the sensitivity offered by empathetic talk (Robbins and Hunsaker 2012). Further, constructive performance feedback should be aligned with how well the employee's optimal contribution level fits into the organization's *big picture* vision. This requirement underscores a strong connection between direction-giving language and

meaning-making talk. In support of constructive performance feedback, the subsequent category of direction-giving language, *available resources*, comes into play. Competent ML leaders expedite messages to followers about accessible ways to facilitate tasks, training, people, knowledge, etc. For example, Jacqueline had a boss who briefed her about all the key players at the start of a project that she was managing.

Roles is the category where the leader tells a follower what her/his job really involves and how it is connected with the jobs of other organizational members. Ideally, this communicative process includes employee input, although this feature is not always practical for highly routine, part-time worker positions. Role clarification in leader speech is best done in combination with meaning-making language, by helping a follower to job craft (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001) and tie their contributions with a higher purpose. (Please see the chapter on meaning-making language if you need a quick review.) Above all, leader explanation of work roles helps diminish role ambiguity and its associated negative outcomes. Such words guide followers to understand how they belong or fit in the organizational culture and point out collaborative paths for interdependent jobs. Role clarification similarly fosters team cooperation. The subsequent factor of *task clarity* is a more focused application of *roles*. Simply put, a leader specifies the job duties that make up a follower's role. For both individual and collaborative tasks, follower input is just as necessary as leader clarity.

Collaborative tasks are often time bound with values that compete (Alipour et al. 2017; Kouzes and Posner 2006). This observation is especially true for matrix organizations where employees are assigned to multiple projects and supervisors. In all of these contexts, the next category of direction-giving language, *priorities*, becomes crucial. If the leader does not verbally help a follower to prioritize job requirements, tasks included, the likely outcome is experienced role conflict with resultant stress, lower performance, etc. Most of us confront competing values in our jobs. Take the case of a junior professor who is evaluated equally for teaching and research. How does he or she decide task order when grades are due for students at the same time as a journal article deadline? How does a customer service representative assist a caller when he/she is rewarded for both speed in issue resolution and helping customers? Without leader guidance on which task to favor, the follower confronts a catch-22. And in many cases, this advice is delivered via spoken words.

Priorities are closely tied to *goals*, the next category of direction-giving language. Clear goals are critical motivators and eradicators of role ambiguity. The follower—if he or she buys into the goal—feels greater commitment to it and knows performance expectations. Many goals are set and implemented in oral speech. But there is more to astute linguistic goal setting than just assigning a task and asking the employee to accept it. Leaders must articulate goals as SMART: Significant, stretching, and specific; Motivational, measurable, and meaningful; Action oriented, attainable, and achievable; Relevant, reasonable, realistic, and rewarded; Time bound, tractable, and tangible (Haughey n.d.; Robbins and Hunsaker 2012). Remember too that the job characteristics model identifies task identity and task significance as core motivators (Hackman and Oldham 1980), so SMART goals in direction-giving language also incorporate the meaning-making dimension.

SMART goals include stretching. Research informs us that setting challenging goals is more motivational when they are accompanied with understandable explanations of all-important task requirements and have subordinate participation. Ideally, the leader asks the follower to help choose or define the goal, since goal commitment is positively linked to follower task performance. Complex goals should also be broken down into smaller milestones (which can also be celebrated as small wins during long-term projects) (Klein et al. 1999; Miner 2005; Robbins and Hunsaker 2012).

The *R* in SMART goals stands for *reward*, the next category of direction-giving language. Leaders should state reward contingencies for goal fulfillment in specific terms and follow through by supporting them. Reward clarification verbalizes an unambiguous picture of what performance behaviors will earn certain benefits. We emphasize that a key-tested assumption for ML is for the leader to walk-the-talk, i.e., to act congruently with what he or she says. Moreover, and based on expectancy theory—employees are motivated by feasible goals that carry attractive rewards. That is, the earned advantages for goal attainment must appeal to the follower (Miner 2005; Vroom 1994). Thus, skilled direction-giving language users will flexibility and mindfully offer rewards that tantalize individual follower values. These leaders integrate direction-giving and meaning-making speech in such situations.

One form of reward that is intrinsically motivational is *autonomy/authority*, the final category of direction-giving language. Delegated authority to make work decisions is not just inspiring. It is imperative

in today's economic environment that demands quick, agile responses. (There is an important caveat: Empowered employees must receive adequate preparation before assuming autonomous work roles.) Autonomy, or the freedom to make decisions about one's own tasks, is an integral and well-supported motivational driver in both Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (inner values and free choice inspire us to perform well) and the job characteristics model (Hackman and Oldham 1980; Ryan and Deci 2000).

Autonomy works best with leader communication that carefully outlines the degree of freedom allowed and the follower's level of authority. Well-communicated autonomy instills self-efficacy in task fulfillment. A recent study discovered that an employee's need for task explanation is not diminished by high work independence (Tummers et al. 2016). Often, employees become discouraged when given responsibility without authority—not a recommended delegation tactic! In addition to voicing task and authority details, the high direction-giving leader speaks words of encouragement to a follower, such as reminders of past accomplishments and her or his specific/relevant talents for performing an assignment. The likely result is that self-efficacy, or the employee's confidence that they can succeed in a task, will grow (Bandura 1997). Self-efficacy is strongly and positively linked with performance (Stajkovic and Luthans 1998). And motivating language research reveals positive, significant relationships between ML and effective employee decision making, self-efficacy, and self-leadership (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012; Mayfield and Mayfield 2016; Mayfield, Mayfield, and Neck manuscript 2017). In conclusion, words that instill self-efficacy give another example of combined direction-giving and empathetic language. The leader vocalizes both capabilities (resources to get a job done) and expresses caring for the follower. The next chapter will elaborate much more on how all three motivating language dimensions work synergistically.

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CHAPTER 6

Motivating Language Coordination

Abstract This chapter describes why all motivating language factors must be used in a coordinated fashion for maximum outcomes. Each facet plays a unique role in leader-to-follower communication that cannot be replaced by the other facets. In addition, a deficit in one facet will create problems in a worker's situation that will blunt the effectiveness of the other facets—a lack of one facet's use may create problems that have to be addressed by the use of other facets. Since a leader's time is limited, this will mean that time using a facet to deal with problems arising from another facet's deficit cannot be used to employ any one facet to its full potential.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication Co-ordination · Synergy

Overview

This chapter gives an overview of why all three facets of motivating language must be used in a coordinated fashion for maximum outcomes, and how the appropriate level for each facet can vary with different circumstances. Each facet plays a unique role in leader-to-follower communication that cannot be replaced by the other facets. In addition, a deficit in one facet will create problems in a worker's situation that will blunt the effectiveness of the other facets—a lack of one facet's use may create

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problems that have to be addressed by the use of other facets. Since a leader's time is limited, this will mean that time using a facet to deal with problems arising from another facet's deficit cannot be used to employ any one facet to its full potential.

How a leader coordinates motivating language facets changes with different circumstances—especially over time and with organizational changes. In static situations, leaders can rely more on prior ML communications to achieve positive follower outcomes. However, when organizational situations change, a leader will need to employ appropriate facets to maintain workplace functioning. Leaders must also tailor their ML use to change follower circumstances as a follower enters new career or life stages or set new workplace goals.

Putting the Pieces Together

In the last three chapters, we discussed each ML facet independently, but quality motivating language requires more than a leader using three separate speech types. Leader speech only becomes quality motivating language by combining all three speech types in an interlinked way—changing from solo instruments to an ensemble as a leader balances different aspects to create a whole. Full motivating language use is synergistic and uses all three facets together to provide more benefits than simply the sum of each facet. Empirical evidence supports ML's synergistic nature (Mayfield and Mayfield 2009), but in this chapter, we will focus more on the logic behind the idea.

We will fully present our logic later in this chapter, but the basic ideas are simple. Each ML facet has a distinct role to play in the workplace, but workplace activities require more than just one type of language. Job duties can be explained through direction-giving language, but direction-giving language cannot deal with affective issues surrounding job duties or provide a worker with the motivation that comes from having a higher sense of purpose connected with a job. Empathetic language provides emotional support, but cannot remove the stress that comes from being unclear about job duties or not understanding an organization's culture. And having an understanding of how your purpose links to your organization is not very useful if you don't understand what you need to do or feel emotionally estranged from your workplace.

A strong use of a single motivating language facet can increase worker outcomes—better direction-giving language helps workers to set goals,

empathetic language use can increase job satisfaction, and meaning-making language can increase loyalty. But independently, each facet fails to cover the full range of workplace communication, and so its effect remains limited. Each ML facet interlocks to support the others. A weakness in one area lessens the strength in another. To show these limits, we will discuss in turn how the lack of a motivating language facet creates workplace deficits that the other two facets cannot fill. Therefore, any given facet's strength will be blunted without support from the other facets.

It is the combined and synergistic increase we mean when we say that all three facets are needed for optimal worker outcomes. All workplace outcomes need support from all three facets. In essence, we propose that ML facet use is non-linear. Imagine for a moment that each facet has only two levels (high and low) and any given worker's outcome was measured from 0 (lowest) to 10 (highest). If all three facet uses were low then a worker's outcome would be at the lowest level (0). If the leader started using a high-ML level for one facet, then the worker's outcome might rise to 2 if the outcome was directly linked to the facet (say job satisfaction and empathetic language) or only rise to 1 if there were only indirect links (say performance and empathetic language). If the leader started employing high levels in two facets the outcome might increase to 5. But it would only be after a leader started using all three facets that you would see the increase to the highest level of 10. Each added facet would provide a synergistic increase in outcomes.

In this chapter, we will discuss the three ML facets in the same order we presented them in the previous three chapters. For simplification, we will discuss three broad outcome classifications—behavioral, motivational, and affective. These three groups should cover most worker outcomes, and the interested researcher should be able to apply the given logic to specific situations. We will also provide specific examples for some worker outcomes and give examples throughout the chapter.

Meaning-Making Language

Meaning-making language provides the link between a follower's goals and organizational goals, provides a connection to the culture, and explains cultural rules and norms. A deficit in any of these areas creates problems that cannot be overcome through the use of the other ML facets and will hamper the effectiveness of the other facets.

Empathetic language (the facet used for emotional connection) is hampered because people need to have a shared culture to fully create emotional connections. Meaning-making language creates a shared culture for leader and follower that gives a context for expressing emotions (such as what work achievements merit extra pride, or what setbacks require more emotional support). This blunting of empathetic language creates extra problems when there is a lack of meaning-making language.

Without a quality use of meaning-making language, followers face extra (affective) stresses at work due to feeling unclear about or estranged from a workplace. These stresses can be addressed through empathetic language, but a leader's time is finite. If the leader must use time in empathetic language use to reduce problems caused by a lack of meaning-making language, then the leader cannot use that time to employ empathetic language for other emotional issues. Therefore, in addition to directly blunting the effectiveness of empathetic language (through the lack of a shared cultural understanding), a deficit in meaning-making language can also impose extra emotional burdens that will lessen the time available to employ empathetic language for workplace advancements.

Low meaning-making language use similarly hampers direction-giving language use. Meaning-making language gives a follower an implicit understanding of what workplace behaviors will be recognized in a given culture. Without this understanding, followers will more often face difficulties and roadblocks in accomplishing a task—they may understand *what* needs to be accomplished, but they may not know *how* to accomplish it in a way that will be accepted and recognized by the organization. Direction-giving language can provide specific instructions for a given organizational task, but these directions will have to remain constant and detailed to overcome a follower's lack of cultural knowledge. As with empathetic language, such extra details will reduce the time a leader has to employ higher level or more far reaching direction-giving language.

In addition to the behavioral problems workers face in accomplishing tasks, there are also motivational issues. A follower's motivation will remain limited if he or she is unable to see a higher purpose—a purpose linked to organizational goals—in her or his work. As such, a leader will have to fall back on weaker *quid pro quo* motivational methods to inspire followers' efforts. Such motivations will not create a resiliency in followers to buffer them against setbacks or to weather times when extra, extended efforts are required. As such, leaders will need to expend more of their time in empathetic language use to deal with the affective

problems low meaning-making language use can create and lessen the time available to use empathetic language to address other issues.

Empathetic Language

Empathetic language forges emotional bonds between a leader and follower, and leaders use it to help followers deal with emotional situations at work. Without quality empathetic language use, workers feel emotionally estranged from a leader and have higher negative affect levels. This emotional deficit will create a flattening effect on the link created through meaning-making language. While a worker may understand an organization's culture and might even feel a link between personal and organizational goals, the understanding will lack emotional resonance. For highest motivational levels, people require both an intellectual understanding and an emotional connection. Without the emotional connection, a follower is less likely to care about higher organizational purposes and, without feeling an emotional connection, is more likely to not care if cultural norms are violated.

Similarly, the effectiveness of direction-giving language use will be blunted without accompanying empathetic language use. Understanding what needs to be done does not fully motivate someone to actually perform in a desired way. Empathetic language provides a motivational boost that leads followers to expend extra effort because they feel valued as a human being. Lacking this motivational push, leaders must use direction-giving language in a more primitive way—they must spend more time providing explicit instructions to a follower to ensure work performance. Having to employ such direction-giving language means leaders will not be able to use direction-giving language to its fullest effect.

There will also be an interaction between affective, behavioral, and motivational consequences of low empathetic language use. For example, low empathetic language use is most likely to create affective problems for a follower, but these affective issues (such as higher stress) can lead to increased absenteeism, illness rates, job dissatisfaction, and even turnover to avoid the stress. These primary effects can then decrease behavioral activities such as performance (especially in the case of voluntary turnover). In any case, decreases in affective states will lead to lower follower motivation which also creates poorer behavioral outcomes.

Direction-Giving Language

We will conclude with the direction-giving facet. Direction-giving language provides the focus and knowledge a follower needs to perform well in the workplace. Without direction-giving language, emotional support, and cultural understanding and acceptance will have little influence on workplace outcomes. In addition, the emotional (affective) stresses caused by role ambiguity will create problems similar to those discussed in the earlier sections, and these stresses will absorb much of empathetic language's utility. Similarly, leaders will have to direct more meaning-making language toward creating organizational cues that followers can use to construct performance activities.

In short, without strong direction-giving language, the other two ML facets will not have a framework upon which to build. The cultural explanations (meaning-making language) will have no purpose—it will be unclear why a follower needs to understand cultural norms. And without a link between personal and organizational goals, followers will feel like a spectator at a sports match for teams they do not care about: they can cheer when everyone else does, but there doesn't seem many points to it all. Leaders can use empathetic language, but the language will be divorced from workplace accomplishments. A follower can like the leader, and a follower may feel emotionally fulfilled, but the follower can come to see the workplace as a support group rather than a place to accomplish tasks if empathetic language use is dominant.

Other Considerations in Motivating Language Coordination

ML facet coordination has other aspects as well. First, few—if any—leaders innately use all three ML aspects well in a coordinated fashion, and even those who do can run into difficult circumstances. There are three general situations where a leader's ML ability will be blunted.

First, a leader's entry into a new organization or department blunts his or her ML ability. In such cases, the leader may not fully know what tasks need to be accomplished (direction-giving), how to support a given worker emotionally (empathetic language), or the organization's culture (meaning-making). While the time for individuals to come up to speed varies by organization, the complexity of understanding the new situation, and how quickly a person can or even will innately

adapt, a common rule of thumb states that it takes a leader six months to become fully acclimated and productive in a new situation (Mayfield and Mayfield, in press). Therefore, one can expect that even leaders with high innate ML ability will have poor performance until they can acclimate.

Special cases of leader acclimatization happen when a leader gains a new follower, or there are situational and organizational changes. With changes, the leader must learn and adjust to the new situation. The greater the change, the longer it will take for the leader to adjust. For example, when a firm introduces a new information system the leader may have to adjust direction-giving language use, but the other facets may not need such adjustment. In such a case, the leader should only need a short adjustment period. However, if there is a massive change—such as when IBM switched from being a hardware vendor to a service provider—all firm aspects change, and thus the leader will need more adjustment time.

Such large-scale changes create even more leader complications because the leader needs to learn new organizational aspects related to all three ML facets. At the same time, workers experience greater stress and uncertainty—meaning followers have a greater need of leader ML use. Direction-giving will have to be adjusted to fit with the new demands; different stresses will emerge so empathetic language will have to be adjusted to deal with these new stresses and the change itself will create stresses that must be reduced through empathetic language. The cultural change will necessitate the creation and transmission of the new culture, giving reasons why the changes are necessary, and helping people to understand how their goals link to the new culture. A lesser change happens when someone new enters a leader's sphere of influence. The leader must discover what ML methods are most effective for that person, what guidance the person needs, and how to use ML to provide the guidance.

