Survey of Communication Study: "Chapter 11 – Organizational Communication"

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Chapter Objectives:

After reading this chapter you should be able to:

• Describe the importance and pervasiveness of organizations in our society.
• Define organizations and organizational communication.
• Explain how the study of organizational communication developed and what makes this specialization of communication study unique.
• Explain the five theoretical perspectives for understanding organizational communication.
• Understand the challenges and future directions of organizational communication.

Organizational Communication

If you have ever worked a part time job during the school year, worked a full time summer job, volunteered for a non-profit, or belonged to a social organization, you have experienced organizational communication. It's likely that you been a job seeker, an interviewee, a new employee, a co-worker, or maybe a manager? In each of these situations you make various choices regarding how you choose to communicate with others.

We participate in organizations in almost every aspect of our lives. In fact, you will spend the bulk of your waking life in the context of organizations (March & Simons, 1958). At the center of every organization is this phenomenon we've been studying throughout this book – Communication! Organizational communication is a broad and ever-growing specialization in the field of Communication. For the purpose of this chapter, we will provide a brief overview of the field, highlighting what organizational communication is and how it is studied.

What Is An Organization?

Before we define organizational communication let's look at what an organization is, and how pervasive they are in today's society. Amitai Etzioni (1964) states, "We are born in organizations, educated by organizations, and most of us spend much of our lives working for organizations" (p. 1). Simply put, from birth to death, organizations impact every aspect of our lives (Deetz, 1994).

Stephen P. Robbins (2001) defines an organization as a "consciously coordinated social unit composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals" (p. 4). We organize together to achieve what we cannot accomplish individually. Organizing happens through communication. When we

study organizational communication our focus is primarily on corporations, manufacturing, the service industry, and for profit businesses. However, organizations also include not-for-profit companies, schools, government agencies, small businesses, and social or charitable agencies such as churches or a local humane society.

We organize together for common social, personal, political, or professional purposes. When people form organizations they establish rules, hierarchies, structures, divisions of labor, designated/negotiated roles, and interdependent relationships. Organizations are complicated, dynamic organisms that take on a personality and culture all their own. Think back to our discussion in Chapter 5 on Systems Theory. Organizations can be thought of as systems of people (Goldhaber, 1993) who are in constant motion in which change is inevitable (Redding, 1972). Organizations are social systems (Thayer, 1968, Katz & Kahn, 1966) that rely on communication to cope with uncertainty and perform with some degree of efficacy. Simon (1957) puts it quite simply: “Without communication, there can be no organization” (p. 57).

What Is Organizational Communication?

Like defining many aspects of communication study, many of the definitions of organizational communication share common elements. Stanley Deetz (2001) argues that one way to enlighten our understanding of organization communication is to compare different approaches. However, for the purpose of this text, we want to define organizational communication so you have a frame of reference for understand this chapter. Our definition is not definitive, but creates a starting point for understanding this specialization of communication study.

We define **organizational communication** as ***the sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals.*** Organizational communication is highly contextual and culturally dependent, and is not an isolated phenomenon. Individuals in organizations transmit messages through face-to face, written, and mediated channels.

Organizational communication largely focuses on building relationships, or repeated interpersonal interactions, with internal organizational members and interested external publics. Goldhaber (1990) identified a number of common characteristics in the variety of definitions of organizational communication -- Organizational communication 1) occurs within a complex open system which is influenced by, and influences its internal and external environments, 2) involves messages and their flow, purpose, direction, and media, 3) involves people and their attitudes, feelings, relationships, and skills.

Organizational communication helps us to 1) accomplish tasks relating to specific roles and responsibilities of sales, services, and production; 2) acclimate to changes through individual and organizational creativity and adaptation; 3) complete tasks through the

maintenance of policy, procedures, or regulations that support daily and continuous operations; 4) develop relationships where "human messages are directed at people within the organization-their attitudes, morale, satisfaction, and fulfillment" (Goldhaber, 1990, p. 20); and 5) coordinate, plan, and control the operations of the organization through management (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Redding, 1972; Thayer, 1968). Organizational communication is how organizations represent, present, and constitute their organizational climate and culture—the attitudes, values and goals that characterize the organization and its members.

For organizations to be successful, they must have competent communicators. Organizational communication study shows that organizations rely on effective communication and efficient communication skills from their members. A number of surveys (Davis & Miller, 1996; Holter & Kopka, 2001; Maes, Weldy, & Icengole, 1997; Verespej, 1998; Gaut & Perrigo, 1994) identify effective oral and written communication as the most sought after skills by those who run organizations. The U.S. Department of Labor reported communication competency as the most vital skill necessary for the 21st century workforce to achieve organizational success (Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills, 1992). The Public Forum Institute (2001) maintained that employees need to be skilled in public presentation, listening, and interpersonal communication to flourish in an organization (www.publicforuminstitute.org).

Organizations seek people like you who can follow and give instructions, accurately listen, provide useful feedback, get along with coworkers and customers, network, provide serviceable information, work well in teams, and creatively and critically solve problems and present ideas in an understandable manner. Developing organizational communication awareness and effectiveness is more than just having know-how or knowledge. Efficient organizational communication involves knowing how to create and exchange information, work with diverse groups or individuals, communicate in complicated and changing circumstances, as well as having the aptitude or motivation to communicate in appropriate manners.

