

Chapter 10

An Exemplar for Theoretically Driven Research Programs: A Man Ahead of His Times


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I first met Ed in 1990 when I was on the job market. Ed was the chair of the Department of Communication at the University of Maryland, and I was finishing my PhD at Indiana University. I was thrilled when I received a phone call inviting me to interview for the Assistant Professor position. Then I remembered that Ed Fink was the chair of the department, and I was terrified. As a student of persuasion and social influence, I had read many of Ed's papers. But more critically, my dissertation relied heavily on multidimensional scaling (MDS), and I had received the same advice as every other graduate student in the last 100 years of the academy—your job talk should be about your dissertation to demonstrate the research program.

Talking about my dissertation was easy—there was going to be a total of five studies (see [Roskos-Ewoldsen, 1997](#)), but I had already conducted most of them. And, as already mentioned, I was relying heavily on MDS. Giving a job talk in front of any other department would have involved explaining what MDS was and how it aided my research. But this was not any other department. Ed Fink was the leading expert on MDS and Galileo ([Dinauer & Fink, 2005](#); [Fink & Chen, 1995](#)). Galileo is, perhaps, a more sophisticated approach to the type of data I was working with in my dissertation than MDS. And Ed's work with Stan A. Kaplowitz on MDS and Galileo is outstanding. The problem for me was that Ed preferred Galileo and that he clearly understood MDS better than almost anyone in the world. What was the question-and-answer period at the end of the job talk going to be like? Then I received the schedule for the interview. As luck would have it, I was meeting with Ed a couple of hours after my job talk. Would

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he drive to the airport early because I used MDS instead of Galileo? (One of the members of my dissertation committee loved to tell the story of being taken to the airport eight hours prior to his flight because of his job talk.)

My stress was further heightened when I checked into the hotel that was scheduled for me to stay at during the interview. At the time, my last name was Roskos-Ewoldsen. When I went to check in, there was no reservation for Roskos-Ewoldsen. I tried just Ewoldsen, but again, there was no reservation. After about 15 minutes of trying to figure out what to do, they found it under Rofkof-Ewoldfen. As far as I know, my name has never had the letter “f” in it, and I could not imagine anyone thinking that was the correct spelling. After getting checked in, I quickly dismissed any nefarious intent behind the spelling of my name. However, after learning about Ed’s notorious sense of humor, I have subsequently wondered if he was behind this unique spelling of my name.

Despite my fears, the job talk went well. Ed asked one or two straightforward questions and made a nice comment about my use of MDS. Our meeting did not involve him driving me to the airport and kicking me out of his car at the curb but rather was an exhilarating discussion of statistics and potential follow-up studies for this line of research. Unfortunately, for various reasons unrelated to Ed and the University of Maryland, I was not able to accept the job when it was offered. But I often wonder how my career would have turned out differently if Ed could have served as my mentor as I launched my career.

But in hindsight, Ed was always there as a mentor. It is common for people to talk about having “a” mentor, but my experience is that I have had many different mentors, and I am proud to count Ed among them. I find it difficult to think of a conference that I attended where I did not track Ed down, and we would talk about different research projects that we were working on. Ed always had useful comments and steered me toward ideas and literature that always improved the final product. Likewise, if I were stuck on a difficult issue, I always knew that I could call Ed for helpful advice. Being able to reach out to someone I respected so much was very helpful.

Now I must admit that there were times when I wished I did not share quite so many interests with Ed. Often, editors would reach out to me to review manuscripts that I would later learn were authored by Ed. I’m not sure if I ever had to read one of Ed’s published papers on message discrepancy because I’d already reviewed it (e.g., [Chung et al., 2008](#))! On the other hand, besides keeping me up on the literature, reviewing Ed’s papers did help a lot on the service component of my annual reviews! I’ve always received good evaluations for professional service, and I am confident that at least part of that is due to Ed’s prolific productivity!

More seriously, Ed’s work on message discrepancy will long stand as a model in our discipline for how theory can be translated into mathematical models to improve the precision of the predictions (e.g., [Fink et al., 1983](#)). To me, this is the heart of what science should strive for—precise predictions that demonstrate an increase in the verisimilitude of the theory ([Ewoldsen, 2022](#)). Likewise, Ed was also one of the early scholars to introduce the important role of time and dynamics to our discipline ([Kaplowitz et al., 1986](#)). His work on the time course

of attitude change and the oscillation of beliefs is, at least to me, among his most important works. I think it is a shame that the discipline has yet to catch up with Ed's theoretical ideas.

Finally, I am incredibly proud to be the editor who published Chung and Fink's (2018) paper demonstrating the many failures to replicate the classic Petty et al. (1981) paper that laid the foundation for the elaboration likelihood model. Chung and Ed's paper went on to receive the Information Systems Division's Randall Harrison Outstanding Article award (2020). This is only one of the many awards Ed has received throughout his career. To me, it is another exemplar from Ed's arsenal of publications on how science should operate. Ed's career serves as a model for how research programs develop and advance our understanding of critical issues facing the discipline. I believe he is an exemplar that should be held up to our students to understand and emulate (except, maybe, his humor).

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