One note needs to be made about substitutes for ML use. Up to this point, we have discussed ML use as if only the leader can provide the support a follower needs. However, other sources can fulfill the ML facet roles. Over time, an employee learns static workplace expectations from doing the job. Other organizational members can help a person understand performance expectations and methods, provide emotional support, and help to understand the organizational culture. Observation by the worker and (non-intentional) modeling also provide sources of understanding. Family members and non-work friends can provide support—especially emotional support—for the worker. Even personal

reflection and outside training can help a worker achieve many of the benefits that come from leader's ML use. As such, these actions can and often do become ML facet substitutes.

Time—and the accompanying follower development—also acts as a contextual factor with ML facet use. At different points in a follower's career and personal life, he or she will need different forms and levels of ML facet use. For example, when a worker first joins a work team, that person needs a large amount of ML use from all three facets. The person needs help to understand the organization's culture and her or his place in this culture (meaning-making language), needs emotional support to process the many new stimuli (empathetic language), and needs greater guidance about required job duties (direction-giving). As time passes, the follower will need less of each three, but to advance in workplace outcomes, he or she may need more specific and detailed communication of each type. Finally, when there are system shocks—one or more workplace aspects change—the process of using ML facets may need to be restarted to help the follower adjust to and cope with the changes. It seems likely though, that this period will be shorter than the initial period since the follower can use previous experiences to comprehend motivating language use.

Also, ML use will vary by the individual and the context. A major assumption of ML, of course, is that the quality of ML use depends on how it is received—it is not a one-way, linear action. Some people need more or less direction-giving language—they may have held similar jobs, be highly trained in their job, or work in a job that requires a lot of independent actions, and not need as much direction. Some people have greater emotional resilience and therefore need less empathetic language use. And some people come to an organization specifically to fulfill their personal goals or be in a job that depends little on understanding cultural norms and thus not need as much meaning-making language.

People also go through different life stages. While life stage changes may not require a change in direction-giving language (though a person might mature and need less direction-giving, or suffer an emotional trauma that decreases their ability to work independently), it is quite reasonable that the person needs different levels and types of emotional support at different life and career stages. Similarly, as a person goes through life changes, their personal goals can change. Such changes will mean that different meaning-making language must be employed to help reconnect the new personal goals to organizational goals.

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CHAPTER 7

Motivating Language and Workplace Outcomes

Abstract Motivating language theory foundations rest on evidence that links it to important workplace outcomes. This chapter summarizes existing research on motivating language and its outcomes using multiple relationships and outcome measures. We present ML's outcomes in three sections: outcomes that primarily benefit organizations, outcomes that primarily benefit followers, and causal evidence and ML antecedents.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication Performance · Absenteeism · Job satisfaction · Meta-analysis

Overview

Motivating languagetheory foundations rest on evidence that links it to important workplace outcomes. This chapter summarizes existing research on motivating language and its outcomes using multiple relationships and outcome measures. We present ML's outcomes in three sections: outcomes that primarily benefit organizations, outcomes that primarily benefit followers, and causal evidence and ML antecedents.

Researchers have studied performance the most from all organizationally beneficial outcomes, and the overall results yield a median correlation of 0.17 with ML. Perceived leader communication competence has a combined correlation of 0.61 with leader motivating language. Similarly, ML has a median correlation of 0.69 with perceived leader competence.

J. Mayfield and M. Mayfield, *Motivating Language Theory*,
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ML has a lower, though still meaningful, correlation of 0.19 with job creativity and innovation. Current studies of ML and organizational commitment reveal a median relationship of 0.34. Studies of ML and absenteeism have a median correlation of −0.21 across many settings, although culture seems to moderate the ML–absenteeism relationship. The median relationship between ML and intent-to-stay is 0.26. While motivating language has been linked to other organizationally relevant outcomes, we only found single studies on these relationships: LMX ($r = 0.85$), self-efficacy ($r = 0.34$), decision making ($r = 0.25$), intrinsic motivation ($r = 0.21$), and organizational citizenship behavior ($r = 0.10$).

Above all, job satisfaction has been studied more than any other motivating language outcomes, but the correlation seems to be bimodal: either around 0.35 or around 0.65. Combined, these studies yield an r of about 0.35. Communication satisfaction with a supervisor also has a bimodal relationship of 0.35 and 0.67 with a median correlation of 0.36.

Studies have also demonstrated ML's causal role for such outcomes as performance and creativity. These studies have employed longitudinal and experimental designs. Studies have also shown that leader behavioral integrity acts as an antecedent for successful motivating language use.

A Brief Look at What We Know

Motivating language theory has always been evidence based and strongly linked to important workplace outcomes. To date, most ML research has focused on organizationally beneficial outcomes such as worker performance, intent-to-turnover, absenteeism, and creativity. Less work has been done on outcomes that benefit a follower, although studies show that ML improves worker job satisfaction, satisfaction with superior communication, and other follower beneficial outcomes. Evidence for causal support comes from longitudinal and experimental design-based studies.

For this chapter, we will summarize existing research on motivating language and its outcomes. While we have not conducted a formal meta-analysis (Hunter and Schmidt 2004) of all ML research, we have tried to locate as many motivating language articles as possible and combine their results into summary statistics. We take the median relationship for ML and a given outcome and present these relationships in five different ways to help you understand the practical and academic relevance of the relationships. These five ways are the correlation coefficient (r), percentage superior (PS), Cohen's d, effect size percentile, and the binomial

effect size display (BESD). While we expect most readers are familiar with correlation coefficients, the other statistics may be less familiar.

The *percentage superior statistic* (Grissom 1994) estimates how much better someone's outcome would be if a leader uses high levels of motivating language as compared to low levels. The measure assumes that leader ML use can be split into two equal groups: high and low. With this median split, the PS tells you what will happen if you compare two randomly selected followers from each group. The PS score gives you the percentage chance that someone from the high-ML group has a better outcome than someone from the low-ML group. A PS score of 50% means that people from each group have an equal chance of having the superior outcome or that no difference exists between the groups. A PS score of 100% means that every person from the high-ML group has a better outcome than every person from the low-ML group. For example, intrinsic motivation has a PS of 62%. The score indicates that 62% of the time a person receiving high-ML communication has higher intrinsic motivation than someone receiving low-ML communications.

We also use the *Cohen's d* statistic (Cohen 1988). This measure gives a standardized difference between groups. As with PS, the measure acts as if ML relationships were split into high and low at the median of all relationships. This statistic gives you a way to see the relative influence of ML on different outcomes expressed in standard deviations. For example, ML has a *d* score of 1.91 for perceived leader effectiveness. This statistic indicates that someone receiving high-ML communications will rate their boss' effectiveness nearly two standard deviations higher than someone receiving low-ML communications.

For comparison with other management studies, we use the *effect size* percentile. People frequently want to know about the strength of a relationship in comparison with other relationships in a field. Often, researchers use Cohen's suggestions (Cohen 1988) of small (an *r* of around 0.10), medium (an *r* of around 0.30), or large (an *r* of 0.50 or larger) to classify relationships. However, Cohen stipulated in his original work that his proposal was only a general rule of thumb, and each area of study should develop its own guidelines. In developing these guidelines for management, Patterson and colleagues (Paterson et al. 2016) used meta-analysis results for organizational behavior and human resource management studies (OB/HR) to develop more specific guidelines. The effect size percentile result gives an idea of how the strength of an ML-outcome relationship compares to other relationships in management.

For example, according to Paterson and colleagues' guidelines, the ML–creative support relationship is stronger than 80% of all studied relationships in OB/HR.

For our final metric, we use the *binomial effect size display* (BESD). The BESD (Rosenthal and Rubin 1982) shows the chance of a higher result under different conditions. As with the Cohen's *d* and PS measures, the BESD treats the independent variable (ML) as being split into high and low conditions. The BESD also treats the dependent (outcome) variable the same way. Under these assumptions, the BESD shows what percentage of people in the high-ML group will also have the highest outcome possible. For example, 67% of followers who receive high-ML communications will also have high job satisfaction as compared to only 33% of those who receive low-ML communications.

We present ML outcomes in three sections: outcomes that primarily benefit organizations, outcomes that primarily benefit followers, and causal evidence and ML antecedents. Within each section, we present the outcomes whose linkage with ML has the strongest support first.

Outcomes that Benefit Organizations

Performance

Researchers have studied ML's influence on performance more than any other organizationally beneficial outcome (and only job satisfaction has been studied more overall). The relationship between ML and follower performance has been largely stable across different situations and measurements with a median *r* of 0.17. Performance has been measured through supervisor reports (Mayfield 1993; Mayfield et al. 1998), self-reports (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006, 2010), qualitative measures (Holmes 2012; Zorn and Ruccio 1998), and longitudinal and mixed-methods (Holmes 2012; Holmes and Parker 2017). Almost all of these studies have shown that motivating language has a significant influence on follower performance, however, studies have shown no relationship for part-time employees (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006) and in Chinese settings (Sun et al. 2016).

The strongest relationship between ML and follower performance was found in 1998 (Mayfield et al. 1998) with an *r* of 0.22. As mentioned earlier, there have been two nonsignificant findings from studies in China (Sun et al. 2016) and for part-time workers (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006)

with *r* statistics of −0.016 and −0.03, respectively. Most other correlations have clustered fairly closely around 0.17 with the other studies being 0.16 (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006) for full-time workers, 0.17 (Mayfield and Mayfield 2010) for dyadic-level relationships, 0.18 (Mayfield and Mayfield 2010) for follower's performance linked to overall leader ML skill, and 0.185 (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012).

Combined, these results give a median *r* of 0.17. The probability superior (PS) score is 60%. This score shows that a randomly selected follower receiving high-ML communications is 60% likely to have higher performance than a randomly selected person receiving low-ML communications. The Cohen's *d* score is 0.35, which places the influence of ML on performance higher than 40% of other known relationships in OB/HR. Finally, the BESD score indicates that 59% of people receiving high-ML communications will also have high-performance levels as compared to 41% of people receiving low-ML communications. In sum, ML has a similar relationship with performance as other management constructs. Paterson and colleagues (Paterson et al. 2016) report an average *r* of 0.18 between performance evaluations and all other constructs measured in their review.

Leader Communication Competence, Perceived

Perceived leader communication competence plays an important role in organizations. It has links to actual leader ability, but also plays a role in maintaining employee morale and motivation. When employees believe their boss communicates well, they engage in more frequent communications with her or him. Perceived leader communication competence also provides a convergent measure of ML's validity. Motivating language should be an aspect of communication competence (although it does not explicitly incorporate such communication skills as choosing the correct communication channel or communication frequency), and a low relationship between the two constructs would create questions about motivating language's validity.

However, all ML studies show a significant relationship between the two constructs and most show a very strong relationship. The lowest relationship between the two variables was found by Madlock (2013) with an *r* of 0.32. This study—in contrast to most ML research—specifically examined work communications mediated through technological communications. In this case, the medium may have blunted a leader's communication

competence, motivating language use, or both. All other studies have found correlations of 0.59 or higher with Majors (2008) finding an *r* or 0.754, Madlock—in a separate study—(Madlock 2012) finding an *r* of 0.70, Sharbrough and colleagues (Sharbrough et al. 2006) finding a correlation of 0.592, and Simmons and colleagues (Simmons and Sharbrough III 2013) finding an *r* of 0.597 for followers in supervisory positions and an *r* of 0.632 for followers in non-supervisory positions.

Combined, these studies show a correlation of 0.6145 between leader motivating language and a follower's perceived leader communication competence. This relationship shows a shared variance of 38% between the two variables—a substantial enough overlap to show convergent validity while also attesting to ML's distinction from general perceived leader communication competence. The relationship yields a PS score of 86% which indicates that a person receiving high-ML communications is 86% more likely to have a higher view of their leader's communication competence than someone receiving low-ML communications. The Cohen's *d* statistic is 1.55 placing the relationship as stronger than 95% of all relationships studied in organizational behavior and human resources. The relationship also gives a high-ML boss an 81% chance of being rated as a highly competent communicator as compared to a low-ML boss only having a 19% chance of being rated a highly competent communicator.

Leader Effectiveness, Perceived

Organizations also benefit when leaders are seen as effective by followers. When employees see their leader as effective, they have higher motivation, trust in their leader, and accept changes more readily. As such, *perceived* leader effectiveness can lead to increased *actual* leader effectiveness.

As with perceived leader communication competence, motivating language has had a consistently strong relationship with perceived leader effectiveness. Sharbrough and colleagues (2006) found a correlation of 0.672 in the earliest study on perceived leader effectiveness and ML. These findings were followed by Majors' (2008) dissertation work where she found a relationship of 0.711. Brannon (2011) found a slightly stronger relationship with a correlation of 0.787 and discovered that these results were similar across all communication mediums. Simmons and colleagues (2013) found a correlation of 0.536 for

followers in supervisory positions and a correlation of 0.479 for followers in non-supervisory positions. Sun and colleagues (2016) provide us with the most recent and second strongest link between motivating language and perceived leader effectiveness with an *r* of 0.733.

Combined, these studies yield a median correlation of 0.6915 or a Cohen's *d* of 1.91. ML and perceived leader effectiveness have the strongest link among all ML outcomes examined in multiple studies, and the second strongest relationship overall. The relationship strength also places it higher than 95% of relationships in the fields of organizational behavior and human resource management. From a management perspective, as indicated by the PS statistic, someone receiving high-ML communications is 91% more likely to have higher leader effectiveness perceptions than someone receiving low-ML communications. From the BESD statistic, a person in a high-ML relationship is also 85% likely to perceive her or his leader as being effective as compared to only a 15% likelihood for someone in a low-ML relationship.

Job Creativity and Innovation

Organizations increasingly need high levels of job creativity and innovation as business success becomes more driven by employee knowledge and ability to adapt to changing circumstances (Arts et al. 2005). Quite naturally, leadership communication researchers have used motivating language to explore its influence on follower innovation. While the two concepts differ—creativity means the generation of new ideas, and innovation refers to their implementation (Mayfield 2011)—the subject areas have enough overlap that we will treat them as the same.

Most studies show that leader motivating language has a significant but modest influence on follower creativity/innovation. The most detailed examination of motivating and follower creativity comes from Wang and colleagues (Wang et al. 2009) in a study of team creativity. This study examined different aspects of creativity in a team setting through an experiment. The study examined how direction-giving and empathetic language influenced different team proposed solutions to various job problems. The authors looked at the total number of responses generated ($r = 0.1787$), proposal flexibility (0.1802), brainstorming ($r = 0.1850$), proposal originality ($r = 0.2141$), and the elaboration of the ideas ($r = 0.2432$). The study did not examine all three ML aspects, but with the strong inter-correlations between the three ML factors we

feel confident of similar results if the researchers had included meaning-making language. Bracketing the results by Wang and colleagues, Mayfield and Mayfield (2004) found a lower—though still significant—relationship between ML and follower innovation ($r = 0.10$), while Sexton (2013) found a higher relationship between ML and follower innovation ($r = 0.300$).

These studies yield a median relationship of 0.185. (This median remains the same whether you treat Wang and colleagues' study as a single measure of ML and innovation or as multiple studies.) This relationship means that a follower receiving high-ML communication has a 60% chance of displaying greater creativity or innovation than a follower receiving low-ML communication. The Cohen's *d* result is 0.37, and its effect size places it above 45% of studied effect sizes in organizational behavior and human resources. Finally, the BESD score for these results indicates that you can expect high-ML communication will generate superior creative/innovative behaviors from followers 59% of the time as compared to only 41% of the time when low-ML communications are used. Also, the link between ML and creativity/innovation stands at about the same level as other known influences. Paterson and colleagues (2016) report an average correlation of 0.14 between creativity/innovation/learning and all other constructs in OB/HR.

Organizational Commitment

Most firms want high organizational commitment from followers—at the very least, high organizational commitment leads to lower turnover, and at the best, it leads to extra effort and peak performance from firm members. Organizational commitment, in brief, captures how loyal someone feels toward an employer and the person's willingness to exert high levels of effort even in difficult circumstances.

Studies have shown a relatively high relationship between leader motivating language use and follower organizational commitment. Madlock and Sexton (2015) found the strongest relationship with an *r* of 0.57 in a Mexican sample. Madlock (2013) also found a more modest relationship of 0.30 when the ML communications occurred through technologically mediated means. Finally, Krause (2013) found a relationship of 0.37 in a US setting and 0.24 in a Singapore setting.