How the Field of Organizational Communication Developed

As you now know, communication study is deeply entrenched in the oral rhetorical traditions of ancient Rome and Greece. Similar to the many of the early concepts that shaped the discipline, some of the founding principles of organizational communication originated in the East. As early as the fourth century, Chinese scholars concentrated on the "problems of communicating within the vast government bureaucracy as well as between the government and the people" (Murphy, Hildebrandt & Thomas, 1997, p. 4). Ancient eastern scholars focused on information flow, message fidelity, and quality of information within their governmental bureaucracy (Krone, Garrett & Chen, 1992). These still remain areas of focus for organizational communication that you will learn in your classes today.

Like most of our field's specializations, organizational communication began in the mid 20th century with the work of P. E. Lull and W. Charles Redding at the University of Purdue (Putnam & Cheney, 1985). Prior to this, individuals like Chester Barnard and Mary Parker Follett were setting the cornerstones for organizational communication by acknowledging the role of communication as key to organizational practices. During the industrial age, the focus of organizational communication was on worker productivity, organizational structure, and overall organizational effectiveness. The main outcomes to be achieved were higher profits and managerial efficiency. Follett is often referred to as the first management consultant in the United States (Stohl, 1995). She focused specifically on message complexity, appropriate channel choice, and worker participation in organizations. Bernard (1938) placed communication at the heart of every organizational process, arguing that people must be able to interact with each other for an organization to succeed.

As a specialization in our field, organizational communication can arguably be traced back to Alexander R. Heron's 1942 book Sharing Information With Employees that looked at manager-employee communication (Redding & Tompkins, 1988). Putnam and Cheney (1985) stated that the specialization of "organizational communication grew out of three main speech communication traditions: public address, persuasion, and social science research on interpersonal, small group, and mass communication" (p. 131). Along with public-speaking training for corporate executives as early as the 1920's (Putnam & Cheney, 1985), early works like Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People in 1936 focused on oral presentation and written communication skills for managers to succeed in organizations.

Redding and Thompkins (1988) identify three periods in the development of organizational communication. During the **Era of Preparation** (1900 to 1940) much of the groundwork was laid for the discipline that we know today. Scholars emphasized the importance of communication in organizations. ***The primary focus during this time was on public address, business writing, managerial communication, and persuasion.*** The **Era of Identification and Consolidation** (1940-1970) ***saw the beginnings of business and industrial communication, with certain group and organizational relationships being recognized as important.*** During the **Era of Maturity and Innovation** (1970-present), ***empirical research increased, "accompanied by innovative efforts to develop concepts, theoretical premises, and philosophical critiques"*** (Redding & Thompkins, 1988, p. 7).

As with other specializations, over the last century, the organizational communication has evolved dramatically as the dialogue between business and academics continued. Redding and Thompkins (1988) conclude that "by 1967 or 1968, organizational communication had finally achieved at least a moderate degree of success in two respects: breaking from its 'business and industrial' shackles, and gaining a reasonable measure of recognition as an entity worthy of serious academic study" (p. 18).

What Organizational Communication Studies and Teaches Today

By now, you have a fair idea of some the different content that is covered in organizational communication. As communication evolves, research continues to develop, and this specialization continues to redefine itself. In the early stages, the emphasis was on the organizational leaders giving public presentations. More recently emphasis has focused on all levels of interaction in organizations. Because interpersonal relationships are a large part of organizational communication, it makes sense that a great deal of research focuses on how interpersonal relationships are conducted within the framework of organizational hierarchies. Thus, the communication in superior-subordinate relationships is a focal point for many organizational researchers (Stohl & Redding, 1987; Putnam & Cheney, 1985).

Putnam and Cheney (1985) summarized modern organizational communication research by identifying four primary domains of this specialization: 1) Communication channels, 2) Communication climate, 3) Network analysis and, 4) Superior-subordinate communication. Since the 1980s, this specialization has expanded to include work on organizational culture, power and conflict management, and organizational rhetoric. In a recent analysis of 23 introductory organizational communication textbooks (Aust, Limon, & Lippert, 2002), commonalities occurred in the coverage of multiple approaches and topics. The nine topics that appeared most frequently include: 1) leadership, 2) conflict and conflict management, 3) communication networks, 4) decision making and problem solving, 5) morals, ethics, or values, 6) communication technology, 7) human resources perspective, 8) human relations perspective and, 9) classic management theory. If you were take an organizational communication course at your campus, it's likely that much of the time would be spent focusing on developing your skills in organizational socialization, interviewing, individual and group presentations, work relationships, performance evaluation, conflict resolution, stress management, decision making, and communicating with external publics.

Studying Organizational Communication

Looking back to Chapter Six, we looked at three primary ways Communication scholars conduct research. When we study organizational communication we can look to quantify date to predict behaviors, or qualify data to understand behaviors. We can also use qualitative methods to study communication in the natural environment of organizations in order to understand organizational cultures and how they function. These approaches emphasize the study of meanings and subjective aspects of organizational life as we experience them in our daily lives (Putnam, 1983; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983).

Critical approaches view organizations as "sites of domination" (Miller, 2003, p. 116) where certain individuals are marginalized or disadvantaged by oppressive groups or structures. Most often the focus of this line of research involves gender or ethnicity as

they are manifest in organizations. Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) state that a critical theorist "gathers interpretive cultural data about language, motives, and actions and makes judgments about the power relationships that exist in the organization" (p. 160). The critical researcher uses interpretative research techniques similar to cultural studies. When looking at something like a company pamphlet or the organization's employee handbook, a critical researcher will expose any anti-social or political meanings detrimental to certain individuals.

Chronological Progression of Perspectives for Understanding Organizational Communication

Now that you have a better understanding of the concept of organizational communication, let's look at five different perspectives for understanding organizational communication that have developed over time.

