

# MANAGING SPEECH RIGHTS

## Special Issue Proposal for *Philosophy of Management*

### Call for papers

#### **Introductory outline**

Free speech is widely celebrated, yet its precise meaning remains a source of profound and irreconcilable dissensus (Eabrasu, 2019). The dispute over free speech is especially challenging in business contexts. Since business relations continuously test the leaky boundary between the private and the public spheres, they implicitly generate a host of situations where the definition and the application of the right to free speech become subject to controversy. One of the aspects that is primarily covered in these debates is the corporation's right to free speech (Stoll, 2005, 2015). While scholars have examined questions concerning free speech rights that stem from the moral and legal agency of the corporation itself (Hasnas, 2017), discussion of other issues with respect to free speech in corporate contexts is not so well understood. Further analysis is likely to be required concerning the speech rights of executives, managers, and other employees (Anderson 2017; Bebchuk & Jackson, 2010; Barry 2007). Therefore, in addition to discussing the nature, limitations, and consequences of a corporation's right to free speech, further analysis of how speech rights are internally managed in day-to-day operations is still very much needed.

This is precisely what we call for in this Special Issue. We invite scholars interested in studying speech rights to shift their attention from the macro standpoint (at the corporation level) to a micro perspective (at the management level, including managers' actions, decisions

or decision-making processes). More specifically, and in line with the scope of the journal *Philosophy of Management*, we call for research that deploys philosophical analysis to assess how speech rights are managed within the organization. We are mainly interested in scholarship that uses a philosophical lens to assess how speech rights are managed inside the firm, not only to deepen a less explored research path but also to shed new light on extant conversations. In doing so, we encourage scholars to revisit, rejoin, and reconnect a host of separate discussions on various topics spanning from whistleblowing (Loumansky & Lewis, 2013; Katz & Lenglet, 2010; Vandekerckhove & Tsahuridu, 2010) to censorship (Barry 2007; Messina, 2022, 2023).

### **Topics of interest**

**The following topics represent a non-exhaustive list of suggested directions for addressing this research gap:**

- **Conditions for tolerating or limiting speech rights:** There is a thin line between exerting the right to speech to expose unethical or illegal activities within the company and merely retaliating or harming the company image. Papers could inquire into conditions under which managers can or should ensure that freedom of expression in a company remains morally acceptable. Can speech rights self-regulate in a company, thus avoiding undesirable or negative consequences? How can we ensure that all voices, especially those from marginalized groups, are heard and respected and that a loud minority does not dominate the agenda? Under which circumstances must companies be wary of suppressing speech that promotes hate, discrimination, or harassment, creates political or religious tensions in the workplace, breaches confidentiality rules, or discloses trade secrets?

- **Censorship and self-censorship:** With the increasing uses of social media, employees' posts can reflect on their employers (with or without the employers' consent). To what extent and under which conditions is it morally acceptable for managers to protect their firms' interests by monitoring and potentially censoring employees' online activities (on and off-duty)? On which moral grounds is it acceptable, required, or forbidden for employees to self-censor? Under which conditions is it morally appropriate for hiring coordinators to use an applicant's social media presence to determine whether or not to hire them? How do speech and privacy rights relate to each other in this context?
- **Training and Awareness:** Assuming that assessment and understanding of speech rights and their applications are essential for a company, questions arise regarding managers' training and awareness. How can manager know and prepare what constitutes morally acceptable speech? How can such training be effective? What are the ethical assumptions, biases, or implications of such training? What role(s) might trade associations and other business associations play in coordinating around commitment to free speech? What might be the costs of these associations of such an approach?
- **The value of speech rights.** Fundamental to the debate on political free speech rights is the source of the moral and political value of free speech. Is the right to free political speech intrinsic or merely instrumental to other desired outcomes? Likewise, in the essentially transactional business domain, are speech rights valued per se or only as they fulfill, directly or indirectly, a specific (not necessarily financial) goal? Are there business-specific reasons for tolerating a range of types of employee speech? Or is commitment to non-retaliation against employees for their speech best understood as an external constraint on corporate social responsibility?