These results give a median correlation of 0.335, placing the relationship strength at or above 80% of all relationships studied in

organizational behavior and human resources. From a practical standpoint, the results mean that a follower receiving high-ML has a 69% chance of having greater organizational commitment compared to a follower receiving low-ML communications. Stated another way, 67% of followers receiving high-ML communications can be expected to have high organizational commitment as compared to only 33% of followers receiving low-ML communications.

Unlike other results, we have examined to this point, the relationship between leader motivating language and follower organizational commitment has an obvious outlier result with Madlock and Sexton's (2015) work. Their result of 0.57 demonstrates a far stronger relationship than do other studies. There are not enough other studies to shed light on whether this discrepancy results from a different national cultural setting (since the study was conducted in Mexico) or a sampling issue. Future research should continue to develop this line of inquiry both conceptually and empirically.

Absenteeism

Most organizations want to reduce absenteeism. Absenteeism occurs when a person misses work for any reason other than vacation days, non-work days, or non-operating days of the firm. Absenteeism can have many disruptive effects on the workplace including the person's missed productivity, disruptions in the workplace from having to cover for the person, and administrative time needed to deal with the absence. Cascio (2000) places a conservative cost estimate of absence as being equal to the person's pay for the day he or she was absent.

While absenteeism holds great organizational importance, relatively few studies have looked at ML's effect on this workplace outcome. Mayfield and Mayfield (2009a) specifically studied motivating language use and absenteeism and found a correlation of −0.21 between the two constructs. Krause (2013) found similar results for the US sample ($r = -0.22$), but no meaningful relationship ($r = -0.05$) in a Singapore sample.

Overall, the studies have a median correlation of −0.21. While excluding the Singapore sample does not substantially change the median result (−0.215 rather than −0.21), sample national culture seems to provide a strong moderator for the ML–absenteeism relationship. Future studies need to examine culture's role in this relationship.

For the US results, the relationship has a Cohen's *d* of −0.44 which places its relationship strength at the 50th percentile of effect sizes in organizational behavior and human resource management. The statistic also means that a person receiving high motivating language has a 62% chance of being absent less often than a person receiving low motivating language. Similarly, when a leader uses high ML with a follower, that person will have high absenteeism only 39% of the time as compared to 61% of the time with low-ML use.

Intent-to-Stay

Intent-to-stay complements intent-to-turnover in that both measure a person's intentions to remain with an organization: intent-to-stay measuring the likelihood of remaining and intent-to-turnover measuring the likelihood of leaving. Organizations care about this outcome because of its strong links to actual turnover. And turnover costs organizations between one-half and one-and-a-half the leaver's annual pay (Cascio 2000, 2009). Intent-to-stay also provides a bellwether measure of a person's general feeling of content (or discontent) with a job. Followers who are low on intent-to-stay are likely to have low motivation and negative feelings about an organization.

We found three studies (as reported in two articles) linking motivating language to intent-to-stay/intent-to-turnover. Krause (2013) performed two studies—one in the USA and one in Singapore—on intent-to-stay. The relationships were the same in both nations, each with a correlation of 0.26. In our study on the same subject (Mayfield and Mayfield 2007), we found a higher relationship with a correlation of 0.50. A reason for the discrepancy (at least in the US samples) could be that better job market conditions during the 2007 study period (pre-Great Recession) lead to followers feeling higher efficacy about leaving and thus acted as a positive moderator on the relationship. Future work may want to explore job market influence and other possible moderators.

The median relationship between ML and intent-to-stay is 0.26, or a Cohen's *d* of 0.54. The strength of this relationship places it at the 60th percentile of organizational behavior and human resource management relationships. It also means that a person receiving high motivating language communications from a leader has a 65% chance of having a stronger intent-to-stay than a person receiving low-ML communications. Another way to look at the relationship is that 63% of people receiving

high-ML communications are likely to have a high intent-to-stay score, while only 37% of people receiving low-ML communications are likely to have high intent-to-stay scores.

Other Outcome Constructs that Benefit the Organization

While researchers have studied motivating language and other organizationally relevant outcomes, we only found single studies on the relationships in this section. As such, we will only briefly describe the outcome construct and give the correlation between ML and the construct. Table 7.1 provides the other effect measures.

Motivating language has a strong link with the leader–follower relationship quality: how much both go above and beyond workplace contractual requirements for the other (as captured through the leader

Table 7.1 The effects of motivation language

Outcome	*r*	*PS (%)*	*Cohen's d*	*Effect size percentile*	*BESD (high outcome with high-ML use) (%)*
Absenteeism	−0.215	62	−0.44	50	39
Communication satisfaction with supervisor	0.357	70	0.76	80	68
Creative support	0.347	70	0.74	80	67
Creativity/Innovation	0.185	60	0.37	45	59
Cultural intelligence	0.190	61	0.39	45	60
Decision making	0.250	64	0.52	62	63
Intent-to-stay	0.260	65	0.54	65	63
Intrinsic motivation	0.207	62	0.42	52	60
Job satisfaction	0.352	70	0.75	80	68
Leader communication competence, Perceived	0.615	86	1.55	95+	81
Leader effectiveness, perceived	0.692	91	1.91	95+	85
LMX	0.850	99	3.22	100	93
Organizational commitment	0.335	69	0.71	80	67
Organizational citizenship behavior	0.096	55	0.19	20	55
Performance	0.170	60	0.35	40	59
Self-efficacy	0.343	70	0.73	80	67
Self-esteem	0.368	71	0.79	85	68

member exchange construct). This correlation was found to be 0.85 (Mayfield 1993; Mayfield and Mayfield 2009b). (Jackie originally presented the relationship in her dissertation but it formally appeared in the journal article.) Motivating language has also been found to strongly influence a person's self-efficacy—how confident a person is in their current activities and how assured that person is in taking on new tasks—with a correlation of 0.343 (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012). Motivating language also has a moderate link with follower effective decision making (Mayfield and Mayfield 2016) with a correlation of 0.25. Sun and colleagues (2016) found a similar link between ML and follower intrinsic motivation (how much someone's drive to perform comes from internal reasons rather than monetary or other rewards). These authors found a correlation of 0.207 between ML and intrinsic motivation. The authors also found a nonsignificant relationship between ML and organizational citizenship behavior (how willing someone is to go outside of their assigned work role to perform organizationally beneficial actions) in the same study. A reason for the low correlation of 0.096 could be the Asian sample. Organizational citizenship behaviors have been found to be lower than in these settings. Finally, Toby Holmes (2012) found that when principals used ML with their followers, their respective schools show a continuous improvement. In comparison, the performance of schools with principals who used low ML fluctuated over time.

Outcomes that Benefit Followers

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction has been the most studied of motivating language's outcomes as well as one of the earliest examined ML outcomes (Mayfield et al. 1998). We were able to locate 15 different studies linking leader motivating language to follower job satisfaction. The large number of studies reflects job satisfaction's importance to people in an organization. Job satisfaction measures how well someone likes her or his workplace, work environment, and job tasks. While not a substitute for good pay, job security, or workplace safety, job satisfaction plays a major role in someone's psychological health, well-being, and their overall workplace happiness.

While all studies have shown a positive and fairly strong relationship between ML and job satisfaction, the studies seem to yield two different correlation sets: either around 0.35 or around 0.65. The bimodal distribution of results indicates a moderator among the study settings, but the moderator itself remains unclear. The strongest relationship ($r = 0.687$) was found by Simmons and colleagues (2013) among followers in non-supervisory roles. But they found a nearly indistinguishable correlation of 0.633 among followers in supervisory relationships, i.e., middle-managers. We and Jerry Kopf (1998) found a similar relationship ($r = 0.67$) in a US setting as did Madlock and Sexton (2015) in a Mexican setting ($r = 0.63$). Choi (2006) found similar results in a South Korean setting with a correlation of 0.612. These similar results speak against national culture or setting as being the moderator. The studies with lower effect sizes also seem to have no common characteristic. Sexton (2013) found a correlation of 0.410, Sharbrough and colleagues (2006) found a correlation of 0.343, and Majors (2008) found a correlation of 0.33 in varied US organizations. Madlock (2013) found a parallel correlation of 0.33 in a Mexican setting. We found similar correlations of 0.31 for full-time employees and 0.26 for part-time employees (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006). And Krause (2013) found a correlation of 0.30 in a US sample and 0.26 in a Singapore sample. While most of these studies have been conducted in non-unionized settings, Chan (2007) found a correlation of 0.28 in a unionized setting. Future research needs to examine what moderator(s) create this bimodal distribution.

Combined, these studies yield an r of 0.3515 or a Cohen's d of 0.75. The strength of this relationship places it at the 80th percentile for studied relationships in organizational behavior and human resource management. For application purposes, a person receiving high-ML communications is 70% more likely to be satisfied with her or his job than someone receiving low-ML communications. Similarly, 68% of people in a high-ML relationship have high job satisfaction while only 32% of people in low-ML relationships have high job satisfaction.

Communication Satisfaction with Supervisor

Communication satisfaction with a supervisor also reflects a positive outcome for followers. Communication satisfaction provides a general view of someone's happiness with all communication and practices from

a boss. Better communication reduces stress, ambiguity and gives a follower a positive feeling of well-being at work.

As with job satisfaction, studies yield mixed findings on this outcome. The correlations generally split around 0.35 or 0.67. However, unlike job satisfaction, not enough studies exist to decide if the split represents a moderator or simply comes from sampling variance.

At the lower end of the relationship strength, Simmons and colleagues (2013) found a correlation of 0.259 between ML and supervisor communication satisfaction for followers in non-supervisory roles. These researchers also found a correlation of 0.357 for followers in supervisory roles—a similar result similar to Madlock's (2013) finding of 0.350. Sharbrough and colleagues (2006) found a stronger relationship of 0.633 between ML use and follower satisfaction with the leader's communication. Majors (2008) found the strongest relationship to date with a correlation of 0.721.

These correlations yield a median correlation of 0.357 or a Cohen's *d* of 0.76. This effect size places the relationship at the 80th percentile for studies in OB/HR. It means someone receiving high-ML communications is 70% more likely to have better communication satisfaction than someone receiving low-ML communications. It also means that 68% of people receiving high-ML communications have high communication satisfaction with their superior as compared to only 32% of those receiving low-ML communications.

Other Outcome Constructs that Benefit a Follower

As with outcomes that benefit organizations, some follower-centered outcomes have seen only singular research reports. Banks (2014) found a strong relationship ($r = 0.368$) between motivating language and follower self-esteem. The relationship's strength places it at the 85th percentile for OB/HR studies and means a person in a high-ML relationship has a 71% chance of having higher self-esteem compared with someone in a low-ML relationship. At a similar level of relationship strength, we (2017) found a correlation of 0.347 between an ML relationship and how supported someone felt in their workplace creativity. A weaker relationship ($r = 0.190$) has been found between ML and cultural intelligence (a person's ability to understand and adapt to different cultural settings). Even though this statistic is not as robust, it places the relationship at the 45th percentile for OB/HR studies and

signifies that a person in a high-ML relationship has a 61% chance of having a higher cultural intelligence compared with someone in a low-ML relationship.

Table 7.1 summarizes the relationships between ML and the various outcomes.

Causal Support and Antecedents

Noted research experts have declared that proving causality is impossible (Dubin 1978). However, other researchers have chosen a more pragmatic approach to causality and recast evidence as being along a continuum where we have greater or lesser belief that one phenomenon causes another (Howson and Urbach 2005; Pearl 2009). According to the second line of reasoning, three general tests provide causal evidence. The most basic (and common) test requires a relationship between two phenomena. If no relationship exists, then one phenomenon cannot cause another. As detailed in our previous two sections, ample evidence exists for motivating language's relationship to many workplace outcomes. These relationships consistently test as significant, and usually have a strength that equals or exceeds most relationships in OB/HR.

The next test requires precedence; changes in the (presumed) causal phenomenon must come before the changes in the other phenomenon. This requirement simply means that effect must follow cause. Researchers usually test this causal requirement through longitudinal designs. To date, only Holmes (2012) and Holmes and Parker (2017) have tested ML through a longitudinal design. Both studies give support that ML acts as a causal agent on such outcomes as performance and job satisfaction. These studies also indicate that ML acts as a causal agent for organizational-level performance, and give insight into one of motivating languages major assumptions: That leader behavior must be congruent with their ML communications. Holmes and Parker (2017) found that leader behavioral integrity and credibility must be in place for the best motivating language use.

The final and most difficult test requires that all other credible explanations must be ruled out. Because some undiscovered alternate explanation can always exist, this requirement can never be fully met. However, there are two—mutually reinforcing—ways to exclude alternate explanations. Strong theory development provides the first method (Goldthorpe 2001). Well refined theory gives more robust reasons for why a

phenomenological network operates in the way proposed and, thus, provides greater credence for the theory. Hopefully, the many authors who have developed motivating language theory through the years (and this book) have created a solid foundation to understand this leadership communication model.

Experimental design provides the second method for eliminating other credible explanations (Campbell and Stanley 2015). In an experimental design, the researcher manipulates the (causal) variable of interest while controlling for extraneous factors that could influence changes in the outcome variable. The combination of manipulation and control provides strong evidence for causality, but can be difficult to institute for social science phenomena. To date, limited work has been done to implement experimental design studies of motivating language. However, the experiments that have been conducted all support leader motivating language use as a causal variable on workplace outcomes. Studies by Wang and colleagues (2009) and Fan and colleagues (2014) showed that motivating language use increases creativity.

While long theorized, Holmes and Parker (2017) were the first authors to test the necessity of behavioral actions and motivating language communications (the walk-the-talk assumption.) Their study found leader behavioral integrity a necessary antecedent to successful ML implementation. Future research needs to develop more theoretical and empirical work on what precedes ML use. Such work should examine the needed circumstances for successful ML use and what circumstances trigger different dimensions and combinations of effective of ML applications.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we presented how motivating language influences various workplace outcomes as well as evidence for motivating language's causal role. From this review, we can say that motivating language has a consistently strong link to workplace outcomes. Of the 17 outcomes, we examined, motivating language has a stronger than average relationship (for OB/HR studies) with 11 of them and only one relationship below the 40th percentile of studies.

These relationships occur across a wide variety of workplace outcomes: both those beneficial for an organization and those beneficial for employees. Most ML research focuses on outcomes beneficial to an organization, but job satisfaction (an outcome beneficial to a follower)

has been the focus of the greatest number of studies. While the emphasis on organizationally beneficial outcomes is perhaps understandable, we want to make a call for more research on how and in what ways motivating language can help followers lead better work lives.

As noted in the main text of this chapter, some outcomes such as performance, job satisfaction, and intent-to-stay have been the subject of multiple motivating language studies. However, there are many outcomes such as decision making, creative support, employee voice, and cultural intelligence that have only seen a single examination—outcomes in need of greater exploration. Also, future work (theoretical and empirical) needs to be undertaken to understand what moderator(s) cause the bimodal distribution in the link between ML and job satisfaction.

In addition, our motivating language review has shown credible (if not conclusive) support for motivating language's causal role. Ample studies have shown ML to have moderate to strong relationships with various outcomes, and longitudinal studies have shown a temporal relationship between ML and performance and various satisfaction measures. Existing experimental studies provide evidence of ML's causal role, but these studies have examined limited outcomes. Future research needs to include more longitudinal and experimental design on a broader set of outcomes. As a whole, however, our review of motivating language research supports its place as a scientifically valid theory and a relevant one in organizational settings.

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CHAPTER 8

Strategic Motivating Language

Abstract This chapter presents three forms of strategic ML use—(1) organizational level: internal, (2) organizational level: external, and (3) team based. In all three cases, leaders must have a clear idea of what they need to accomplish and their constituents' characteristics. By understanding these two factors, a leader can tailor her or his ML use to maximize organizational outcomes. The need for understanding follower characteristics brings up the issue of feedback in motivating language. With strategic ML, and its need for constant adjustment to fit multiple changing circumstances, the feedback process must be made explicit. This chapter presents an idea about how the feedback process might work, but future work should develop this idea.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication
Strategic management · Feedback · Teams

Overview

This chapter presents three forms of strategic ML use—(1) organizational level: internal, (2) organizational level: external, and (3) team based. In all three cases, leaders must have a clear idea of what they need to accomplish and their constituents' characteristics. By understanding these two factors, a leader can tailor her or his ML use to maximize

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organizational outcomes. The need for understanding follower characteristics brings up the issue of feedback in motivating language.