Classical Management Perspective

The original perspective for understanding organizational communication can be described using a machine metaphor. At the beginning of the industrial age, where people thought science could solve almost every problem, American Frederick Taylor, Frenchman Henri Fayol, and German Max Weber tried to apply scientific solutions to organizations. They wanted to determine how organizations and workers could function in an ideal scientific manner. Organizations during the industrial revolution wanted to know how they could maximize their profits so the classical management perspective focused on worker productivity.

The machine metaphor of classical management suggests that three basic aspects should exist in organizations: Specialization, Standardization, and Predictability (Miller, 2001). Those who advocated this perspective argued that every employee should have a specialized function. This being the case, essentially any individual could perform a job if they are properly trained. Thus, if one individual fails to do the job, he/she is replaceable with another person since people are seen as machine parts.

Frederick Taylor forged the beginnings of his **Theory of Scientific Management** from his early days as a foreman in a machine shop. Little did he know how drastically he was going to influence organizations and our notions of working life. Taylor could not understand why organizations and individuals would not want to maximize efficiency. In Frank Copley's biography (1923) about Taylor he reveals a man who was driven by perfection: "The spectacle of a [man] doing less than [his] best was to him morally shocking. He enthusiastically believed that to do anything less than your best is to add to the sum of the world's unrighteousness" (p. 207). However, workers were not always as enthusiastic about efficiency and quality as Taylor, especially given the significant difference in status and pay between management and labor. For the common laborer

during the industrial revolution, this new approach to employment meant possibly losing your job if a “scientific” formula showed that fewer workers could do the same job.

During this time, Weber was also developing his ideas about **bureaucracy**. He was fascinated on what the ideal organization should look like, and believed that effective hierarchies helped organizations operate effectively.***Precise rules, a division of labor, centralized authority, and a distinctly defined hierarchy should be driven by rational thought void of emotion and outside influence***(Weber, 1947). This way, organizations could operate in a somewhat predictable manner, employees knew what to expect and who was in charge, and management could make decisions based on familiar, relevant information rather than irrational feelings. Think about the bureaucracy of your college campus. There are divisions of labor, rules, policies, and procedures to follow on your campus. Registering for classes, tracking transcripts, obtaining financial aid, living in campus housing, etc., are all part of the time you spend navigating the bureaucracy on your campus. But, imagine a campus without bureaucracy. What if you couldn’t easily access your transcripts? What if no one kept track of your progress through college? How would you know what to do and when you were done? What if there was no process for applying for financial aid? While bureaucracies can be slow, tedious, and often inefficient, they provide structure we have come to rely on to accomplish personal and professional goals.

Fayol’s (1949) theory of classical management focused on how management worked, specifically looking at what managers should do to be most effective. For Fayol, it should be clear who is in charge, and each individual should know his/her role in an organization. He argued that organizations should be grouped in precise hierarchy that limits the flow of communication to top-down communication, and the number of employees directly under the supervision of one manager.

Theory X is an example of a classical management theory where ***managers micro-manage employees by using reward-punishment tactics, and limiting employee participation in decision making*** (McGregor, 1960). This theory sees employees as apathetic, unconcerned about organizational goals, resistant to change, and basically lazy or unmotivated. Because of this, managers should closely supervise their workers. Because the classical management perspective viewed employees as interchangeable parts of a machine, employees were as disposable parts of the machine. This allowed for management to mistreat and abuse their employees, ultimately lowering the very thing they were after, greater productivity.

Organizations you use this approach can still be found today. Have you ever had a boss or manager who treated you like an interchangeable part of a machine who had little value? If so, you’ve experienced aspects of the classical management perspective at work. While notions of science were an interesting starting point for determining how to communicate in organizations during the initial stages of the industrial revolution, the classical management approach fell short in many ways. Thus, development and

refinement continued to occur regarding ways to understand organizational communication.

Organizational Communication Then
Frederick Taylor

In today's world, fast food chains are good examples of classical management. Next time you buy that Whopper or Big Mac, you can thank the influence of American businessman Frederick Taylor. Literally using a stopwatch, Taylor's used his time and motion studies to prove that for every job, there is one best way to perform it in the shortest amount of time. This meant properly selecting, training, and rewarding the appropriate worker with the right task (Taylor, 1947). Peek into the kitchen the next time you order that burger, fries, and coke. It is likely that you will see employees separated by station and task, doing their specific part to fulfill your order. Likewise, the design of hard plastic seats and bright colors in fast food restaurants is done with intention to get customers in and out of the restaurant in an efficient and expedient manner.

Case In Point
McDonalds

Richard and Maurice McDonald owned such a restaurant. After running it successfully for 11 years, they decided to improve it. They wanted to make food faster, sell it cheaper and spend less time worrying about replacing cooks and car hops. The brothers closed the restaurant and redesigned its food-preparation area to work less like a restaurant and more like an automobile assembly line.

Their old drive-in had already made them rich, but the new restaurant - which became McDonald's - made the brothers famous. Restaurateurs traveled from all over the country to copy their system of fast food preparation, which they called the Speedee Service System. Without cars, Carl and Maurice would not have had a drive-in restaurant to tinker with. Without assembly lines, they would not have had a basis for their method of preparing food.

Being a short-order cook took skill and training, and good cooks were in high demand. The Speedee system, however, was completely different. Instead of using a skilled cook to make food quickly, it used lots of unskilled workers, each of whom did one small, specific step in the food-preparation process.

