

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

1. Organizations are communicative structures of control.
  - a. Management and organizational communication theory attempt to address the problems associated with motivating people to come together to do specific tasks.
  - b. Tensions between individual goals, beliefs and desires and those of the larger organization work against the perfect coordination of a large number of people.
    - i. The tension is usually resolved by subordinating the goals of individuals to those of the organization through organizational control.
    - ii. Control is a dialectical process as organization members resist management efforts to limit their autonomy.
2. Although “organizational communication” is complex and difficult to define, Charles Redding gives us a starting point by defining a complex organization as having four essential features: interdependence, differentiation of tasks and functions, goal orientation and control. This chapter adds a fifth feature: communication processes.
  - a. Interdependence – no member of an organization can function without affecting, and being affected, by other organization members.
  - b. Differentiation of tasks and functions – the organization as a whole is divided into various departments, and organization members specialize in particular tasks.
  - c. Goal orientation – although complicated by the fact that organizations often have multiple and competing goals, an overarching goal is nonetheless essential in transforming a random group of individuals into an organization.
  - d. Control – various forms of control are necessary in order to achieve coordinated, goal-oriented behavior.
    - i. Direct control – close supervision of employees, directing them in explicit ways and then monitoring their behavior to ensure performance.
    - ii. Technological control – technology is used to control what people do as well as the speed at which they work.
    - iii. Bureaucratic control – a system of rules, formal structures, and roles both enable and constrain the activities of organization members.
    - iv. Ideological control – the development of a system of values and beliefs (an organizational culture) that organization members internalize and are expected to exhibit.
    - v. Disciplinary control – individuals see their identities as projects, or “brands,” that need continuous self-monitoring and improvement in order to achieve (career) advancement.
  - e. Communication processes – communication activities are the basic, defining “stuff” of organizational life.
    - i. There would be no organization without communication – communication constitutes organization.
    - ii. Communication activities of organization members are enabled and constrained by institutionalized rules and structures of the organization.
    - iii. Definition of communication: “The dynamic, ongoing process of creating and negotiating meanings through interactional symbolic (verbal and

- nonverbal) practices, including conversation, metaphors, rituals, stories, dress, and space.”
- iv. Definition of organizational communication: “The process of creating and negotiating collective, coordinated systems of meaning through symbolic practices oriented toward the achievement of organizational goals.”
3. This chapter presents theories of organizational communication within a framework that presumes that we are living in an age characterized by a “crisis of representation.”
- a. Multiple and competing ways of knowing have arisen that supplement or replace the traditional social science view of an objectively existing world that can be accurately represented through knowledge claims.
  - b. Issues of voice, or representation, have become increasingly complex with growing diversity and the emergence of challenges to a single (white, male) vision of society.
  - c. Competing worldviews in organizational communication represent a progressive deepening of the “crisis of representation.”
    - i. Functionalism - a discourse of representation
      - 1. This worldview assumes that we can discover truths about human behavior through scientific principles.
      - 2. Communication is seen as a vehicle, or conduit, to express and share thoughts and knowledge.
      - 3. The goal in such research is to make predictive and generalizable (causal) claims.
    - ii. Interpretivism - a discourse of understanding
      - 1. This worldview sees the world as symbolic and communication as a dynamic process that actually creates organizations.
      - 2. Communication constitutes human identity and reality; it doesn't simply represent them.
      - 3. The goal in this research is to allow organization members' own understanding and experience of organizational life to come to the fore.
    - iii. Critical theory – a discourse of suspicion
      - 1. This perspective views reality as a product of the collective communication practices of social actors who have different levels of access to symbolic and communication resources.
      - 2. Communication is seen as constructing reality; specifically, different interest groups vie to shape the organizational meanings that constitute reality for members.
      - 3. The goal of this research is to reveal the ways in which power plays a central role in organizing and give voice to those in organizations who have relatively little power.
    - iv. Postmodernism - a discourse of vulnerability
      - 1. This perspective directly challenges representational discourse; instead, there are multiple ways of looking at the world and multiple potential realities.

2. Postmodernists reject the representational connection between communication and the world “out there;” discourse is what is real and meaningful to us.
  3. The goal of this research is to deconstruct organizational communication and illustrate how organizations are not stable structures, but instead are relatively precarious systems of meaning.
- v. Feminism - a discourse of empowerment
1. There are multiple feminist perspectives, each illuminating the question of gender, but having different views of the role of men and women in organizations.
  2. The goal of this research is to address the exclusion of women’s voices from organizational life and to highlight these voices in order to develop more equitable organizational practices and structures.