Currently, only one ML article (Mayfield et al. 2015) has incorporated feedback into the ML process, and with dyadic ML, the feedback process has largely been assumed to take place. With strategic ML, and its need for constant adjustment to fit multiple changing circumstances, the feedback process must be made explicit. This chapter presents an idea about how the feedback process might work, but future work should develop this idea.

Motivating Language at Organizational and Group Levels

Recent motivating language theory research has begun to explore an intriguing new direction: strategic leader communications (Argenti 2017; Holmes 2012; Huang-Horowitz and Evans, in press; Mayfield and Mayfield, in press; Mayfield et al. 2015). This new direction has added to our understanding of motivating language theory in two ways. First, it has extended motivating language from its traditional view as a one-to-one process (leader-to-follower) to a one-to-many (leader-to-*followers*) process. And because of this extension, we are starting to see a better understanding of how the motivating language process emerges—a view that incorporates a feedback process and a team coordination role for the leader.

When we discuss strategic ML use, we mean motivating language used to shape an environment as a whole or motivating language that influences and coordinates groups of individuals. From this frame, we examine three areas where leaders use strategic ML. First, leaders use strategic ML at an organizational level to influence and coordinate internal activities. Second, leaders use strategic ML at the organizational level to influence external constituents and coordinate activities between their organization and other organizations. Top leaders most often implement these two forms of strategic ML use (either directly or through intermediaries).

The use of intermediaries for strategic ML use brings up another difference between strategic and dyadic ML use. Dyadic ML—by its nature—is employed directly by a leader. However, with strategic ML use, a top leader may work with other people to craft and deliver an ML

communication. For example, a CEO may work with a public relations department to craft messages to influence stockholders. As such, strategic ML use shifts ML from being an individual-centered phenomenon to a group setting where the members act as a unit under the direction of a leader (Naidoo and Dulek 2017). While we are aware of this phenomenon, we will continue to discuss strategic ML as if it is coming from a single individual since a single leader directs the process even when other implements it.

Finally, strategic motivating language takes on a coordinating role between members in a team. This final form of strategic motivating language occurs on the team level with direct reports to a leader. Such strategic motivating language occurs with and is needed by leaders at all organizational levels. In brief, leaders use coordinating strategic ML to ensure that all team members work together to achieve team objectives while reducing the frictions that arise in any team situation. Non-top leaders will most frequently use this aspect of strategic ML since their primary focus is to influence direct reports.

We will use the remainder of this chapter to develop these three areas of strategic ML use. To do so, we will present a unified look at the developments in strategic ML use, expand these ideas into a model of strategic ML use at the organizational level (internally and externally), and discuss how strategic ML can be used on a group level to coordinate team member actions. To build a foundation for these strategic ML uses, we will first discuss a skill underlying all strategic ML use—being able to translate environmental cues into leader communications—and how leaders use this skill with different constituents.

Leader Translation of Environmental Cues to Guide Strategic Motivating Language Use

To employ strategic motivating language use, leaders must first understand their environment. Decoding the environment should guide how top leaders use ML to achieve organizational goals. Leaders have different specific environments and different ML usage needs, but all leaders have the same type of components in their environments. For top leaders, their environment will include external and internal constituents, competitive forces, and social and political changes that may affect

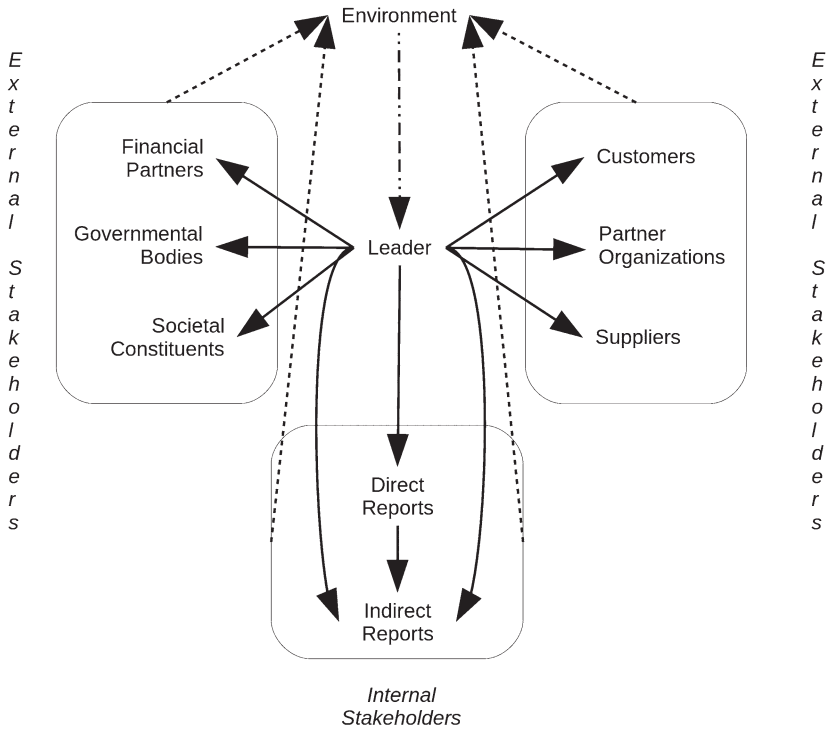

Fig. 8.1 A systems model of top leader strategic vision and values interpretation flow. The *long-dashed line* indicates how a leader interprets environmental cues to craft motivating language messages. The *solid lines* represent motivating language communications that are sent to various stakeholders. The *dashed lines* represent how stakeholder changes influence the organizational environment. The leader then checks the changed environment to craft new ML messages. In total, the model represents a cybernetic feedback process through which leaders develop ML messages.

organizations. A lower-level manager's environment consists of direct and indirect reports. Figure 8.1 provides a graphical display of the environmental forces that leaders encounter.

As the Fig. 8.1 shows, stakeholders both influence top leaders as environmental factors and receive top leader ML messages. The stakeholders' environmental influence, therefore, acts as part of a feedback loop in leader motivating language use by giving environmental cues for a leader's ML use. Decoding the environmental cues helps a leader decide how to frame messages from each ML facet and how ML facets' usage needs to be adjusted for different stakeholders.

The decoding process in strategic ML gives us an insight into how leaders select and adjust their ML usage. At the dyadic level, MLT has been modeled with an implicit feedback process, but ML at the strategic level requires a new understanding of how top leaders incorporate feedback into their communications. In our and our colleague's initial article on strategic motivating language (Mayfield et al. 2015), we proposed that leaders use a cybernetic process to adjust their ML use. The process starts with a leader having a desired state he or she wants to achieve. The desired state can come from environmental scanning that uncovers opportunities, or the matching of goals with the environment to see which goals are achievable. The leader then develops and implements an ML strategy to achieve this state. After implementation, the leader checks for a gap between the desired state and the actual state.

When gaps exist, the leader decides on what ML facets (meaning-making, empathetic, or direction-giving) need adjustment to close the gap. In the adjustment process, a leader learns which ML tactics are more effective in achieving the desired goal (and can draw upon this knowledge in other similar circumstances). At its most primitive, the adjustment process can occur through a series of random searches where a leader employs different means to instantiate ML language, discards those that are completely ineffective, retains those that are partially effective, and then adjusts the retained strategies to better achieve goals. A more sophisticated leader will use her or his knowledge—and that of important others—to target better ML tactics in achieving results.

In all of these cases, leaders use environmental feedback to set ML usage. The environmental feedback process also allows leaders to update the goals they want to achieve through motivating language to better match changing environmental states. The changed goals may result in needing new direction-giving language or even necessitate new meaning-making language if changes are needed to organizational goals and culture. In any case, leaders should use empathetic language to help followers deal with stresses caused by the environmental and organizational shifts.

Organizational-Level Strategic Motivating Language Use: Internal

Strategic motivating language also plays a major role in coordinating internal activities in an organization. Top leaders use ML to ensure that the organization as a whole has a shared set of goals and beliefs, everyone in the organization commits to these goals (meaning-making language), organizational members feel supported and can bring their whole selves to work (empathetic language), and everyone has a clear purpose and understands how their purpose fits with other organizational members (direction-giving language).

Top leaders have their greatest impact through meaning-making language. While lower-level leaders must clearly transmit an organization's culture—and link the culture to each individual's goals—a top leader must do more: Top leaders must actively and intentionally craft the culture and make sure it encapsulates an organization's vision, promotes employee morale and productivity, and fits with the wider environment. Top leaders use meaning-making language to shape and transmit an organization's culture, and this culture must be one that others can value and embrace.

To use meaning-making language to forge a culture, leaders must take environmental inputs and link these inputs to the organizational vision. External inputs help the leader understand what type of culture best fits with external forces; internal inputs help the leader understand what culture fits and includes all organizational members. As forces evolve, they must be matched with existing culture and shaped in a way that inspires followers. Thus, most leaders will not be creating a new culture—they will be attempting to refine and adjust a culture to match the normal changes in an environment. Some top leaders will face environmental forces that require major changes to an existing culture. And all leaders must use meaning-making language to reinforce and clarify an existing culture, perhaps emphasizing aspects of a culture when vital cultural aspects begin to erode or change in negative ways.

Top leaders use empathetic language to develop the feeling of shared emotional support in an organization—to let followers know that the organization as a whole provides a supportive community where members can bring their whole selves to work. Top leaders have the greatest need to use empathetic language when there are unusual events that occur in an organization. For example, when a company has a

success—such as offering a new product or gaining a new major client—a top leader that uses good strategic motivating language will help organizational members to emotionally connect with the event through empathetic language. This language use creates an emotional connection to the event rather than just an intellectual one. In turn, the emotional connection guides and aids organizational members in their sense making process (Balogun and Johnson 2004) and gives the followers a stronger connection to the organization.

Leaders use empathetic language in a more dramatic fashion when a negative event strikes their organization. More common examples of such situations include unexpected or dramatic financial losses, the emergence of a new competitor, or the loss of a long-time client. Less frequent events—but ones that create a greater need for empathetic language—including the death of a respected employee, closing of a production unit, and layoffs. In these situations, leaders must not only create an emotional connection with organizational members, but the empathetic language must give emotional comfort and support to members. Top leaders must use their language to help process grief, fear, and even anger. By providing such emotional support, leaders can help members cope better with their emotional distress and ensure smoother operations in an organization.

For top leaders, direction-giving language use is the most straightforward of the three ML facets. It consists of top leaders sending communications to organizational members about the tasks they need to accomplish the organization's vison. A difference between strategic and dyadic direction-giving language is that strategic ML use must focus on inspiration and broad directions that drive productive vision fulfillment rather than specific directives.

Top leaders use a variety of channels to communicate these messages and must understand how different channels and communication flow choices can affect their messages. Probably, the most common channel top leaders use for dispersing their message is through the chain of command—from their direct reports downward. However, this channel risks distortion or loss of the original message intent as each manager receives and encodes the information through her or his unique perceptual process. This channel also depends on the motivating language ability of each person in the chain. If a single leader has poor motivating language use with a follower, then the original top leader's message can be stopped or seriously curtailed in its transmission.

Top leaders can also communicate directly to organizational members through mass communication channels such as e-mail, video, printed messages, and speeches and presentations. Such channels allow the top leader a way to send undistorted messages to organizational members, but must necessarily use channels that provide fewer communication cues and opportunities for adapting a message based on recipient reaction (Daft and Lengel 1986). Using such channels also creates problems in that it is harder to tailor the messages to specific followers, thus risking the loss of motivating language's strength for specific members.

Strategic Motivating Language Use—Linking Pin and Contagion Aspects

Top leaders also have another consideration in their internal strategic use of motivating language—ensuring that their ML communications extend throughout the organization. While a top leader can use high-ML levels with her or his direct reports, this use becomes blunted when those reports fail to employ high-ML use as well. Top leaders need their ML messages passed throughout the organization, and the best way for these messages to spread comes from other leaders employing high motivating language to disperse the message. While top leaders can use other means to directly send their ML communications to non-direct reports, these means require time and resources that top leaders could use elsewhere, and these messages may not be as effective as messages coming from a direct supervisor.

Top leaders, therefore, need to make sure that all leaders in an organization use quality motivating language. When all leaders use high-quality motivating language, all three communication facets are better transmitted throughout the organization—each leader receives a more complete picture of organizational culture, emotional resonance, and needed actions. When an intermediary leader fails to use quality motivating language, that person's reports will receive only a partial or distorted view of the organization and what must be done to achieve organizational goals. When such a break occurs, lower-level leaders are disadvantaged and a cascade effect occurs.

When a leader fails to use quality ML, the rupture cannot be overcome by their reports employing motivating language. The reporting leader will be working from a reduced understanding of the strategic

ML message. Their understanding of the organizational culture will be diminished (meaning-making language), they can find it difficult to provide emotional support when they do not receive needed emotional support from their boss (empathetic language), they will only have an imprecise understanding of what specific actions need to be carried out (direction-giving language), and their motivation is likely to be reduced as well (ML as a whole). Without a clear understanding of the strategic ML message, these leaders cannot transmit the message to others—including other leaders that report to them. At best, all reporting leaders carry forward a distorted strategic ML message that continues to the lowest organizational level.

You can think of this issue as a linking pin problem (Graen and Cashman 1975; Graen et al. 1977). How well a leader transmits strategic motivating language messages depends (in part) on how well he or she received the message. Breaks in the leadership chain create dead sectors in the organization. This problem can be partly overcome through receiving ML messages from peers or directly from the top leader, but such means are inherently less effective than direct transmissions. Additionally, as the dead sectors in an organization increase, the cross talk (peer communications) between high-ML. and low-ML sectors creates distortions in the strategic ML message that creates further distortions in the strategic motivating language message.

With such peer communication of strategic motivating language, there are differences in organizations depending on the number of areas receiving poor strategic ML, and whether those poor areas have received limited or distorted messages. When an area does receive limited communications, the followers will know or at least suspect that they do not have the full message—they will not know what they are expected to do, will not feel an emotional connection to the workplace, or will not understand the organization's larger purpose. In such cases, the followers can seek and receive this information from other sources—either from messages from the top leader (assuming he or she is available) or from peers who have received the strategic ML message from a direct leader. However, as these poor strategic ML areas increase in an organization, it becomes more difficult to find peers with enough understanding of the strategic ML message to supplement someone's lack of understanding.

Compared to absence of ML, a worse situation occurs when strategic motivating language messages become distorted due to poor leader ML use. In these situations, different areas in an organization have divergent

understandings of the strategic ML message. This situation occurs when one leader uses ML poorly in transmitting the strategic motivating language message to her or his followers; then, these followers make their best guess about what the message is or are forced to interpret it through their own experience, and in turn, lower-level leaders use quality motivating language to pass the distorted message to their followers. At this point, the (altered) strategic motivating language message passes to others in an organization as if it were an authentic strategic motivating language message. An example is when a top leader wants to increase firm market share and passes this message on, which is then distorted into increasing dollar sales. In this case, the people implementing the strategy will be operating from wrong premises that are embedded in organizational operations.

In the situation of distorted strategic motivating language messages, the distortions will be difficult to correct and can spread beyond the directly affected organizational areas. Unlike the situation where the strategic ML message is poor, people receiving distorted strategic ML messages will not see a reason to seek message clarification—they will likely believe they understand the intended strategic ML message. When they do communicate with peers, it will be unclear which message is the correct one. When there are only a few areas effected by distorted messages, organizational members might be able to use triangulation (which message occurs most often) to recover the original message. But when there are many areas that receive a distorted message, people who have received the correct message may be the ones who change their beliefs about what needs to be accomplished. Also, with many different strategic ML messages being exchanged, the confusion from these different messages will reduce the effectiveness of even the correct message.

To deal with such distortion, top leaders need to recognize it exists and take proactive steps to reduce its occurrence. In our simulation of how motivating language spreads through an organization (Mayfield and Mayfield, in press), we found that top leader quality motivating language use is the most important factor in ensuring the spread of strategic ML messages. When a top leader uses high levels of motivating language, her or his direct reports are likely to model the top leader and employ high levels of motivating language as well. This adoption happens as a result of effective culture creation. Time and training also play a crucial role in spreading strategic motivating language use.