Instead of being designed to facilitate the preparation of a variety of food relatively quickly, the kitchen's purpose was to make a very large amount of a very few items.

When you visit different restaurants belonging to the same fast-food chain, the menu and food are pretty much the same. There's one reason for this uniformity in fast food - it's a product of mass-production.

Human Relations Perspective

Because of the overly mechanical nature of the classical management perspective, organizational scholars wanted to focus on the human elements that make up organizations. The human relations perspective emerged out of the deficiencies of classical management where managers neglected employees' needs and treated them as pieces of a machine rather than unique individuals. The **human relations approach** focuses on how ***organizational members relate to one another, and how individuals' needs influence their performance in organizations***. In 1924 Elton Mayo and his team of Harvard scientists began a series of studies that were initially interested in how to modify working conditions to increase worker productivity, decrease employee turnover, and change the overall poor organizational effectiveness at the Hawthorne Electric Plant near Chicago (Roethlisberger & Dickson, 1939).

Mayo's team discovered that, no matter what changes they made to the work environment (such as adjusting lighting and temperature levels, work schedules, and worker isolation), worker productivity increased simply due to the presence researchers themselves. This research pointed to the fact that simply paying attention to workers and addressing their social needs yielded significant changes in their productivity. This is where the term "The Hawthorne Effect" developed. Mayo's work provided an impetus for a new way of looking at workers in organizations.

Maslow's hierarchy suggests that human beings are motivated to satisfy their personal needs. Maslow (1957) contends that humans are motivated by a series of basic physical and psychological needs divided into lower and higher order categories. His theory is still of interest to us today as we try to comprehend the relevance of human relations in the workplace. Daniels, Spiker, and Papa's (1997) describe McGregor's contributions: "As management theorists became familiar with Maslow's work, they soon realized the possibility of connecting higher-level needs to worker motivation. If organizational goals and individual needs could be integrated so that people would acquire self-esteem and, ultimately, self-actualization through work, then motivation would be self-sustaining" (p. 33). Remember that Theory X managers do not trust their employees because they think workers shy away from work, change, and responsibility. At the other end of the managerial spectrum, Theory Y managers (those that take a human relations perspective to employees) assume that workers are self motivated, seek responsibility, and want to achieve success. As a result of this changing perspective, managers began to invite feedback and encourage a degree of participation in organizational decision making, thus focusing on human relationships as a way to motivate employee productivity.

Human Resources Perspective

The Human Resources perspective picks up where human relations left off. The primary criticism of the previous approach was that it was still primarily concerned with productivity, and tried to achieve worker productivity simply by making workers happy. The idea that a happy employee would be a productive employee makes initial sense. However, happiness does not mean that we will be productive workers. As a matter of fact, an individual can be happy with a job and not work very hard. Another reason scholars tried to improve the human relations perspective was because manipulative managers misused it by inviting participation from employees on the surface, but not really doing anything with the employees' contributions. Imagine your boss encouraging everyone to put their ideas into a suggestion box but never looking them. How would you feel?

Human Resources attempts to truly embrace participation by all organizational members, viewing each person as a valuable human resource. ***Employees are valuable resources that should be fully involved to manifest their abilities and productivity***. Using this approach, organizations began to encourage employee participation in decision making.

An example of the human resources perspective is William Ouchi's (1981) Theory Z. Ouchi believed that traditional American organizations should be more like Japanese organizations. Japanese culture values lifetime employment, teamwork, collective responsibility, and a sound mind and body. This contrasts with many traditional American values such as short-term employment, individualism, and non-participation. In the 1980's movie Gungho, Michael Keaton played an automotive plant manager that struggles as a Japanese company purchases his American automotive plant. The comedy of the movie relies on the incongruency between the two cultures as the American work force attempted to adjust to the Japanese management team.

Ouchi did not think that American organizations should function exactly like Japanese organizations. Many U.S. companies implemented Japanese organizational concepts such as quality circles (QC), quality of work life (QWL) programs, management by objectives (MBO), and W. E. Deming's (1982) notion of total quality management (TQM). Each of these approaches was designed to flatten hierarchies, increase participation, implement quality control, and utilize teamwork. Brady (1989) states sums up the human resources perspective when he stated that it is all about "achieving high productivity or performance by getting organizational participants meaningfully involved in the important decisions that regulate the enterprise" (p. 15).

Systems Perspective

Collectively, individuals in organizations achieve more than they can independently (Barnard, 1838; Katz & Kahn, 1966; Redding, 1972; von Bertalanffy, 1968).

The **systems perspective** for understanding organizations is ***"concerned with problems of relationships, of structure, and of interdependence rather than with the constant attributes of objects"*** (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p.18). An organization is like a living organism, and must exist in its external environment in order to survive. Organizations are not isolated, and must interact with other organizations within their environments to survive. Without this interaction an organization remains what we call closed, and withers away (Buckley, 1967).

All organizations have basic properties. **Equifinality** means that ***a system (organization) can reach its goals from different paths***. For example, each professor that teaches public speaking does so in a different way but, the end result is that the students in each of the classes as completed a course in public speaking. **Negative entropy** is ***the ability of an organization to overcome the possibility of becoming run down***. Any steps your campus takes to keep its curriculum up to date, and its facilities maintained is considered negative entropy. **Requisite variety** means that ***organizations must be responsive to their external environment and adjust when needed***. On the campus of your authors, there were not enough students attending. So, the campus did a marketing study to figure out how to reach potential students. **Homeostasis** points to ***an organization's need for stability in a turbulent environment***. As gas prices have gone up, organizations impacted by these rising costs take steps to ensure their survival and profitability. **Complexity** states that ***the more an organization grows and interacts, the more elaborate it becomes*** (Katz & Kahn, 1966; von Bertalanffy, 1968; Miller, 2002). Think about huge companies like AT&T. It must have elaborate organizational systems in place to deal with all of its employees and customers in a competitive market place.