- **Contract and law.** Employees often believe that their speech enjoys protection from employer sanction even when it does not (Rudy 2002). On the one hand, this suggests that employees are not overly worried about how their speech can jeopardize their career. On the other hand, it raises the possibility that employees might value having contractual protections for their speech. To what degree are employees willing to take less in traditional compensation (e.g., salary) in exchange for speech protections? If they are not, in general, willing to make such tradeoffs, to what degree should the law step in to do what they are not willing or able to do on their own?
- **Conceptions of diversity.** Given (1) the importance of work to quality of life, and (2) the reality of pluralism in civil society, firms may appear to have a strong moral reason, grounded in diversity, for tolerating employee speech, regardless of its political viewpoint. Tolerating such diversity can help firms benefit from what Page (2017) calls the diversity bonus. But diversity of the sort that generates productivity gains comes in many forms, and a viewpoint-neutral approach might make it more difficult for firms to realize diversity along dimensions other than viewpoint (e.g., gender, racial, or socio-economic diversity) (Muldoon 2022). How should firms conceptualize diversity, and why should they care about it? To what extent does employee speech promote or compromise this value? How does suppressing and/or encouraging free reign in employee speech impact corporate culture, both in encouraging a sense of respect and belonging as well as in avoiding the creation of toxic work cultures of harassment that may violate workers' rights?

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## GUEST EDITORS' TEAM

**Marian Eabrasu (corresponding guest editor)** < [meabrasu@em-normandie.fr](mailto:meabrasu@em-normandie.fr) > is Associate Professor at the EM Normandie and has a PhD in political science from the Université de Paris Saint-Denis (France) awarded in 2007 and a Habilitation (HDR) in management awarded in 2013 at Angers University (France). His research interests are at the crossroads of management, political science, philosophy, and economics and, more specifically, focus on Corporate Social Responsibilities, Business Ethics, and Global Affairs. He currently chairs the Philosophy of Management annual meeting and serves as executive editor for *Philosophy of Management*. His articles are available in journals such as *Philosophy of Management*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, *Organization*, *Politics, Philosophy and Economics*, *Journal of Institutional Economics*, *Business and Society Review*. He authored the book *Moral Disagreements in Business* (Springer, 2019).

**JP Messina** < [jpmessin@purdue.edu](mailto:jpmessin@purdue.edu) > is assistant professor of philosophy at Purdue University. Before joining the faculty at Purdue, he held research positions at the University of New Orleans and Wellesley College. He received his Ph.D. from UC San Diego in 2018. Messina's research asks questions about human freedom across philosophical contexts, with a special interest in free speech. His work has appeared in several scholarly venues, including *Philosophers' Imprint*, the *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, the *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, *Politics, Philosophy, and Economics*, *Kantian Review*, and the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. His first book, *Private Censorship*, is forthcoming with Oxford University Press in 2023.

**Mary Lyn Stoll** < [mlstoll@usi.edu](mailto:mlstoll@usi.edu) > is Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Southern Indiana. She earned her Ph.D. and Masters in Philosophy at Purdue University in 2002. Her research interests are in business ethics, environmental ethics, and political and legal philosophy. In particular, she has focused on how corporate speech plays a role in democratic function, corporate moral and political speech rights, boycotts, greenwash, and corporate impacts on sustainability initiatives. Her work has appeared in journals such as the *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Between the Species*, as well as in edited volumes including *Applying Care to Business Ethics*, *The Routledge Companion to Environmental Ethics*, and *The Handbook of Research on Business Ethics & Corporate Responsibilities*. She also co-edited *Stakeholder Theory: Essential Readings in Stakeholder Theory and Management* with Prometheus Books in 2008.

**Wim Vandekerckhove** < [wim.vandekerckhove@edhec.edu](mailto:wim.vandekerckhove@edhec.edu) > is Professor of Business Ethics at EDHEC Business School. He has published research on whistleblowing in the *Journal of Business Ethics* and *Organization Studies*, as well as edited volumes and books: *Whistleblowing* and *Organizational Social Responsibility* (Ashgate 2006, Routledge 2016), and *The Whistleblowing Guide* (Wiley 2019). He led the development of ISO37002, the first international standard on whistleblowing management systems, and delivered expertise on internal whistleblowing and whistleblower protection to a range of organizations in both public and private sector.

## SUBMISSION PROCESS AND DEADLINE

- **Submissions deadline May 1st 2024**
- Manuscripts submitted to this special issue should adhere to the Philosophy of Management journal's aims and scope, as well as to contributor guidelines for submitting a paper. The manuscript length should be 8,000-12,000 words (for a standard original article).
- Submissions must be original and unpublished works that are not concurrently under review for publication elsewhere.
- Papers should be submitted to the *Philosophy of Management* online submission system, with explicit reference to this special issue.  
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- For any query about this SI please write to Marian Eabrasu < [meabrasu@em-normandie.fr](mailto:meabrasu@em-normandie.fr) >