

Organizational Communication: Historical Development and Future Directions

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*T*he following article offers a historical overview of five primary research traditions within organizational communication: communication media, communication channels, networks, organizational climate, and superior-subordinate communication. More significantly, Putnam and Cheney provide an introduction to four emerging approaches to the study of organizational communication: (1) the information-processing, (2) the rhetorical, (3) the cultural, and (4) the political perspectives.

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Organizational communication as a specialized area of speech communication has experienced rapid growth in the past decade. Most colleges and universities with speech communication programs offer at least one course in this area. A master's degree in organizational communication can be obtained at approximately 75 institutions and 35 of these schools offer the Ph.D. Despite its growing popularity, however, organizational communication is a relative newcomer to the discipline. Its departmental roots date back to the early 1950s with the work of P. E. Lull at Purdue University; its origins can be traced to speech training for corporate executives in the 1920s. Its emergence in the field of speech communication parallels the entrance of speech communication into the mainstream of social science research.

The growth of organizational communication is concomitant with the development of industrial psychology, social psychology, organizational behavior, and administrative science; hence, experts in these fields have shaped the dominant theories, concepts, and issues that organizational communication scholars typically raise. Redding (1979b) acknowledges and laments this "wholesale transporting (borrowing? stealing?) of concepts and variables from our academic cousins" (p. 321). Recent breakthroughs, however, reflect the influence of a wider array of disciplines; namely, sociology, rhetoric, anthropology, philosophy, political science, and linguistics.

Organizational communication grew out of three main speech communication traditions: public address; persuasion; and social science research on interpersonal, small group, and mass communication. Definitions of both communication and organization were as diverse as the tradition that shaped research topics. Moreover, because definitions reflected various theoretical assumptions and concepts (Cusella, in press; Putnam, 1982a), it was unlikely that any one definition would gain wide acceptance (Porter & Roberts, 1976). In the early writings, defini-

tions of communication had a distinctly "media-oriented" focus, shaping research on the accuracy and clarity of message composition (McMurray, 1965). Communication, in this sense, was the "process of sending and receiving messages" (Sanborn, 1964, p. 3). The publication of Lee Thayer's (1961) *Administrative Communication* and W.C. Redding's (1972) *Communication Within the Organization* shifted the focus of organizational communication from sender to receiver models. Communication referred to "those behaviors of human beings . . . which result in messages being received by one or more persons" (Redding, 1972, p. 25). This definition dismissed the notion that messages were literally transmitted from one person to another. Instead, it stressed that the message received was the one that mattered.

Recent studies have moved away from these conceptions to one of interaction, or the social creation of message and meaning (Hawes, 1974). *Process* assumes a central role in the interactive orientation, and organizational communication is broadly defined as "the processing and interpreting of messages, information, meaning, and symbolic activity within and between organizations" (Putnam, 1983a, p. 1). Definitions of *organization* have also shifted from a preoccupation with bureaucratic models to a focus on aggregates of persons arranged in patterned relationships (Barnard, 1938; Redding, 1972). Organizations are seen as involving dynamic activities rather than static collections of people; these activities are integrated through role coordination, interdependence, and interlocked behaviors (Redding, 1972; Weick, 1979).

This chapter traces the evolution of organizational communication—its major topics and research developments. In particular, it reviews the key research domains, breakpoints in new lines of work, and the interface between research and application from 1920 to 1980. Spatial limitations preclude a thorough synthesis of research findings in organizational communication. The reader is urged to consult Guetzkow

(1965), Redding (1972), and Porter and Roberts (1976) for detailed state-of-the-art reviews. Other articles provide a definitive historical treatment of organizational communication (Hay, 1974; Porterfield, 1974; Redding, 1966; Richetto, 1977; Tompkins, 1967; Van Voorhis, 1974). Our chapter draws from these summaries to highlight historical developments.

Spatial limitations also preclude a review of major theorists and methodological developments in the study of organizational communication. Interested readers are directed to Tompkins (1984) and Pietri (1974) for a review of the contributions of such major theorists as Barnard, Fayol, Follétt, Simon, Taylor, and Weber. Other review chapters focus on premises and metatheoretical assumptions that underlie research traditions (Putnam, 1982a; Redding, 1979b); ways of transforming traditional research into alternative approaches (Putnam, 1983b; Putnam & Cheney, 1983); research methodologies used to study organizational communication (Dennis, Goldhaber & Yates, 1978); and new models for research on systems theory and communication structure (Farace & MacDonald, 1974; Monge, 1982; Roberts, O'Reilly, Bretton & Porter, 1974; Thayer, 1967); hence, these topics will not be reviewed.

Instead, this essay reviews five areas of "traditional" organizational communication research—communication media, communication channels, networks, organizational climate, and superior-subordinate communication—and four emerging approaches: information-processing, rhetorical, cultural, and political orientations. It concludes with an overview of the practical side of organizational communication, its history, and its impact on training and consulting.