If an organization is a system, how do we use the role of communication to analyze interactions among organizational members? Karl Weick's (1979) Theory of Organizing suggests that participants organize through their communication and make sense of unpredictable environments through interactions. Organizations exist through the interactions of people in those organizations. An organization is more than just a physical building with people inside. Communication is the "process of organizing" implying that communication actually is the organization (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977; Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001). Regardless of whether the focus is on the message or the meaning, systems theory stresses the interdependence of integrated people in organizations and the outcomes they produce as a result of their interactions.

Case In Point

The Future of Outsourcing: How it's transforming whole industries and changing the way we work

Globalization has been brutal to midwestern manufacturers like the Paper Converting Machine Co. For decades, PCMC's Green Bay (Wis.) factory, its oiled wooden factory

floors worn smooth by work boots, thrived by making ever-more-complex equipment to weave, fold, and print packaging for everything from potato chips to baby wipes. But PCMC has fallen on hard times. First came the 2001 recession. Then, two years ago, one of the company's biggest customers told it to slash its machinery prices by 40% and urged it to move production to China. Last year, a St. Louis holding company, Barry-Wehmiller Cos., acquired the manufacturer and promptly cut workers and nonunion pay. In five years sales have plunged by 40%, to $170 million, and the workforce has shrunk from 2,000 to 1,100. Employees have been traumatized, says operations manager Craig Compton, a muscular former hockey player. "All you hear about is China and all these companies closing or taking their operations overseas." But now, Compton says, he is "probably the most optimistic I've been in five years." Hope is coming from an unusual source. As part of its turnaround strategy, Barry-Wehmiller plans to shift some design work to its 160-engineer center in Chennai, India. By having U.S. and Indian designers collaborate 24/7, explains Vasant Bennett, president of Barry-Wehmiller's engineering services unit, PCMC hopes to slash development costs and time, win orders it often missed due to engineering constraints -- and keep production in Green Bay. Barry-Wehmiller says the strategy already has boosted profits at some of the 32 other midsize U.S. machinery makers it has bought. "We can compete and create great American jobs," vows CEO Robert Chapman. "But not without offshoring."

Cultural Perspective

Each organization has unique characteristics that make it different from other organizations. Every organization has certain cultural differences such as language, traditions, symbols, practices, past-times, and social conveniences that distinguish it from other organizations. Each organization is rich with its own histories, stories, customs, and social norms. We can understand organizations by seeing them as unique cultures.

Simply put, the **cultural perspective** states that ***organizations maintain: 1) Shared values and beliefs, 2) Common practices, skills, and actions, 3) Customarily observed rules, 4) Objects and artifacts, and 5) Mutually understood meanings.*** Shockley-Zalabak (2002) contends, “Organizational culture reflects the shared realities and shared practices in the organization and how these realities create and shape organizational events” (p. 63). Not every individual in an organization shares, supports, or engages in organizational values, beliefs, or rules in a similar manner. Instead, organizational culture includes various perspectives in a continually changing, emerging, and complex environment.

It can be tempting to treat culture as a “thing.” However, organizational cultures are shared ways of thinking that emerge through interaction. Members share meaning, construct reality, and make sense of their environment. From a communication perspective, individuals of organizations create culture through their interactions. “Culture is directly revealed through language, stories, nonverbal messages, and

communication exchanges" (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001, p. 128). As Morgan states, "There is often more to culture than meets the eye and our understandings are usually much more fragmented and superficial than the reality itself" (1997, p. 151).

When we become involved with organizations, current members of that organization teach us "the correct way to perceive, think, and feel" (Schein, 1992, p. 12). There are three interdependent levels that provide insight into how culture works in organizations.

- **Artifacts** are the first type of communicative behavior we encounter in organizations. Artifacts are easy to observe but difficult to interpret. Artifacts are ***symbols used by an organization to represent the organization's culture***. You might observe artifacts such as office technology, office architecture and arrangement, lighting, artwork, written documents, personal items on desks, clothing preferences, personal appearance, name tags, security badges, policy handbook, or web sites. You might observe routine behavior such as work processes, patterned communication (greetings), non-verbal characteristics (eye contact and handshakes) rituals, ceremonies, stories, or informal/formal interactions between supervisor and subordinate. All of these are artifacts that tell us something about an organization's cultural values and practices.
- **Values** are an ***organization's preference for how things should happen, or strategies for determining how things should be accomplished correctly***. Hackman and Johnson (2000) believe that values "serve as the yardstick for judging behavior" (p. 233). Many times there is a disconnect between what an organization says it values, and their actual behavior. For example, Disney espouses family values, yet many of their subsidiary companies produce media that do not hold up these values. A way around this for Disney is to make sure to use other names, such as Touchstone Pictures, so that the Disney name is not attached to anything that looks like it does not support family values.
- **Basic assumptions** are the core of what individuals believe in organizations believe. These ***"unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts, and feelings" ultimately influence how you experience the world as an organizational member*** (Schein, 1992, p. 17). Unspoken beliefs reveal how we treat other individuals, what we see as good and bad in human nature, how we discover truth, and our place in the environment (Hackman & Johnson, 2000). Basic assumptions guide how organizations treat employees and provide services to customers. Imagine that you work overtime almost everyday without pay. Why would you do this? Maybe you hold the basic assumption that people who work hard ultimately get ahead by being given promotions and pay raises. Imagine if you did this for years with no recognition or acknowledgement. What does that say about your basic assumptions in comparison to those of the organization?