The longer a top leader sends out a strategic motivating language message, the more likely that message will be correctly received by the entire organization. This idea speaks to the importance of a top leader sending consistent messages. While environmental changes require new messages, good strategy should be resilient enough that core strategic ideas can be relatively stable (Mayfield et al. 2007; Miles and Snow 1978). Top leaders must ground their strategic motivating language messages in these stable, core organizational aspects and frequently send messages that are built around these ideas. In this way, the top leader's message becomes self-reinforcing and part of the organization's culture and speech community.

Top leaders can also help direct reports improve their own motivating language use. In even moderate-sized organizations, top leaders will mostly communicate with middle managers, and in large organizations, top leaders may only communicate with C-level managers (e.g. CEO, COO, and CIO). As such, the bulk of organizational members will receive strategic ML communications from intermediaries. It is therefore crucial for top leaders to ensure that their direct reports can do a good job of distributing the strategic ML messages to their followers. As part of this process, top leaders should devote time to helping their direct reports improve their motivating language ability or implement appropriate leader communication training to better ensure that these people clearly understand the strategic ML message that needs to be transmitted, and that these intermediary leaders also help their reports improve their motivating language use.

Top leaders can aid the process by sending direct messages to the organization as a whole. While only a few researchers have examined this motivating language aspect (Holmes 2012; Holmes and Parker 2017; Mayfield et al. 2015), results show that top leaders should take an active role in sending strategic motivating language messages to the organization at large. Fortunately, modern communication technology makes such large-scale motivating language use easier even in large or geographically distributed locations. These messages can be sent through traditionally printed statements, posted on web pages, or sent as videos to firm members through e-mails or intranets. All such methods help to directly expose organizational members to the strategic ML message and reinforce strategic ML messages that have been passed through the organizational chain of command and correct distortions that may have occurred through such transmission.

Organizational Strategic ML Use: External

Top leaders must also use motivating language with external stakeholders, but why a leader uses ML differs greatly for the internal and external stakeholder. To complicate matters, leaders face great diversity among external stakeholder groups (governmental, stock holders, community members, etc.) and even within each stakeholder group. The variety of external stakeholders creates difficulties for the top leader in crafting ML messages and achieving their goals.

Leaders must have a clear idea of what they need to accomplish to deal with the differing needs and expectations of various stakeholder groups, and must maintain consistency among all messages to the different stakeholder groups. For accomplishing differing goals among different stakeholder groups, the leader needs to understand what role each group plays in relation to the organization. Customers, suppliers, shareholders, and community members all play different roles for an organization, but, from a leader's perspective, they all are necessary for company success. As a precursor to ML use, a leader must carefully examine these roles—including stakeholder needs—and choose what actions are needed from the constituents to further company outcomes.

Leaders must have ML message consistency to maintain the integrity needed for successful ML implementation. Such consistency becomes even more critical with the increasing ease of information sharing between people. Sending a message of increasing economic gains to shareholders (to encourage greater investment) while sending another message of financial trouble to governmental bodies (to try and obtain tax breaks or subsidies) will create confusion at best and legal actions at worst.

Variety within a given stakeholder group also challenges effective strategic ML use. When using strategic ML within an organization, the organization's mission and follower's mutual interests in achieving organizational success provide a base consistency among constituents. But an external stakeholder group may not have such a uniting force. Different members of a stakeholder group can hold different views of the organization, and group members can have conflicts between themselves. For example, some community members may want increased economic growth, while others prefer increased quality of life.

In dealing with such situations, a leader must first use motivating language to unite the stakeholders in a common purpose—to develop a

shared goal that aligns with organizational and stakeholder needs. Only after uniting a stakeholder group can a leader use motivating language to guide the external stakeholders in taking the desired actions. Without a uniting goal for a stakeholder group, the leader's ML use will always be diffused and inefficient.

Strategic ML Use and Teams

The other chapter sections have focused on grand use of motivating language—ML at an organizational level. But leaders use strategic ML with teams, and such focus requires different methods and skills than strategic ML in the large. At the team level, motivating language use becomes focused on coordination of team processes and uniting followers in an effective manner. To achieve the task of effective team ML use, leaders must accomplish three tasks: ensuring that everyone on the team works toward a common goal, all followers' skills are best utilized, and follower interactions are well coordinated.

These tasks require leaders to achieve both uniformity and diversity in ML use. Leaders must employ uniformity in ML use to ensure that all team members have a shared vision (meaning-making), follow a common set of affective interaction guidelines (empathetic), and are working toward common goals (direction-giving). Uniformity can be achieved by routine talks with all team members to reinforce the needed team aspects by using all three ML facets. For this aspect of team ML use, leaders can employ many of the same tactics as top leaders in using ML with the entire organization.

However, team leaders must use dyadic ML to ensure that all team members' skills are best utilized. Leaders accomplish utilization in the manner discussed in Chaps. 3 through 6; however, the coordination of team member activities also requires a leader's awareness of the relative strengths and weaknesses of each team member. For a given project, some team members may have to perform outside of their comfort zone or not operate at their peak in order to take on tasks that only they can accomplish. For example, a French-speaking engineer may have to act as a salesperson with a French client even though her engineering skills are far better than her sales skills.

In such situations, team leaders must also use their ML ability to motivate followers more when their intrinsic motivation is reduced. Meaning-making language should be used to remind the follower how

her or his actions contribute to accomplishing team goals (and how these team goals link to personal goals) even though their specific task is outside of their normal activities. Empathetic language should be used to help the follower deal with the stresses from doing unusual tasks and greater encouragement and praise for taking on the task. Leaders will also need to use more direction-giving language to coach the follower in these new tasks (as described in Chap. 7 about when followers' jobs change).

Finally, a leader must use ML to help followers in their team interactions. Just as ML must be used to help a follower in her or his specific job task, a follower also needs help in how to interact with others to accomplish a job. In essence, leaders must recognize that how followers interact with other team members forms part of their job, and use ML to help accomplish the interaction tasks in the same way that they use ML to help followers accomplish the specific job tasks. Such interactions are most vital in situations where team goals can only be accomplished through interactions (such as designing new products or services), but are present even in jobs where followers generally work independently.

With jobs that are more independent (such as with sales field representatives), leaders can use ML to encourage organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) between team members. OCB (Chen and Chiu 2008) occurs when an organizational member goes above and beyond their job duties to help another one with their job task or in having a more positive affect. Leaders can use ML to encourage and direct followers to use greater OCB and thus improve team interactions even when team members' tasks are only loosely linked.

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CHAPTER 9

Measurement and Generalizability

Abstract Motivating language theory has proven to be remarkably generalizable across many different settings. This stability, in part, comes from ML's firm theoretical grounding, available quality measures, and parallel development using different analytic methods. Its foundation has lead to a theory that generalizes across most national culture groups, work situations, and worker demographics. We need, however, more explicit work on ML's generalizability since our current understanding comes from examining results from studies with diverse settings rather than specific generalizability tests. Future theoretical development needs to accompany such work to better understand *how* motivating language works in diverse settings.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication
Generalizability · National culture · Employee demographics
Scale development · Measurement

Overview

Motivating language theory has proven to be remarkably generalizable across many different settings. This stability, in part, comes from ML's firm theoretical grounding (Mayfield 1993; Sullivan 1988), available quality measures (Mayfield et al. 1995), and parallel development using different analytic methods (Zorn and Ruccio 1998). Its foundation has lead to a theory that generalizes across most national culture groups

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(Ronen and Shenkar 1985), work situations, and worker demographics. We need, however, more explicit work on ML's generalizability since our current understanding comes from examining results from studies with diverse settings rather than specific generalizability tests. Future theoretical development needs to accompany such work to better understand *how* motivating language works in diverse settings.

Making Leader Communication Solid

Theories need quality measurement methods in the same way that surgeons need quality medical instruments. Without quality measurement, a theory remains an abstract idea of how the world could (or at least should) operate. Measurement lets us check a theory's soundness and modify the theory where needed—measures operationalize constructs and let us test propositions (DeVellis 2003; Fornaciari et al. 2005; Omilion-Hodges and Baker 2017). In many ways, a theory rests upon its measurement and test settings. We should only feel comfortable that a theory reflects reality—and not the quirks of a single study or method—after constructs and propositions have been tested across diverse measures and settings.

From near its conception, motivating language theory has been intimately tied to its measurement. The first quantitative article on motivating language (and second article ever) examined the theory from a measurement development perspective (Mayfield et al. 1995). The third article on motivating language (Zorn and Ruccio 1998) also grounded itself in using measurement development to understand leader motivating language use. But Zorn and Ruccio (1998) took a different approach to motivating language measurement and employed qualitative methods. Since that time the majority of ML studies have used the motivating language scale developed by us, but other methods have been used as well.

On a personal note, the initial lack of motivating language measure could have stopped the theory's development. Instead, the lack of a scale spurred much of what became the theory in its current form. When Jackie first proposed testing motivating language theory for her dissertation, her committee asked about instrument availability. When she found that one didn't exist, most of her committee members warned about the problems of creating a new scale within the confines of dissertation research and suggested she look for a different topic. However,

she decided to take the risk and develop a new scale. We started work on the motivating language scale on Thanksgiving of 1991, drafting the broad outline for the scale then. We finished the scale's final draft (with the exception of a few minor grammatical changes and clarifications) on New Year's Eve of 1991. Since then, researchers have translated the scale into multiple languages, used it for academic research, used it as the basis for training programs in small and large organizations, and used it to ground our understanding of motivating language theory.

However, as mentioned earlier, researchers have employed other methods to capture ML use in diverse settings. These varied ML tests of motivating language theory have supported its basic tenets and in found similar relationships with various ML outcomes. These findings help support the validity of motivating language theory and should give practitioners confidence in using ML for applied situations. Especially useful for leader communication researchers, ML can be measured through a simple survey completed by followers.

The most widely used scale (Mayfield et al. 1995) has been tested on several thousand subjects and consistently shows high measurement reliability and validity. More recently, a new ML instrument has been developed with similar scale properties to the original measure but that incorporates recent theoretical developments in motivating language research. This chapter presents both of these scales as well as ideas for how ML could be measured in future studies.

This chapter also discusses the generalizability of ML findings. Generalizability has been examined across different worker types, nations, and industries in different studies. Findings from this research show ML to be stable across many work settings, and we will examine the theoretical implications of this stability later in this chapter.

Measurement

Before we discuss how ML has been measured, we need to discuss what needs to be measured by any ML instrument. In brief, motivating language as currently conceived is a latent construct: its effect is something that cannot be seen, heard, tasted, or touched; something that can only be measured indirectly. Intelligence is the best known latent construct. No one denies that IQ exists (even if there are arguments on the exact definition of IQ), but a person's IQ cannot be measured using a ruler or kitchen scale. IQ must be measured indirectly by asking people to

answer questions that relate to their intelligence. We then use the answer to these questions to estimate a person's IQ. A person's answers to the questions are the direct measures—the person's IQ estimate is the indirect (latent) measure.

ML, as IQ, requires a latent measurement process. A follower's perception of ML use cannot be directly measured. Instead, ML instruments use some form of indirect measurement to capture the construct or the perception of its use. While ML has been measured using multiple instruments, the most common measurement form has been a self-completed questionnaire filled out by the follower, and we will mostly concentrate on this measurement form in this chapter.

Jackie first presented the ML scale in her dissertation (1993), and we subsequently published it in the *Journal of Business Communication* (Mayfield et al. 1995). This scale consists of 24 questions that a follower completes about her or his leader. The scale has consistently had high-reliability measures with each facet usually having a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.90 or higher. The scale's factor structure has also consistently tested well with the items showing strong loadings on the expected latent constructs. We present the original ML scale at the end of this chapter.

We also created a reduced scale based on the full scale (Mayfield and Mayfield 2007). We created this scale by taking the three highest loading items from each ML facet and created a nine-item ML scale. The scale has shown itself to have good psychometric qualities including high Cronbach's alpha scores. The reduced and full ML scale also has similar relationships to other variables—indicating that the reduced ML scale provides a valid measure of motivating language.

However, we urge caution in using the reduced ML scale because it appears to be somewhat fragile under certain situations. In an unpublished study, two researchers used the reduced scale to test the effectiveness of motivating language training in a healthcare setting. In this setting, one of the meaning-making items did not load as it did in other studies. After discussion between us and the researchers, we determined that the item was not appropriate for the setting. Once the item was dropped, the reduced scale tested and performed as expected. While we expect that the reduced scale items will perform as expected in most settings, using the reduced scale poses more risk than the full scale in terms of delivering reliable results. If a researcher is pressed to use a subset of ML items, we suggest using four or five items for each facet.

We have also created a new motivating language scale that incorporates many of the theoretical developments (and our own personal ideas) on motivating language that have arisen since the original scale's creation. The new scale has quality psychometric properties similar to the original scale. The Cronbach's alpha scores for each facet are: meaning-making language—0.95 (0.88 for the original measure in the same study); empathetic language—0.97 (0.92 for the original measure); direction-giving language—0.97 (0.93 for the original measure). Each facet has a high correlation with the same facet from the original scale and similar relationships to outcome measures (performance, absenteeism, job satisfaction, and intent-to-turnover) as the original ML scale.

The new scale also includes different types of ML usage for each facet, thus incorporating our more recent ideas of how leaders use motivating language. (We used these areas to develop our descriptions of each facet in chapters three through five.) By incorporating greater detail in each facet, people can use the new ML scale to better pinpoint areas of weakness in a given leader's ML usage and then develop interventions to improve the motivating language use.

However, this greater explicitness came at the cost of a much longer scale. The new scale includes twenty-four items per facet or seventy-two items in total. We expect this number can be reduced because each factorial area was measured using three different items. This means that the scale can be reduced to a third (twenty-four items) and still retain its ability to provide greater details on areas of weakness in a facet. And at twenty-four items, the scale would be the same length as the original ML measure. We present the complete new ML scale at the end of this chapter.

In addition to self-completed questionnaires, researchers have used alternate measures to examine motivating language. Zorn and Ruccio (1998) were the earliest authors to employ an alternate measure. They used semi-structured interviews and open-ended questions to generate follower descriptions of leader motivating language use and then used narrative analysis to categorize the responses into themes that represented different types of motivating language use.

The authors' study was the second analytical motivating language study published in an academic journal and only the third of any kind. As such, it presents an interesting example of how motivating language could be analyzed and brings out ideas that have either never been pursued or only recently been rediscovered. In addition to the authors' qualitative analysis, they also looked at the language that demotivates.

The authors identified demotivating language as coming from shallow or inauthentic use of ML. This idea mirrors the motivating language requirement of a leader *walking the talk*, but also presents a slightly different perspective on the use of motivating language.

The analysis of demotivating language also provides a different perspective than the typical idea of ML. Implicitly, the standard measures of ML assume a follower's motivation starts at zero (or some initial level), and motivation remains the same (with poor ML use) or increases (with good ML use). With this view, poor ML use fails to increase motivation but does not destroy existing motivation. By taking an alternate measurement approach, Zorn and Ruccio present the idea that a leader's communication can harm a follower's motivation. In such situations, followers can end up being less motivated after a leader's communication than before her or his communication. To date, no researcher (we know of) has followed up on this intriguing idea.

Other researchers have used qualitative methods to capture the motivating language process. Toby Holmes and his colleagues are at the forefront of this renewed interest in using qualitative methods to examine ML and have combined qualitative and quantitative methods to examine the validity of motivating language in different settings (Holmes 2012). Holmes and Parker (2017) used these mixed-methods measures to test a long-standing assumption that motivating language use must be supported by leader behavior. While Mayfield (Mayfield 1993) had tested this assumption quantitatively, Holmes and Parker were able to add specifics on what type of leader behaviors are necessary to support motivating language use.

In addition to quantitative and qualitative measures of motivating language, researchers have tested ML use through experimental manipulations (Wang et al. 2009). Such research shows us that we understand motivating language well enough to create artificial situations with the important aspects of leader communication use and indicates that researchers have developed a good understanding of the core ML properties.

Generalizability

We define generalizability as the level of consistency in construct relationships across different settings (Cronbach et al. 1963; Dubin 1978). A theory's generalizability lets us know where we can apply results, and where we must use caution or even develop new theories (Dubin 1978;

Shavelson and Webb 1991, 2005). Understanding a theory's generalizability helps us know the theory better—both in different contexts and within any given context. In essence, a close examination of a theory's generalizability helps us to develop a theory (Almaney 1974).

When a theory generalizes across many different situations, then that theory likely captures some process fundamental to human nature. However, even when a theory fails to generalize across some situations, the limitation help us explore the theory's mechanisms. At its most fundamental, when a theory does not generalize across contexts, the context differences can be seen as moderators. For example, if motivating language operates differently for full- and part-time work (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006), we could simply use full- or part-time worker status as a moderator. But using context as a simple moderator provides a poor understanding of the theory. Far better to use the contextual break to try and understand why there are differences. By proposing and testing theoretical explanations for the differences, we develop a richer understanding of motivating language and how motivating language operates (Aritz and Walker 2014).