EARLY ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH: THE STUDY OF COMMUNICATION MEDIA

Topics covered in an introductory course on organizational communication typically begin with

the research of the 1950s (Jablin, 1978b). But in actuality, one offshoot of industrial communication, business and professional speaking, dates back to the late 1920s. This section reviews publications on industrial public speaking, communication media, and the semantics of organizational messages. The first visible sign of courtship between the American business community and the speech-communication field occurred in the late 1920s. Encouraged by the popularity of Dale Carnegie's writings and courses, business began to link managerial effectiveness with communication skills (Sanborn, 1964). Even though academicians regarded Carnegie's courses as "gimmickry," they followed his lead in providing prescriptive texts for managerial success. Two textbooks that gained a widespread appeal were Hoffman's (1923) *Speaking for Business Men* and Sanford and Yeager's (1929) *Business and Professional Speaking*. These books adapted public speaking to the business scene by introducing briefs, reports, and presentational speeches as forms of public address. Most of the business speaking texts published before 1950 "provide no evidence to support their huge numbers of prescriptions" and treat communication as "speaker-centered, and success-oriented, manipulative, and simplistic" (Redding, 1966, p. 52).

Although Collins (1924) conducted a survey of public speaking courses in business administration and YMCA schools, systematic research on business speakers did not surface until the surveys of industrial training programs at Pennsylvania State University in the 1950s (Knapp, 1968; Zelko, 1951) and the studies of business rhetoric at the University of Missouri in the 1960s (Fisher, 1965). Fisher (1965) analyzed the persuasive strategies of 500 speeches delivered by top management officials. The speeches relied on a common enemy and used stylized platitudes and recurrent symbols as persuasive techniques. Shifting from content to speech preparation, Knapp (1970) reported that middle managers had very little preparation time before

delivery, feared being misquoted, and relied heavily on prepared manuscripts for their delivery. A few academicians extended this work by studying audience responses to business rhetoric (Derry, 1969; Irwin & Brockhaus, 1963; Williams & Sundene, 1965). This early work on public speaking in industry laid the foundation for a plethora of courses and texts on business and professional speaking (see, for example, Bradley & Baird, 1980; Downs, Berg & Linkugel, 1977; Howell & Bormann, 1971; Zelko & Dance, 1965).

Public speaking was only one medium of communication that gained popularity in early days of organizational research. Academicians also focused on written communication, particularly employee handbooks, company newsletters, memoranda, and information racks (Mahoney, 1954; Zelko, 1953). To understand what "information should be transmitted to whom in what media" (Van Voorhis, 1974, p. 14), studies centered on the accuracy (Beach, 1950), the readability (Paterson & Jenkins, 1948), and the functions (Dover, 1959) of written information. The few employee newsletters that existed before World War II contained mostly chitchat and notices of social events, but the number of company newsletters tripled in the 1940s, with their content shifting to information about company plans, operations, and policies (Dover, 1959). In the 1950s company publications became an arm of management, complete with persuasive appeals for action and with managerial interpretations of company events. Axley's (1983) recent study of employee publications echoed Dover's (1959) earlier observation that managerial philosophy influenced the amount of space devoted to information-giving news, status-conferring activities, and the language that depicted these events.

Typically, research in this vein compared the effectiveness of and preferences for particular types of media. Although management preferred written communiques, employees opted for supervisor conferences and group meetings as

their preferred forms of communication (Peters, 1950). This finding in conjunction with Dahle's (1954) experimental comparison of five modes of communication led to the conclusion that a combination of written and oral media constituted the most effective means of communication (Sanborn, 1961), especially when message content and media use were adapted to particular audiences (Thayer, 1961). But when the sender and the receiver differed in vocabularies and problem orientations, written was more effective than oral communication. If the message required feedback or clarification, oral communication surpassed written media (O'Reilly & Pandy, 1979).

Research on communication media in organizations adopted a very narrow and often mechanical view of communication. With a zeal to improve routine practices, organizational researchers treated communications as a one-way, downwardly directed conduit for transmitting messages. Even studies that developed taxonomies of messages (Eilon, 1968) took a distinctly "media" focus; messages and media were treated as synonymous. Organizational communication consisted of "speech" media, often cast in simplistic, prescriptive principles that were devoid of any basic understanding of the complexities of communication (Redding, 1966).

A major breakpoint in this preoccupation with media came through the application of communication theory to organizational behavior. The focus of organizational communication shifted to message distortion, as characterized by two distinct lines of work—perceptual or semantic distortion and blockage in information flow. Both research strains questioned how misunderstanding occurred in organizations; one focused on the meanings of messages, and the other centered on transmission problems in message flow. Inspired by the general semanticists and under the leadership of Irving Lee at Northwestern University, perceptual distortion studies examined the effect of words and language on

interpretations of organizational events. Haney (1973) discussed problems that resulted from equating inferences with observed behavior. Weaver (1958) tested the impact of labor-management semantic profiles on message flow. Triandis (1959a, 1959b) uncovered "cognitive disparity" between supervisory and work groups in making judgments about organizational events. Schwartz, Stark, and Schiffman (1970) found that concepts such as "strike," "solidarity," and "management" triggered different interpretations among union officers. Tompkins (1962) assessed what he termed "semantic information distance" between and among different levels of a nationwide trade union. Studies on semantic distance, while few in number, served as the forerunners for later work on organizational symbols. The second strain of research, message distortion, emerged in studies of upward communication, a subdivision of one of the four "traditional" domains of organizational communication.