Looking at organizations from the cultural perspective began in the 1980s (Putnam, 1990, p.2). During this time, several popular books focused on ideal corporate cultures,

and the cultural perspective became a hot topic. Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) and In Search of Excellence (Peters & Waterman, 1982) described cultural elements that mark prosperous organizations. The authors talked with Fortune 500 companies and determined that if an organization demonstrates a bias for action, has a close relationship with customers, has identifiable values, reveres individuals that exemplifies organizational values (heroes), and has a solid communication network, it is a healthy organization.

Culture is complicated and unstable. Each organization has its own unique identity, its own distinct ways of doing things, and its own ways of performing culture (Pacanowsky & O 'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983). The books mentioned above prompted many organizations to try to replicate the companies with "strong" or "excellent" cultures. Ironically, several of the companies identified with strong or excellent cultures have had a difficult time maintaining productivity over the last twenty years.

An important focal point of the cultural perspective is the climate of an organization. **Climate** is ***the general workplace atmosphere or mood experienced by organizational members*** (Tagiuri, 1968). Organizational climate is a "subjective reaction to organization members' perception of communication events" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2002, p. 66). Do you like working with the people at your job? Are you satisfied with the general climate of your college campus? Are you appropriately rewarded for the work you do? Do you feel like a valued member of your church or social group? Climate has a direct effect on organizational relationships and members' satisfaction and morale. Researcher Jack Gibb (1961) proposes that the interpersonal communication in organizational relationships, especially between superiors and subordinates, contributes to the overall climate of organizations. Gibb identifies a continuum of climate characteristics ranging from supportive to defensive behaviors that lead to member satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

> **Organizational Communication Now**
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> There's no question that Google is a trendsetter. The company made Web search sexy, and lucrative. It established the foundation for an ecosystem that allows any old little Web site to make money off advertising.
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> With its lava lamps, simple doodle design, pampered employees and millionaires in its rank and file, it has become a cultural icon and an emblem of the gold-rush promise of the Web.
>
> Google was ranked by Fortune magazine as the best place in the U.S. to work, and it has reached another zenith by becoming the most popular Web site. It's even become a verb in the dictionary.
>
> And it may even have started a new trend by creating a job that carries the title

"chief culture officer." Stacy Savides Sullivan is that person at Google. Sullivan's mission is simple: retain the company's unique culture and keep the Googlers happy. In an exclusive interview, she tells CNET News.com how she does just that.

What do you do as chief culture officer?
Sullivan: I work with employees around the world to figure out ways to maintain and enhance and develop our culture and how to keep the core values we had in the very beginning--a flat organization, a lack of hierarchy, a collaborative environment--to keep these as we continue to grow and spread them and filtrate them into our new offices around the world.

We want all of our employees to play a part in being involved in keeping our culture the way it is today but also growing and developing it. So some of it is coming up with different programs or processes, and just being there to talk with people when they have issues, setting up Web sites where people can report bugs in their culture and ideas on how to improve it, and those types of thing.

What have we not covered that you think is germane to what you do at Google?
Sullivan: I think for any company that is growing as quickly as we are the work-life balance component is actually quite high. We don't typically have early-morning meetings or late-night meetings. And people are welcome to do things via conference call at home and we pay for people to connect from home. We have a good paternity-leave policy where the dads can take off a couple of weeks when their spouse has had a child and we pay for peoples' meals when they have new babies for the first few weeks.

We've all heard about the ability for people to bring their dogs to work. And you have such a litany of perks and benefits and things that would encourage people to stay or even join. And we have a benefit where we reimburse people up to $5,000 if they buy a hybrid or electric car. And we have shuttle service (for commuters) to and from San Francisco, the East Bay, Santa Cruz.

Organizational Communication Then
Gibb's Climate Characteristics: In the 1960s Gibb developed characteristics of Defensive and Supportive Climates in organizations.

Defensive Climate
• Evaluation-passing judgment, blaming, and questioning standards, values, and motives
• Control-trying to do something to someone else
• Strategy-manipulating or tricking others
• Neutrality-expressing a lack of concern for other's welfare

• Superiority-communicating an attitude of superiority in position, wealth, intellect, and physical characteristics by arousing feelings of inadequacy in others
• Certainty-being dogmatic and always needing to be right

Supportive Climate
• Descriptive-being nonjudgmental and asking questions without calling for change
• Problem Orientation-defining mutual problems and seeking solutions without inhibiting
• Spontaneity-being free of deception and straightforward
• Equality-having mutual trust and respect engaging in participative decision making
• Empathy-respecting the worth of the listener by sharing and accepting others problems and values
• Provisionalism-being willing to experiment and adapt

Challenges in Organizational Communication

In today's world we all must be communicatively aware and ready to cope with rapid organizational change during this "information-intensive age" where downsizing, strikes, illegal activities, dot.coms, and bankruptcies dominate the headlines (Bennis, p. 178). As you continue your education in college, you'll continue to understand the need to be prepared for a perpetually evolving, increasingly diverse, and unpredictable global workplace.

The key to organizational success, both for you and the organizations with whom you are involved, is effective communication. As you have probably experienced in both your personal relationships and organizational relationships, communication is not always successful. If you have ever worked on a group project for one of your classes, you have likely experienced many of the communicative challenges organizations face in this increasingly fast-paced and global world.