Research results show motivating language generalizes across a wide range of settings: cultures, measures, industries, job types, and organizational levels. These findings come from different researchers, which also adds to ML's generalizability. In this section, we will discuss across which situations ML generalizes, where ML does not generalize, and what the results mean for understanding motivating language.

As discussed in this chapter's measurement section, the motivating language construct and its relationships have remained robust across multiple instruments. This stability indicates that the motivating language construct exists outside of any given measurement method—the idea is not simply a measurement artifact. While this result may seem simple, it provides a base for all other findings. It gives us reassurance that we examine a true phenomenon and not simply a data collection artifact.

Motivating language theory has also generalized across multiple cultures and languages. The initial motivating language theory tests took place in the USA. The next motivating language study occurred in Australia (Luca and Gray 2004), and this study supported the generalizability of the original ML scale and the links between leader motivating language use and positive follower outcomes. Another Australian study (Sarros et al. 2014) used a combination of leader interviews and responses to written questions to examine leader's motivating language

use during times of organizational change and transition. This study supported MLT as a useful framework for examining leader communication and also provided interesting evidence about leaders use and non-use of the full range of motivating language facets.

However, the generalizability of ML to Australia should be expected. While Australia and the USA have distinct cultures, their cultures have many similarities. Several cultural studies—examining leadership and communication cultural aspects—have underscored these similarities (Hall 1969; Hofstede 1980, 2001; House et al. 2004; Inglehart et al. 2008). Ronen and Shenkar (1985) placed Australia and the USA into the same overall Anglo-Saxon cultural group: nations that use English as their major primary national language and whose foundings are strongly tied to Great Britain (England, Ireland, Scotland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the USA).

Even with such similarities, the Australian studies give us a valuable insight into how motivating language generalizes across cultures. The results suggest that motivating language should generalize across nations from the Anglo-Saxon group, and the findings from one nation in this cultural group should apply to the other nations in the group. The study also raises the question of how well the motivating language theory generalizes to nations in other cultural groups.

To examine that question, we can look at motivating language studies from cultures that are very different from the Anglo-Saxon cultural group. Researchers have done less work on motivating language outside of the Anglo-Saxon culture group, but the existing studies provide useful insights. Specifically, work has taken place in Taiwan, Mexico, Turkey, Kuwait, and Poland. These studies have all supported motivating language theory and its broad generalizability across cultures.

Studies in Taiwan have shown that motivating language generalizes to that nation (and likely to other nations in the Asian cultural group) and provides support for motivating language's generalizability from verbal to written communications. Wang and colleagues' (2009) initial motivating language study involved an experimental design in which different motivating language conditions were manipulated through written communications to influence team creativity. While the authors only manipulated two of the three ML facets (direction-giving and empathetic), the results supported the influence of those facets on team creativity. A follow-up study by Fan and colleagues (2014) examined motivating language use in a virtual team. Their findings supported motivating language's influence on individual creativity. For this study, the authors

examined leader motivating language use through e-mail channels, thus adding weight to MLT's generalizability across cultural groups and communication channels.

A study in China (Zhang (張) 2009) provided further evidence of motivating language's generalizability to nations in the Asian cultural group. Zhang translated the original motivating language scale into Mandarin Chinese and then tested the translated scale for reliability and factor structure. Analysis results showed strong reliability and a factor structure consistent with the original scale after deleting two items. The author then retested the translated scale on a new set of respondents and supported the scale's psychometric properties. While more work needs to be done to examine how motivating language operates in China and other Asian nations, the results provide good evidence of motivating language's consistency in cultures very different from the Anglo-Saxon group.

Recent work in Japan provides further evidence of ML's generalizability across Asian cultures. A study by Kunie and colleagues (Kunie et al. 2017) found that leader motivating language use significantly improved work engagement. The authors also examined group level motivating language use and—based on analytic results—theorized that quality leader ML communication increases worker engagement by improving the psychosocial work environment for groups. By examining ML at a group level, this study provides evidence that motivating language use generalizes across different levels as well as across cultures.

A study of motivating language in Mexico provides more evidence of MLT's generalizability and also offers insights into how cultural aspects influence motivating language. Madlock and Sexton (2015) examined how leader ML use influenced follower job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and views of leader communication competence. They found significant and large (Cohen 1988) relationships between ML and the outcome variables—relationships that were similar in magnitude to those found in the USA.

They also tested for the relationships between worker power distance scores (Hofstede 2001) and each motivating language facet. They found no relationship between power distance and empathetic language and only small relationships with direction-giving and meaning-making language. The overall national cultural score may have attenuated these relationships (greater variability will be seen between nations); however, the findings indicate that cultural differences should have only limited influence in how followers perceive leader motivating language use.

Madlock and Sexton's study also brings up the intriguing idea that motivating language becomes more powerful when a greater power differential exists between a leader and follower. This study result indicates a limitation on ML generalizability but also provides insight into how ML might operate. The power differential result indicates a generalizability limitation of degree rather than kind. ML still operates in high- and low-power situations, but ML's effect appears to be attenuated in low-power situations—a leader's ML use has less effect in low-power situations.

Exploring the reason for this attenuation raises some intriguing ideas. It is possible that in high-power distance situations the leader's ML (communication) lowers a steeper power differential. The more a follower sees a leader as equalizing power, the more attention the follower will pay to the leader's communication and thus ML will have a greater effect. Alternately, in low-power distance situations, team members may be more likely to communicate among themselves and provide substitutes for a leader's ML use. As such, a leader's ML use would be less necessary and have a lower effect.

Returning to other national studies, in Turkey, Özen (2013) translated the original motivating language scale into Turkish and found the translated scale to have similar properties as the English scale and equivalent psychometric properties. The author used the translated scale to test the link between motivating language and organizational citizenship behavior (LePine et al. 2002) in an educational setting (Özen 2014). The study results were similar to findings on ML and organizational citizenship behavior in the USA (Mayfield and Mayfield 2013).

Continuing in the Middle East, Alqahtani (2015) investigated motivating language's effect in public schools. The author found that a principal's use of motivating language had a positive and significant effect on follower's school climate perceptions. Alqahanti's work not only helps us map how stable motivating language is across cultures but also adds a new outcome that motivating language influences—organizational climate. While the outcome is new, it is similar to known links between motivating language and affective outcomes such as job satisfaction. As such, Alqahtani and Özen's work provides initial evidence for motivating language theory's generalizability to Middle Eastern settings.

We turn to Poland to complete our geographical tour of motivating language theory research. Dr. Joanna Wińska has used the motivating language framework to examine leader communication and positive organizational development (Wińska 2010, 2013, 2014b). In her initial analytic study,

Dr. Wińska (2013) used motivating language theory as a basis to identify the types of communication most often used in major Polish businesses and how these communications influenced positive management practices. Her study showed support for the motivating language framework in this setting and also uncovered new aspects of motivating language use.

In addition to expanding ML research to Poland, her study augmented ML's generalizability in other ways. First, she examined leader's ML use in the context of the organization as a whole. Thus, her work provides a basis of understanding ML as a component of organizational culture and how top leader motivating language use influences overall organizational outcomes. Her study also examined the influence of leader behavior and organizational characteristics in tandem with motivating language use—reinforcing the idea that motivating language must be supported by actions. She examined these communications using a mix of the Delphi method, surveys, and in-depth interviews, adding credibility to the idea that motivating language exists independent of any particular measurement method. Finally, she examined the role of motivating language in coordinating activities between different followers—an important workplace function that had not been previously explored in an ML context.

In addition to these contributions to ML theory, Wińska examined the antecedents of quality ML use in an organizational setting. She proposed five major areas consisting of management behavior (top leader communication behaviors that are modeled by other leaders), selection and recruitment, training, organizational culture, and communication systems and procedures.

Wińska found that the strength of ML facets differed between Poland and non-Polish ML studies. Specifically, Polish managers used empathic language less. She speculated that the lower use was due to Poland's high-masculinity cultural attribute (Hofstede 2001; Wińska 2013), although future work will be needed to rule out other cultural influences (Babcock and Du-Babcock 2001; Limaye and Victor 1991). Overall, however, these study findings and later work (Wińska 2014a; Wińska and Glińska-Neweś 2016) by Wińska have supported motivating language's generalizability to Poland. These studies also provide evidence that ML should generalize to eastern Europe as well.

Looking at these findings as a whole, we can say that evidence supports the generalizability of motivating language theory across most national culture types. We also propose that motivating language should operate

similarly in the remaining cultural groups. However, work still needs to be done in African, Asian, and western European nations, Latin American, Germanic, and Nordic cultures. Additionally, more systematic work needs to be conducted in the cultures where motivating language has been tested.

We have already discussed the various measures used to examine motivating language, and this instrument variety provides insight into how motivating language generalizes. Motivating language theory has been tested with a self-completion instrument (Mayfield and Mayfield 2009), through interviews (Zorn and Ruccio 1998), experimental design (Wang et al. 2009), content analysis (Fan et al. 2014), expert analysis (Sarros et al. 2014), and mixed qualitative and quantitative designs (Holmes 2012). These different methods broadly supported motivating language theory, indicating that the measurement method has little effect on an investigation. Thus, we can say that motivating language can be generalized across measurement methods.

We can also tentatively say that motivating language generalizes across a range of industries and job types. The early motivating language studies included a limited range of industries and job types—specifically professional or skilled workers in health care (Mayfield et al. 1998) and sales (Zorn and Ruccio 1998). Later studies expanded to a variety of industries and job types (Holmes and Parker 2017; Mayfield and Mayfield 2006, 2009; Mayfield and Mayfield 2016; Sharbrough et al. 2006) and found motivating language to have high consistency both in terms of how the construct operates and how it influences worker outcomes.

Augmenting the studies done in different industries and across different job types, more recent motivating language studies have attempted to examine motivating language using heterogenous samples (Mayfield and Mayfield 2009, 2012; Mayfield and Mayfield 2017). These studies looked at followers in jobs requiring different skill levels (professional, skilled, and unskilled jobs), across organization sizes (from less than 100 employees to more than 1000 employees), and across a variety of industries and job types. While the job and organizational environment variables were not explicitly examined in relation to motivating language, the overall results showed stability (generalizability) across the different work situations.

These and the other motivating language studies indicate that motivating language theory generalizes across most workplace situations. Future research needs to be done explicitly examining the role of organizational setting and motivating language. Also, new work needs to look

at how other jobs and individual characteristics (such as follower's career stage, time with leader, and personality characteristics) influence the operation of motivating language.

A final note needs to be made about where motivating language fails to generalize—to part-time workers (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006). In our study comparing ML's effect on part- and full-time workers, we found that leader ML use influenced part-time followers' job satisfaction, but not their performance. These results are interesting for many reasons. First, it shows that motivating language is perceived in similar ways by part- and full-time workers but operates in different ways. The findings indicate that motivating language influences follower affective states regardless of job status—which indicates that motivating language does operate in a similar way across different worker statuses. However, the lack of ML effect on follower performance also indicates that there are other—neutralizing—factors at play. We speculated in our paper that the variance could be differing job or career aspirations, but to date, no further theoretical or empirical work has examined these differences.

Motivating Language Scale—Original

Below we list our original motivating language scale along with its directions. We omitted the response categories to save space. Each question has five possible responses—*very little*, *a little*, *some*, *a lot*, and *a whole lot*—that are scored from 1 (very little) to 5 (a whole lot). The score in each area comes from the average of all items in a facet (direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making), and the overall ML score comes from the average of the three facets.

Please contact us if you would like to use the scale but cannot comply with the terms for some reason. We will be happy to work with you when possible.

Motivating Language Scale

The examples below show different ways that your boss might talk to you. Please use the following selections to choose the answer that best matches your perceptions, and then click on the appropriate response.

Direction-Giving Language

1. Gives me useful explanations of what needs to be done in my work.
2. Offers me helpful directions on how to do my job.
3. Provides me with easily understandable instructions about my work.
4. Offers me helpful advice on how to improve my work.
5. Gives me good definitions of what I must do in order to receive rewards.
6. Gives me clear instructions about solving job-related problems.
7. Offers me specific information on how I am evaluated.
8. Provides me with helpful information about forthcoming changes affecting my work.
9. Provides me with helpful information about past changes affecting my work.
10. Shares news with me about organizational achievements and financial status.

Empathetic Language

11. Gives me praise for my good work.
12. Shows me encouragement for my work efforts.
13. Shows concern about my job satisfaction.
14. Expresses his/her support for my professional development.
15. Asks me about my professional well-being.
16. Shows trust in me.

Meaning-Making language

17. Tells me stories about key events in the organization's past.

18. Gives me useful information that I couldn't get through official channels.
19. Tells me stories about people who are admired in my organization.
20. Tells me stories about people who have worked hard in this organization.
21. Offers me advice about how to behave at the organization's social gatherings.
22. Offers me advice about how to "fit in" with other members of this organization.
23. Tells me stories about people who have been rewarded by this organization.
24. Tells me stories about people who have left this organization.

Motivating Language Scale—Revised

Below we list our revised motivating language scale along with its directions. We omitted the response categories to save space. Each question has six possible responses—*completely disagree, strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree, completely agree*. For non-italicized items, responses are scored from 1 (completely disagree) to 6 (completely agree). Italicized items are scored from 6 (completely disagree) to 1 (completely agree). The score in each area comes from the average of all items in an area (direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making), and the overall ML score comes from the average of the three areas.

Motivating Language

The statements below provide different ways that your boss might talk to you. For each of these statements, please select how strongly you agree or disagree with the statement—from *Completely Disagree Completely Agree*.

Direction-Giving Language

Basic work requirements/procedures

1. My boss does an excellent job of telling me about necessary work procedures.
2. My boss clearly tells me about all work requirements.
3. *My boss does not tell me what I need to do in my job.*

Innovation

4. My boss communicates information that helps me be more innovative in my job.
5. My boss tells me about new ideas related to my work.
6. *My boss tells me to not change things at work.*

Performance Feedback

7. My boss always gives me feedback on how well I am doing in my job.
8. My boss tells me how I can improve my work.
9. *I get no feedback from my boss on my performance quality.*

Available resources

10. My boss does an excellent job of telling me about resources available for completing tasks.
11. My boss updates me about new resources for doing my job.
12. *If I had to rely on my boss, I would never know about what resources are available for doing my job.*

Role

13. My boss clearly defines my overall job responsibilities to me.
14. My boss clearly tells me how my work relates to the work of co-workers.
15. *My boss is confusing in describing how my job relates to co-worker's jobs.*

Task Clarity

16. My boss clearly communicates what specific job tasks I am expected to perform in my job.
17. My boss always explains my specific job tasks in an understandable way.
18. *When my boss tells me about my job duties, I am more confused than before.*

Priorities

19. My boss always tells me how to prioritize different job requirements.
20. My boss always gives clear communications about what tasks are most important.
21. *My boss is constantly giving me unclear communication about my task priorities.*

Goals

22. My boss clearly communicates work goal expectations to me.
23. My boss always clarifies complex goals for me.
24. *My boss never explains my goal expectations.*

Reward

25. My boss always lets me know how I will be rewarded.
26. My boss tells me what I need to do to earn workplace rewards.
27. *My boss never talks to me about work rewards.*

Autonomy/authority

28. My boss always tells me how much independence I have in completing work tasks.
29. My boss always expresses confidence in my ability to make work decisions.
30. *My boss clearly tells me that I do not have independence in my work performance.*

Empathetic Language
Politeness/cordiality

1. My boss is always polite in conversations with me.
2. My boss never uses harsh language with me.
3. *My boss is often rude in conversations.*

Work Empathy

4. My boss often tells me that my happiness at work is important.
5. My boss expresses understanding when I am discouraged at work.
6. *My boss never expresses concern for my emotional well-being at work.*

Achievement

7. My boss always congratulates me when I make work achievements.
8. My boss always provides encouraging words when I have a work setback.
9. *My boss never expresses support for my work.*

Personal Goals

10. My boss always encourages me in working toward achieving personal goals.
11. My boss always give me positive recognition on making progress toward personal goals.
12. *My boss never discusses my personal goals with me.*

Performance Praise

13. My boss always expresses enthusiasm about my work quality.

14. My boss always praises me for accomplishing steps toward work goals.
15. *My boss never praises me about my work performance.*

Personal Experiences

16. My boss congratulates me about my important personal experiences.
17. My boss expresses support for my personal disappointments.
18. *My boss never wants to talk with me about personal issues.*

Effort

19. My boss always talks positively about my efforts regardless of the outcome.
20. My boss communicates encouragement for my work efforts.
21. *My boss only talks about results.*

Barriers

22. My boss encourages me when I face work barriers.
23. My boss tells me he or she understands when I have a work setback.
24. *My boss never expresses empathy about the work barriers which I face.*

Meaning-Making Language
Cultural Storytelling

1. My boss frequently tells me stories that explain my organization´s culture.
2. My boss tells me inspiring stories that help me better contribute to my workplace.
3. *My boss has never told me a story about how things can be done in my organization.*

Links personal values to work/organizational values

4. My boss talks to me about how my organization´s values relate to my values.

5. My boss frequently discusses with me how I can support my personal values through job performance.
6. *My boss clearly communicates that my personal values do not matter in my organization.*

Organization/cultural changes

7. My boss immediately tells me about any changes in my organization's goals.
8. My boss always discusses important organizational changes with me.
9. *My boss is the last person to tell me about how the organization is changing.*

Behavioral guidelines (artifacts)

10. My boss tells me about desirable work behaviors.
11. My boss tells me how to best gain support from co-workers.
12. *My boss never discusses what behaviors will get me in trouble.*

Cultural values and ideas

13. My boss tells me what is most valued in my organization.
14. My boss discusses with the reasons behind organizational changes.
15. *My boss never discusses organization values with me.*

Expresses collective, higher purpose

16. My boss often talks to me about how my organization helps society.
17. My boss often talks to me about how my specific job helps society.
18. *My boss only talks with me about financial or productivity gains at my organization.*

Task significance/Individual organizational contributions (cultural)

19. My boss often tells me how my contributions help achieve organizational goals.
20. My boss talks with me about why my work is important to our customers or clients.

21. *My boss never talks about the contribution of my work to my organization.*

New Methods

22. My boss talks with me about why new job innovations contribute to organizational values.
23. My boss always tells me about how new work ideas contribute to organizational goals.
24. *My boss never tells me why new work methods are important.*

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CHAPTER 10

Future Directions

Abstract In this chapter, we examine many ways to expand ML research. First, we look at how ML directly influences someone's motivation. We also look at how ML operates over time through adjustments to ML messages. We then provide ideas on how to translate ML from a leader-to-follower theory to a theory that can operate between any two people, including one-to-many settings, and even through non-oral communications. At its heart, MLT describes how language can be used to instigate some action or achieve some end. We also believe that motivating language should make organizations better for the people who work in them and the communities that surround them, and call for more research on ML's ethical role.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication Ethics · Time · Teams

Overview

In this chapter, we examine many ways to expand ML research. First, we look at how ML directly influences someone's motivation. We also look at how ML operates over time through adjustments to ML messages. We then provide ideas on how to translate ML from a leader-to-follower theory to a theory that can operate between any two people, including one-to-many settings, and even through non-oral communications. At its

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heart, MLT describes how language can be used to instigate some action or achieve some end. We also believe that motivating language should make organizations better for the people who work in them and the communities that surround them, and call for more research on ML's ethical role.

How Motivating Language Motivates

Motivating language theory has motivating right in the name. Yet so far motivation's role in MLT remains implied rather than explicit. Currently, no studies have examined ML's effect on motivation, and the theoretical development of how ML should influence a follower's motivation has been sparse at best. Therefore, we needed to advance a theoretical base of how motivating language theory influences motivation.

While many ways exist to describe motivation, we choose intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Gerhart and Fang 2015; Ryan and Deci 2000). Intrinsic motivation arises from internal desires to achieve something and a belief that the goal can be achieved. Even though motivating language cannot create intrinsic motivation, it can help shape and enhance it. Extrinsic motivation comes from the expectation of rewards for a given behavior. Motivating language can serve as both a direct extrinsic reward (through praise) or as a way to communicate available rewards for a given behavior.

We expect that motivating language has a more complicated relationship with intrinsic motivation that extrinsic motivation. By definition, intrinsic motivation comes from within a person. However, empirical evidence indicates a positive link between ML and intrinsic motivation (Sun et al. 2016). We believe that motivating language promotes the circumstances that elicit intrinsic motivation and guides the goals related to intrinsic motivation toward desired ends (Cerasoli et al. 2014). Intrinsic motivation is driven by interest, autonomy, and self-efficacy (Amabile 1993). Interest in some task increases a person's intrinsic motivation to perform the task. ML can increase a person's interest by linking the task to personal goals (meaning-making language) and providing emotional support in attempting the task (empathetic language). Direction-giving language clarifies what needs to be done to accomplish the task, thus reducing ambiguity that could reduce interest.

Feelings of autonomy also grow intrinsic motivation—the more self-control someone feels about a task, the greater her or his intrinsic

motivation. Using meaning-making language to link a person's goals to the task helps them feel they are achieving their own goals rather than simply working toward someone else's end. Thus, they will see themselves as more in control of their own destiny. As with interest, empathetic language provides support and helps deal with task setbacks and barriers. Relatedly, clear direction-giving language focuses a person on completing a task, thus helping the person see the actions as under their own control rather than driven by external forces.

Finally, ML can increase a person's self-efficacy. Prior research showed a strong link between ML and self-efficacy (Mayfield and Mayfield 2012) and the related concept of self-esteem (Banks 2014). Each ML dimension plays a role in increasing self-efficacy. Meaning-making language helps ground a person's belief in their own ability (self-efficacy) in a larger context (Bandura 1997). Meaning-making language also focuses this confidence toward organizationally beneficial ends. Empathetic language helps keep self-efficacy high by reinforcing triumphs through praise and offering consolation during setbacks. Direction-giving language builds self-efficacy by giving feedback on what behaviors help advance task achievement, how these behaviors can be improved, and what behaviors need to be avoided.

Motivating languages has a more straightforward link to extrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation comes from the belief that performing some task will lead to a reward (Gerhart and Fang 2015). Motivating language forges this link for both tangible and intangible rewards. For tangible rewards (such as pay, bonuses, and promotions), ML links a person's actions to the rewards. ML clarifies what the person needs to do and what reward the person should expect for accomplishing the task. For intangible rewards, ML can act as the extrinsic reward. ML use provides praise as well as linking actions to such intangible rewards as recognition. For both tangible and intangible extrinsic rewards, ML can also highlight a reward's desirability—focus someone on the benefits of attaining the reward and thus increase the motivation to attain that reward.

Motivating Language, Time, and Feedback

Currently, motivating language theory lacks a time element—the model is static. No time element exists—motivating language just happens—and as we write, no one has addressed what occurs during the process. Most

research has simply examined how ML speech influences one or more outcomes, and has not deeply explored what goes on during the influence process.

Holmes and Parker (2017) provide one of the few exceptions to this trend. They examined how ML influences organizational outcomes over time and discovered that ML exerts a stabilizing force on performance. Studies by Wińska (2010, 2013, 2014) have looked at how ML use unfolds during times of change to influence an organization's culture. And we have published a theoretical article (Mayfield and Mayfield in press, 2014) that details a model of how high-quality ML use should diffuse (or not) through an organization.

However, we still need a unifying model of how the motivating language process unfolds over time—one that incorporates ML user feedback. We hinted at some of these ideas in earlier chapters, but we will lay out a more systematic process here. While we do not expect that all of these steps will occur in a conscious fashion by the ML user, for sake of clarity, we will develop the model as if the user was making conscious decisions at each point.

We propose that ML use starts with some desired end state—something the ML user wants to achieve through communication. After formulating a goal, the ML user crafts a message to achieve the desired end. We expect that the crafting of this message—and subsequent message adjustment—forms the most important part of motivating language use over time.

So the question is how does an ML user craft and adjust a message? First, the user draws upon her or his experience to develop a message that is expected to be successful. Then, the person speaks the message or sends it through another appropriate medium. After sending the message, then the person uses feedback to determine if message adjustments are needed. Such feedback can come from asking the recipient questions and listening for their responses, or through a cybernetic process (trying different message variations, determining which one has the most success, and continuing to modify the message until achieving the desired results). Once the desired task has been completed, senders may engage in post-event reflection to determine the most effective messaging methods. ML competency requires such reflection and provides richer experience to be used for the next ML messaging process.

Motivating Language: Beyond Dyads, Leaders, and Oral Communication

While we have provided theoretical models for how motivating language can operate in this chapter, we purposefully avoided using the words leader and follower, or even language that would confine these mechanisms to a one-to-one relationship. We did this to show that motivating language can occur outside of leader–follower dyads. True ML has been conceptualized (and has largely been implemented as) a dyadic, leader communication model. Yet its implications are much broader.

At its heart, MLT describes how language moves people to take some action. Anyone can use ML for this end. Areas for future research include how peer-to-peer, peer-to-superior, and (organization) insider-to-outsider ML communications occur. While we expect similar results as leader-to-follower ML, the different power relationships may act as moderators. An especially interesting line of research would be how ML is used in sales, customer service, and marketing situations. Also, ML can be used to connect people toward greater fulfillment and a shared vision. In this way, motivating language implies a sense of community and can occur as directed by an individual trying to forge a community or as a collective action from people trying to find meaning in a situation (Weick 1995).

Also, research has already shown that ML can be used at group and organizational levels (Fan et al. 2014; Holmes and Parker 2017; McGinn 2017), as well as through non-oral communication (Fan et al. 2014). But theory has lagged in modeling these processes. While traditional motivating language theory should be flexible enough to account for one-to-many and non-oral channels, there may be moderators and differences in communication methods that have not been explored. Future theoretical and empirical work is needed to better understand ML use in these situations.

Motivating Language's Role in Ethical Organizations

We also believe that motivating language has a transformative role: a role that should make organizations better for the people who work in them and the communities that surround them. Motivating language, in short, should play a role in any organization's ethical dialogue. Motivating language theory already incorporates a level of ethical behavior through its

assumption of speaker honesty—a leader must keep her or his actions consistent with ML use (the walk-the-talk assumption) (Mayfield and Mayfield 2017). And empirical research has shown the necessity of leader behavioral integrity to successful ML implementation (Holmes and Parker 2017). However, ML should play a more normative role in an organization's culture, and future research should examine how ML can be used to create more just and equitable organizations.

Motivating language can promote organizational ethics in two ways: with individual dealings and through an organization's climate. Individual dealings happen through standard ML interactions—from a leader to a follower. Such communication interactions naturally occur to some degree with high-ML relationships. When leaders use high-ML levels, they provide transparency, emotional support, and a connection to a higher purpose. But to truly reach higher ethical levels, leaders should also employ ML to help followers achieve personal fulfillment at work. Preliminary theoretical work (Gutierrez-Wirsching et al. 2015) has looked at how leaders can combine motivating language and servant leadership to create more follower-centric workplaces. However, more work needs to be done on using ML to enhance worker experience.

ML can also improve organizational ethics through shaping an organization's ethical climate. In this situation, top leaders must purposively craft messages to increase ethical behaviors. Top leaders can use direction-giving language to communication-specific (ethical) behavioral expectations such as providing honest feedback or ensuring that suppliers are treated with respect. Empathetic language can provide emotional support for behaving ethically when unethical behavior would be more expedient. Finally, top leaders must use meaning-making language to clearly articulate the organization's vision and values and how achieving them resonates with the personal ethics of organizational members.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we outlined ways to move motivating language theory forward—in terms of its theoretical development and ethical role. Through providing topic sketches, we hope that others find them intriguing enough to explore these ML possibilities. ML's link to motivation offers the most tangible advancement. Future investigation will give a clearer understanding of how ML operates. Exploring ML's feedback and time elements can create a richer theory, but requires more

work (theoretical and empirical). Extending the boundaries of ML participants (beyond dyadic and leader) paves another avenue for ML progress. While ML has always been framed in leader–follower communication terms, no theoretical reason exists to confine ML to these situations.

Finally, we make a plea for understanding how ML can improve employees' lives and society as a whole. Too much management research focuses on improving organizations solely for the benefit owners. We need scholarship and practice that broadens this view to include how organizations can fulfill their roles as a full and beneficial member of society. Such a role brings ML practice back to its ethical core which includes transparency, valuing a person's emotional life, and helping someone reach their higher purpose. We believe that motivating language is a vital part of this process.

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CHAPTER 11

Hands, Heart, and Spirit

Abstract This chapter revisits how far motivating language has come and about its integration with a bigger picture, namely a culture of mindful, collaborative communication. Motivating language is an important expression of respectful leadership, where speakers consciously *own and take responsibility for* their language. This talk is a relational, socially constructed reality that emerges when someone tries to influence behavior. Jeremiah Sullivan created motivating language as an individual's contribution to dialog. ML is optimally partnered with feedback-seeking inquiry and implies active, responsive listening. Collectively, when adopted by most leaders in an organization, motivating language embodies a positive communication culture.

Keywords Motivating language theory · Leader communication
Positive organizational behavior · Organizational culture · Listening

Overview

This chapter revisits how far motivating language has come and about its integration with a bigger picture, namely a culture of mindful, collaborative communication. We cannot emphasize enough that ML is not a monologue. Rather, it is an important expression of respectful leadership, where speakers consciously *own* and *take responsibility for* their language. This talk is a relational, socially constructed

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reality that emerges when someone tries to influence behavior. Sullivan (1988) created motivating language as an individual's contribution to dialogue. ML is optimally partnered with feedback-seeking inquiry and implies active, responsive listening. Collectively, when adopted by most leaders in an organization, motivating language embodies a positive communication culture.

So how does such a positive culture come about? This last chapter gives a blueprint for how organizations can nurture such an atmosphere by first reviewing motivating language's progress and potential. We then explain how this promise is fulfilled. ML can serve as a cornerstone in cultures of positive communication and as a means of effective leader training and development.

Hands, Heart, and Spirit: Progress and Potential

Motivating language is the *hands*, *heart*, and *spirit* of leader speech. *Hands* refer to direction-giving language that clarifies goals and transparently dispels ambiguity. *Heart* refers to empathetic language which imparts genuine caring to others. And *spirit* refers to meaning-making language, enriching a follower's work experience with significance and mutual values. These three dimensions of leader oral communication elicit higher motivational states in followers which in turn improve their own and their organization's well-being. This assertion is well linked to motivational, communication, and social sciences theories and supported by a number of research studies.

Motivating language prioritizes three central beliefs: Communication is a vital part of leadership theory and practice, leadership is relational as opposed to heroic individualism, and leaders who speak strategically with the broadest scope of linguistic resources can optimize their motivational influence. The assumptions in motivating language theory incorporate these beliefs by insisting on leader behavioral integrity (walking the talk), the use of all three ML dimensions, accurate follower understanding of the leader's intended message, and representing all forms of leader to follower speech. Some of these assumptions, such as the antecedent of behavioral integrity and congruent follower decoding, have already garnered empirical support.

These dimensions and assumptions have been explored with greater depth in the preceding chapters. We have also looked more closely at how ML interacts with employee motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) and the resultant outcomes in psychological states and behaviors.

These include a very strong relationship with perceived leader competence, solid links with job and leader communication satisfaction, and significant relationships with increased employee performance, retention, innovation, voice, self-leadership, decision making, self-efficacy, creativity, and work attendance, among others.

In addition, we discussed strategic motivating language at multiple organizational levels. Although there is only a small amount of research in this area, studies have shown ML to be transferable to and coexistent at individual, group, and organizational levels. Motivating language garners other types of generalizability since it has been measured both quantitatively and qualitatively in diverse cultural settings (both organizational and national.) Relatedly, early quasi-experimental design and longitudinal motivating language investigations imply similar impacts in written communication and causality.

For future studies, we encourage more research into motivating language processes, extended generalizability, peer-to-peer adaption, ethical implications, cross-cultural modifications, and feedback loops. Another area that is rich for exploration is training and development, which we will discuss later in this chapter. But first, we will discuss the boundaries of motivating language and how it flourishes in an organizational culture of positive communication.