Ineffective communication can cause many problems that can impact relationships, productivity, job satisfaction, and morale as we interact in organizations. Gerald Goldhaber summarizes Osmo Wiio's "laws" of communication that are good to remember as you interact in increasingly complex organizations. Wiio pessimistically warns that: 1) If communication can fail, it will fail, 2) If a message can be understood in different ways, it will be misunderstood in the manner that does the most damage, 3) The more communication there is, the more tricky it is for the communication to be successful, and 4) There is always someone who thinks they know better what you said than you do.

One of the greatest challenges facing organizations is the practice of ethics. Ethics are a basic code of conduct (morals) that individuals and groups use to assess whether

something is right or wrong. Shockley-Zalabak's (2002) expands the notion of communication ethics: "When applied to human communication, ethics are the moral principles that guide our judgments about the good and bad, right and wrong, of communication, not just communication effectiveness or efficiency" (p. 441). Jablin and Sias (2001) highlight what role truth plays in determining ethical standards. They maintain that organizations have fallen short in developing an understanding of that relationship.

How ethical are you as an organizational participant? Do you always make ethical personal and professional decisions? Have you ever withheld a bit of truth to lessen the impact of revealing the whole truth? What if you accidentally overhear that an individual who is up for a promotion has been stealing from the organization? Do you tell your boss? Or, on a greater scale, what if you discover that your organization is withholding vital information from consumers, or violating lawful practices? Do you blow the whistle or stay loyal to your company? When you write your resume, how accurately do you describe your work history? Each of these scenarios deals directly with ethical considerations and ethical communication.

Many organizations practice a climate of "survival of the fittest" as individuals scramble their way up the ladder of success at any cost. Comedian Jimmy Durante posited this advice: "Be nice to people on your way up because you might meet 'em on your way down." Obviously, not every organization has this type of cutthroat culture, but with an inherent hierarchy and imbalance of power, organizations are ripe for unethical behaviors. Because of the competitive nature of many business climates, and the push for profits, organizational and individual ethics are often tested.

Do organizations have a moral responsibility to act ethically outside of their capitalistic and legal obligations? "Since 1985, more than two-thirds of Fortune 500 firms have been convicted of serious crimes, ranging from fraud to the illegal dumping of hazardous waste" (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001, p. 337). Enron, WorldCom, and Arthur Anderson are recent examples of unethical organizational behavior. In the movie, The Insider, Russell Crowe's character portrays a whistle-blower outing the tobacco industry for withholding pertinent health information. Business professor Eileen P. Kelly (2002) contends, "corporations owe an ethical responsibility to all of their stakeholders and have a duty to be good corporate citizens" (p. 4). All of us have an obligation to communicate ethically in all aspects of our lives, including organizations.

Differences in perception and the failure to clarify communication can lead to miscommunication at interpersonal as well as organizational levels. Organizationally, communication failure occurs due to information overload, communication anxiety, unethical communication, bad timing, too little information, message distortion, lack of respect, insufficient information, minimal feedback, ineffective communication, and even disinterest or apathy. To be successful in our organizational environments, we need to be earnest participants, as well as active listeners, to ensure effective communication

and mutual satisfaction. Organizations cannot successfully operate without effective communication at every level.

Organizational Communication And You

Understanding the importance of organizational communication is essential in the success of any type of organization, large or small. If entering the work world is something that intrigues you, one cannot stress the importance of organizational communication. According to Kathryn A. Baker, “Managers have traditionally spent the majority of their time communicating in one form or another (meetings, face-to-face discussions, memos, letters, e-mails, reports, etc.). Today, however, more and more employees find that an important part of their work is communication, especially now that service workers outnumber production workers and research as well as production processes emphasize greater collaboration and teamwork among workers in different functional groups. Moreover, a sea-change in communication technologies has contributed to the transformation of both work and organizational structure. For these reasons, communication practices and technologies have become more important in all organizations.”

Case In Point

The Case of Hills Pet Nutrition, Inc.

In 2007 several major brands of pet food were recalled due to a contaminant in the food. As a result of the poisoned food, thousands of dogs and cats developed renal failure and many died. Many upset customers asked the pet food companies to take financial responsibility for the costs that were incurred while seeking vital veterinary care for their sick pets. Some companies responded ethically with financial settlements; others failed in their ethical responsibility. Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Inc. (the maker of Science Diet) was one such company. In a letter sent to a customer seeking reimbursement for treating their sick cat, Hill’s wrote a one sentence letter stating, “. . . it appears we are unable to settle your claim for Oscar’s future medical expenses.”

Thinking of this incident in ethical terms Kreps’ (1990) three principles of ethical communication are of relevance. He states ethical treatment should 1) Tell the truth, 2) Do no harm, and 3) Treat people justly. Has Hills, Inc. engaged in ethical communication? How could they have done so?

Future Directions

As with many other specializations in the field of Communication, the area of organizational communication is changing faster than organizations, individuals, and scholars can adapt. It is difficult for organizations to anticipate and keep in front of the

changes they encounter. What worked during the industrial age may no longer be relevant in the 21st century. In fact, what worked ten years ago likely does not work today. A sense of urgency, a fast pace, inconsistency, information overload, regenerating technology, and constant change characterize the dynamic changes as organizations move from operating in the industrial age to the information age. Miller (2003) identifies four elements of the changing landscape for organizations: 1) Organizations are becoming more global, 2) Images and identity are becoming increasingly important, 3) There is a shift to a more predominant service economy, and 4) The changing workforce is highlighted by the "disposable worker" (Conrad & Poole, 1997), downsizing, early retirement, and temporary workers.

As a result, new directions of research are emerging. These changes are forcing the those of us in organizational communication to reexamine existing communicative practices relative to the changing dynamics of organizations. For example, can a person lead without any personal, face-to-face contact? How do organizational values impact ethics, and what is the attitude towards ethical communication in this increasingly competitive age? Eisenberg and Goodall (2001) suggest that organizational communication scholars must focus on the moral dimensions of organizational communication, communication ethics, and ecological responsibilities due to the increasing potential that large-scale organizations have to exploit workers and the environment. How should work-life issues such as working parents, affirmative action, and AIDS screening be handled? With increasing diversity in the workplace, what is the role of intercultural communication? In this age of elevated tensions, how do stress and emotions communicatively manifest themselves in the workplace?

Scholars are continuing to communicatively adapt and respond to the changing landscape in terms of what we teach, research, and practice. Expect to see a variety of approaches and distinctively unique research agendas that will likely highlight the ways in which you will spend your life working in organizations that are different from today.

Organizational Communication Now

Today, E-mail has become a popular tool for communication within organizations. E-mail can be used as for an array of communication purposes. One can use it as a means of sending a brief memo or to address more serious matters. Although people tend to view E mail as an informal written message it is important to formalize written E-mails in the business setting. According to Shawn Smith's article E-mail in the Workplace: Avoiding legal landmines, "… All companies should develop and communicate a sound email policy to communicate proper usage of the company email system to employees. The employer should distribute its email policy regularly to all employees, and require them to sign an acknowledgement that they have received, read, understood and agree to abide by the rules." It is essential to make appropriate use of E-mail

within an organization so as to avoid potential legal issues as well as to initiate effective communication.

Summary

In this chapter, you learned that an organization is a "consciously coordinated social unit composed of two or more people, that functions on a relatively continuous basis to achieve a common goal or set of goals" (Robbins, 2001, p. 4). Organizations are dynamic and are created through our communication. Organizational communication is the sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals. Organizational communication is highly contextual and culturally dependent.

The study of organizational communication developed as a result of the rapid changes brought on by the industrial revolution in the past 150 years. The more formal study of organizational communication took root in the mid-1900s and has gained increasing attention over the past 60 years. We examined three predominant periods of organizational communication during this time. The Era of Preparation (1900 to 1940) is the era in which practitioners and scholars focused on public address, business writing, managerial communication, and persuasion. The Era of Identification and Consolidation (1940-1970) saw the beginnings of business and industrial communication with certain group and organizational relationships becoming important. During the Era of Maturity and Innovation (1970 –present) organizational communication has worked to rationalize its existence through rigorous research methods and scholarship.

Those in the field of organizational communication study a variety of communication activity in organizational settings. Researchers focus on communication channels, communication climates, network analysis and, superior-subordinate communication. Since the 1980s, this specialization has expanded to include the study of organizational culture, power and conflict management, and organizational rhetoric. Other content areas of focus include communication in groups and teams, leadership, conflict and conflict management, communication networks, decision making and problem solving, ethics, and communication technology. Introductory organizational communication classrooms often focus on skill development in socialization, interviewing, individual and group presentations, work relationships, performance evaluation, conflict resolution, stress management, decision making, or external publics.

Since the start of the industrial revolution, perspectives regarding organizational communication have continued to be developed and refined. The initial organizational communication perspective, founded on scientific principles, is the classical management perspective which focused on specialization, standardization, and predictability in organizations. Following this perspective were the human relations and human resources perspectives which further tried to incorporate human satisfaction, needs, and participation as a means for creating effective organizations and productive

employees. The systems perspective allowed researchers to understand organizations as a "whole greater then the sum of their parts." This perspective focuses on the interactions of the people who form organizations, with the basic assumption that all people in the organization impact organizational outcomes. Finally, the cultural perspective understands organizations as unique cultures with their own sets of artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. As part of the cultural perspective we can examine the climate of an organization to reveal how an organization impacts its members, and how members impact an organization.

The future of organizational communication is complex and rapidly changing. As a result, there are many challenges to organizations. Two of the most compelling challenges are ethics and the rapid changes occurring in organizational life. As competition continues to increase, and greater demands are placed on organizations and individuals, ethics is becoming an essential focus of examination for organizational communication and behavior. Likewise, the rapid advances in technology and globalization are creating increased challenges and demands on organizational members.

Discussion Questions

1. Think of an organization you have worked in. What theoretical perspective did the organization take towards its workers? What was it like working within the boundaries of that perspective?
2. What kinds of organizations does the classical management approach work in today? What kinds of organizations does it not work in?
3. What needs of Maslow's do you want your job to help you fulfill? Why?
4. How would you describe the "culture" of your campus? What does this tell you about your campus?

Key Terms

- Artifacts
- Basic assumptions
- Bureaucracy
- Classical management perspective
- Climate
- Competent communicator
- Complexity
- Cultural perspective
- Defensive Climate
- Equifinality
- Era of Preparation
- Era of Identification and Consolidation
- Era of Maturity and Innovation
- Ethical communication

- Homeostasis
- Human relations perspective
- Human resources perspective
- Negative entropy
- Organization
- Organizational communication
- Permeability
- Requisite variety
- Sociability
- Solidarity
- Supportive Climate
- Systems perspective
- Theory of Scientific Management
- Theory X
- Values

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