Boundaries and Complementary Settings

As discussed in Chap. 7, motivating language is associated with improved employee and organizational well-being. Yet this portrait would be incomplete if we did not look at the boundaries of what motivating language can and cannot do. For instance, one study found that motivating language did not improve performance of part-time workers (Mayfield and Mayfield 2006). Even more important, ML does not capture vital nonverbal communication such as active listening, intonation, and body language. Nor does it represent an entire two-way conversation or a dialogue, even though it is often meant to be part of them. (To illustrate this point, we ask ourselves how a leader can execute high meaning-making language if he or she has not listened well and taken the time to consciously interpret messages from a follower.) And the benefits of motivating language can be neutralized when misaligned with organizational strategy or coupled with an ineffective one. The best talk will go nowhere when a company pursues dog food products in a target market of cat lovers.

These boundaries are also contingent on the larger system in which ML plays a key role: an organization's communication culture. Here, we adopt Keyton's (2013) definition. A communication culture is the interplay between organizational culture (patterns of shared interactions and meaning) and communication to cocreate perceived reality (Eisenberg and Riley 2001; Keyton 2013; Mayfield and Mayfield, in press). In other words, communication actively constructs what organizations and their stakeholders experience and accomplish. Note that this perspective diverges from the dominant management viewpoint where communication is assumed or even marginalized.

A positive communication culture is characterized by high-quality employee–organization relationships (EORs): social exchanges with overriding reciprocal benefits for both parties. Such rapports show strong mutual trust, commitment, loyalty, and engagement between the organization and its internal stakeholders on multiple levels, including the creation and enactment of strategy (Blau 1986; Kang and Sung 2017). In effect, EORs are social systems. They are fostered and sustained by symmetrical communication behaviors that are reciprocally supportive, responsive, transparent, and share power horizontally. An example of an EOR is the use of *micromoves*. These refer to the *how* of leadership processes, where the role of leader is owned by multiple participants and emerges communicatively (Dutton et al. 2001; Golden-Biddle 2014; Walker and Aritz 2014). An example happens when leaders ask questions in the subjunctive such as "What could be possible here?" then facilitate stakeholder decision making or sense making. Leaders are pivotal in symmetrical communication since they are influential and employees favor them as an information source. Furthermore, studies indicate that followers prefer face-to-face oral communication (Grunig and Dozier 2009; Men 2014).

So how does motivating language fit into a positive organizational communication culture? There are two ways, partnership and effective diffusion. For partnership, ML can express vision and energize, but also it extends beyond motivational pep talks (McGinn 2017). The preceding chapters highlight how all three dimensions of motivating language entail leader mindfulness, openness, and sensitivity, i.e., responsiveness and egalitarianism toward followers. Another built-in relational advantage is that ML is an interpersonal compass that leaders who are time pressured can rely on.

The disrupted and time-challenged activities of leaders have been underscored by management and communication scholars (Mintzberg 1973; Van Quaquebeke and Felps in press). Let's face it. It is impossible to be mindful and tuned into others all the time, especially when work focus frequently shifts due to the multitasking and short deadlines that much organizational work demands. Motivating language can help leaders in these situations by giving them a collaborative set of communication guidelines to follow.

When most leaders in an organization are competent in motivating language, effective diffusion, the second way that ML fits into a positive communication culture, has happened. Diffusion is the spread and adoption of something, language use for our purposes here—within a system, i.e., the organization. Contagion is the rapidity and degree to which diffusion occurs. So a high level of motivating language contagion occurs when many leaders at diverse organizational levels use it well and cohesively. And a system can apply to a communication network of social interactions throughout an organization, replete with multiple levels, feedback loops, and dynamism over time (Monge and Contractor 2001; Strang and Soule 1998). For example, organizations are filled with many sets of leader–follower relationships that are influenced by such factors as turnover, rewards, training, and senior leadership, and can change as time passes.

We estimated which variables account for the most motivating language diffusion among leaders in a multi-level organization by creating an agent-based model simulation (Macy and Willer 2002; Mayfield and Mayfield in press; Railsback and Grimm 2011). Agent-based modeling allowed us to develop axioms (beliefs that are held as true) from business, communication, and other social science theories, and to investigate their nonlinear implications over a ten-year time period. Simply put, we can now hypothesize which factors encourage or discourage the widespread adoption of motivating language.

Our findings were both expected and surprising. Overall, and as predicted, top leader ML use has the strongest connection with its diffusion and contagion. With a high-ML CEO, its diffusion at all leadership hierarchical levels can reach up to 85%, given enough time (2 years and 9 months in our simulation) and normal turnover: true contagion. Even when turnover is above normal, a high-ML CEO is matched with a 73% diffusion rate among lower level leaders over the same time

period. Conversely, with a low-ML CEO, the diffusion rate can drop to 25% over time, if rewards and training for motivating language are not present. Unexpectedly, we discovered that communication competence hiring criteria did not impact the ML diffusion rate and that more organizational levels actually increased high-ML use when the CEO was a low-ML speaker.

Two points merit consideration here. The contagion influence of top leader can also refer to the head of a division or another organizational unit, not just a CEO. Moreover, our simulation is not an empirical test: That work remains to be done. Still, our study suggests that both rewards and training can shape assimilation of ML into an organization's communication culture. We will not touch upon rewards in this book since they should be interdependent with each organization's unique strategy. Instead, we focus a sharper lens on leader development, particularly on training for motivating language diffusion, and suggest future initiatives in the next section.

Training and Development in Motivating Language

Motivating language is more than spoken words. It is a compass which guides leadership communication behavior. Certainly, it's an aspiration. At times, enlightened, conscious speech eludes even highly skilled communicators. We have already pointed out some of the many stresses that leaders face today, including emotional labor and punctuated multitasking. Their environment is highly complex, and leaders are challenged by rapidly changing information that demands quick decisions. "There are no boundaries anymore," said Jeff Barnes, Head of Global Leadership, General Electric, quoted by Nick Petrie at the Center for Creative Leadership (Petrie 2011, p. 7).

Another advantage with ML training is message consistency, as communication is transmitted through multiple leadership organizational levels. In large organizations, some leaders may have limited direct access to top managers who serve as ML role models, and their strategic vision and values can possibly become mistranslated when they are indirectly communicated. Plus, many leaders look forward to training as a means of personal development. For all these reasons, formal education in motivating language needs to be done to fully realize its benefits. Learning these linguistic strategies creates a more positive oral script when it's hard to fully concentrate. Training also offers behavioral reinforcement for progressing in ML use, as well as a peer

supportive speech community. Similarly, our ML simulation study suggests that training enhances high-ML use with non-top-level leaders, even when the CEO is a low-motivating language speaker.

Very little motivating language training has been reported to date. We encourage this initiative by giving a framework and recommendations for future ML education. We truly believe that motivating language ability is not innate or genetic. Similar to communication apprehension (which can be overcome with coaching and practice), we assert that most leaders can advance their ML competency through committed learning. To begin, ML training should be framed as an integral piece of leadership development, or "the expansion of a collective's capacity for producing the outcomes of shared direction, alignment, and commitment." (McGuire and Palus 2013, p. 9).

According to a recent study, leadership education experts and CEOs concurred that such development must promote shared leadership, and vertical as well as traditional, horizontal learning (McGuire and Palus 2013; Petrie 2011). Shared leadership is present with the interdependence or collaboration between organizational members, team structures, and empowered decision making that knowledge workers and other employees assume. Vertical—as compared to horizontal development (acquisition of tangible skills)—can be defined as the "transformation of leadership cultures or mindsets from dependent, to independent, and to interdependent, such that each more capable successive stage transcends yet includes earlier ones." (McGuire and Palus 2013, p. 9). Put another way, vertical development is adaption of a personal growth mentality, where each person takes ownership for her or his own progressive learning which becomes more and more inclusive of others at each stage (Petrie 2011).

Motivating language is a relevant tool for vertical and horizontal development. For vertical development, it represents growth in self-knowledge, sense making (both personal and interpersonal), and empathy, as we have shown with the progressive examples of ML categories. Three ways that organizations can nurture this process are through giving current and aspiring leaders diverse, challenging interpersonal assignments: meaningful task force charges for instance, training in such psychological/social skills as emotional intelligence, and by sustaining a climate that supports reflection and incremental knowledge, not punishment, as appropriate responses to many work errors (Aguinis and Kraiger 2009; Petrie 2011). For horizontal development, motivating language

competencies such as constructive performance feedback and goal setting can be gained through a well-designed leadership education program that also targets companion abilities such as effective listening.

Ideally, motivating language training and development will be introduced to an organization through the strong advocacy of top leadership. Based on our diffusion simulation and the insights of leadership research and practice, CEO-level championship will more likely lead to widespread ML adoption (Mayfield and Mayfield, in press; McGuire and Palus 2013; Petrie 2011; Schein 2010). Top leadership support and modeling are also more likely to construct a positive communication cultural foundation, one where alignment between organizational strategy, rewards, and motivating language use is forged.

Such buy-in may or may not be in the cards, and top leadership's openness to motivating language must be calibrated. When top leadership readiness is low, ML training initiatives can still be fruitful at unit or divisional levels. Hence, the first step for motivating language change agents is assessment of organizational readiness and training needs. Does top management really prioritize effective leader communication? To what degree can motivating language be incorporated into an organization's culture? Where are the organizational boundaries for adaptation of the progressive ML categories? A company or division which already possesses many positive communication attributes might seek cultural immersion in all types of ML. Another unit or firm may just want to improve the climate of civility and have a lackluster attitude toward spoken words of leader compassion.

Candid discussions are needed between ML proponents and relevant leaders to answer these questions and gauge the scope of leader training/development. Data collection is also necessary to optimize these conversations. At the start, the facilitator should measure current levels of ML strength in the target group of leaders and collect demographic information about these trainees. This evaluation can be accomplished using the original or revised MLS (both are posted in Chap. 9), with qualitative instruments, or ideally with a combination of the two, along with relevant demographic scales. The knowledge gained from these steps will give a baseline reference point about trainee learning readiness as well as inferences about current motivating language strengths and weaknesses. Such evidence helps to identify learning goals. For example, an organizational decision maker might initially seek an intermediary goal of improved employee satisfaction with leader communication and lower voluntary

turnover as an ultimate outcome. As previously noted, turnover is quite costly, up to one and half times an employee's annual salary (Cascio 2012). After data are reviewed, the organizational decision maker and trainer can then adjust goals. In the just described example, they can target ML weaknesses and then design and deliver a training program that has measurable goals of improving follower communication satisfaction with their leaders and reduces voluntary employee turnover.

Tangible goals are critical here. And these goals should be translated into a cost–benefit analysis of the training program. How much will the training cost be compared to reduced voluntary turnover during the next three years? There should be a significant organizational gain in the long term. Solid estimates, such as those gleaned from utility analysis (Cascio and Boudreau 2011), that are bolstered by other supportive logic and analysis frame ML training as much more valuable to organizational decision makers. Following selection of training goals, the data that were initially collected can guide the trainer to build an appropriate learning platform and delivery method. We suggest Cascio's (2012) advice of first testing the training design on a pilot group. In this way, training problems can be recognized, and the program can be refined early in the learning process. Ideally, the next step would be to divide leaders into control and learning groups, collect pre-training information such as ML competencies and their employee target attitudes, communication satisfaction with leader and intent-to-turnover for the preceding example scenario.

The training program can be designed and delivered in various configurations, depending on learning goals and trainee needs. Drawing from our experience, motivating language instruction thrives in an experiential learning environment, including role plays, group exercises, and cases. But this approach may not be the best one in all contexts. (We certainly need more research about how successful ML training is accomplished!) After training is completed, post-tests of the same pre-test data for both the control and target groups should be conducted over time to evaluate training transfer (how much did the trainees really learn), and are the selected goals being attained? This information should also be partnered with learning satisfaction surveys. Putting all the feedback together, the trainer and organizational decision maker can identify revisions in the training program and determine its effectiveness.

There are a few more points to share about ML training. Successful transfer of training (actually speaking with high motivating language in the long run) can be encouraged by refresher workshops and peer

support. After training completion, the learners can reunite at regular intervals (we recommend once a month) with a facilitator to review progress, share motivating language applications, and discuss challenges. Peer support can be introduced with a buddy system. Each training graduate pairs with another as a source of contact reinforcement in adopting ML. Both training transfer and peer support can be guided by evaluation tools such as our Motivating Language Self-Assessment Form in Table 11.1

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Closing Thoughts

We have completed our excursion through motivating language—for now, that is. We conclude that motivating language is a journey, not a destination. Its rewards are rich, and they will sustain us on this path. As we take each step, we can discover new applications, adjustments, and lessons. We are in the early phases of ML research and practice. There is also much more about motivating language to be explored, as we emphasized in Chap. 10.

To sum it up, motivating language is a leader's hands, heart, and spirit that connects with their followers and links these followers to their organization. Motivating language doesn't just promote organizational well-being. ML invites the employees to bring their whole selves to work. On a broader scope, as we saw in Chap. 8, motivating

Table 11.1 Motivating language self-assessment form

This form gives you a way to evaluate your motivating language use with people you lead. (We use the term follower throughout the form, but you could think of them as hires, reports, subordinates, team members, etc.) To evaluate your ML communications, read each statement below and think about how you speak with each of your followers. Then decide how well each statement describes your ML communications with that person. (If you lead a lot of people, you may want to complete the evaluations over a period of days and do two or three people each day.)

Evaluate the statements as follows: 1 (completely unlike my spoken communications), 2 (unlike my spoken communications), 3 (mostly unlike my spoken communications), 4 (mostly like my spoken communications), 5 (like my spoken communications), 6 (completely like my spoken communications). After evaluating the statements, you calculate your ML score in two ways. First, take your average score for each factor to get a measure of your direction-giving, empathetic, and meaning-making language. Second, to get your overall ML score, take the average of the three ML dimension scores

Once you have completed your self-evaluations, the results can be applied in many ways. One way is to identify which followers need higher ML by looking at the people with whom you have low scores. To decide how to improve your ML proficiency with these people, target the weakest areas within each factor. Next, concentrate on developing strengths in these same skills. You can also look at your scores across your followers and see if there are areas with consistently low scores. When you have consistently low areas, you can work to improve those skills for everyone

The statements are mostly worded for face-to-face communications, but you can also use them to evaluate communicative relationships that occur through other methods such as when using e-mail to lead a virtual team. You can also use the form to evaluate communicating with large groups of people by substituting *followers* or *team* for the singular follower

Direction-Giving Language

Basic work requirements/procedures

I clearly explain necessary work procedures to my follower

Innovation

I talk to my follower about ways to increase innovation.

Performance Feedback

I give constructive performance feedback

Available resources

I always make sure my follower knows about available resources to do her or his job

Role

I clarify my follower's job duties

Task Clarity

I talk to my follower about her or his job duties

Priorities

I tell my follower about how to prioritize her or his job duties

Goals

I always make sure I clarify work goals for my follower

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

Reward
I clarify work rewards with my follower
Autonomy/authority
I make clear how much authority my follower has
Fostering Feedback
I encourage my follower to give me feedback about her or his work
I support my follower in giving me feedback about her or his work
Empathetic Language
Politeness/cordiality
I am always polite when I talk with my follower
Work Empathy
I am always sure to express my understanding to my follower
Achievement
I always congratulate my follower on work achievements
Personal Goals
I always give words of encouragement to my follower about achieving personal goals at work
Performance Praise
I always give words of praise about my follower's quality work
Personal Experiences
I always take time to talk with my follower about personal issues
Effort
I always give words of encouragement about my follower's work efforts
Barriers
I make clear my understanding about the difficulty of the barriers that my follower faces
Fostering Feedback
I encourage my follower to give me feedback about her or his feelings
I support my follower in giving me feedback about her or his feelings
Meaning-Making Language
Cultural Storytelling
I use stories to help my follower understand about the organization's culture
Links personal values to work/organizational values
I talk to my follower about how her or his values relate to organizational values
Organization/cultural changes
I always discuss important organizational changes with my follower
Behavioral guidelines (artifacts)
I clarify what behaviors are expected at work
Cultural values and ideas
I clarify what outcomes are most valued at work
Expresses collective, higher purpose
I talk with my follower about how her or his work helps society

(continued)

Table 11.1 (continued)

Task significance/Individual organizational contributions (cultural)
I discuss with my follower why her or his job is important to our customers/clients
New Methods
I always tell my follower how work changes link to organizational goals
Fostering Feedback
I encourage my follower to give me feedback about her or his values
I support my follower in giving me feedback about her or his values

language helps external stakeholders—financial, customer, supplier, community, and government—too. Organizations that communicate and congruently behave with transparent, empathetic, and meaningful visions/values are more likely to benefit these groups and society in general. Therein lies our most important message. Positive leaders have a remarkable impact on our world, especially through their communicative actions. We believe that motivating language makes a significant contribution to this process.

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Index

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