TRADITIONAL DOMAINS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

From an early interest in the downward flow of information, four research "traditions" developed at roughly the same time. The four traditions—communication channels, communication—"represent our discipline's struggle to establish the boundaries of organizational communication" (Putnam & Cheney, 1983, p. 213). These approaches date back to the human relations movement in the 1940s, when social scientists began systematic observations of information flow in collectivities.

Communication Channels

Channel research addresses the flow of information as it relates to organizational structure; that is, upward, downward, and horizontal. Although the majority of practitioners' books in the 1940s

stressed one-way, downward communication, Given (1949), Heron (1942), and Pigors (1949) emphasized the two-way nature of information flow between lower and upper levels. At the same time, Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948) initiated research on "gatekeeping" and the "two-step flow" of information.

In the 1950s and 1960s channel research attracted great interest. A number of studies revealed that lower-level employees tended to distort messages they sent upward (Planty & Machaver, 1952; Read, 1962). This research interest has continued to be pursued. Athanassides (1973) found that a sense of security reduced upward distortion, and high achievement drive increased the tendency to distort. Through extensive research on upward distortion, Roberts and O'Reilly concluded that trust, job satisfaction, and job performance reduced upward distortion (O'Reilly, 1978; O'Reilly & Roberts, 1974; Roberts & O'Reilly, 1974a). Moreover, positive feedback from one's superior also decreased the amount of upward distortion (Jablin, 1979). Following the work of Festinger (1950) and Cohen (1959), Bradley (1978) noted that the content of upwardly-directed messages was determined by the perceived power rather than the status of receivers. In a related vein, the term "Pelz Effect" emerged from studies showing that subordinates would initiate more upward messages if they believed their superiors had upward influence (Pelz, 1952). Examination of the "Pelz Effect" continued, but it became concerned exclusively with the dyadic relationship of superior-subordinate (Jablin, 1980b).

Davis (1953), following Jacobson and Seashore (1951), developed a research technique, ECCO: Episodic Communication Channels in Organizations, to examine the spread of rumors through informal channels or the "grapevine." This body of research grew, but Davis (1978), the major analyst of information channels, contended it was rather small. Informal communication was frequently linked with formal channels. Specifically, in effective organizations,

informal and formal communication showed a positive relationship (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Tompkin's (1977, 1978) study of NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center reinforced this finding in his observation that the practices of managing and communicating fused through an emphasis on both formal and informal communication channels.

Message overload and information adequacy were also linked to frequency of message flow across different channels. Miller (1960) and O'Reilly (1980) observed the effects of "information overload" on organizational members. Miller (1960) described seven possible responses to overload conditions, including omission, error, delaying, filtering, and escaping. O'Reilly (1980) reported that perceived information overload was associated with higher satisfaction, but with lower decision-making performance. This overload, however, resulted from excess vertical rather than horizontal communication. Specifically, managers spent about two-thirds of their communication time on vertical messages to their superiors and subordinates and only one-third of their time on horizontal messages (Porter & Roberts, 1976). Perhaps as Goldhaber, Yates, Porter & Lesniak (1978) reported, horizontal coordinating functions in organizations typically occurred "on a rather informal, impromptu basis" (p. 86), rather than through formal communication channels. Several researchers extended work on communication channels by suggesting a link between perceived information adequacy and such organizational outcomes as communication satisfaction, job performance, and organizational effectiveness (Spiker & Daniels, 1981; Daly, McCroskey & Falcione, 1976; Downs & Hazen, 1977). In particular, O'Reilly and Pondy (1979) showed that relevant and accurate information contributed to individual job performance and to organizational effectiveness.

Guided by the metaphor of information flow, channel studies have treated messages and structures with misplaced concreteness; they have

emphasized the "channel" through which messages are transmitted, rather than the nature or content of messages. In this perspective, communication becomes the accuracy of transmitting a message, a way of "getting information across" rather than a way of interpreting and giving feedback on the meaning of a message. Katz and Kahn (1978), while offering their own explanations for the types of messages that "move" in particular directions, bemoan the lack of empirical attention to message interpretation.

Communication Climate

In the 1960s channel research was applied to the study of communication "climate," communication that contributes to "the spirit or philosophy" responsible for organizational relationships (Koehler, Anatol, & Applbaum, 1981, p. 123). Thus, climate research incorporated communication channels into a framework of organizational relationships. The first studies of psychological or social climate were inspired by field theory (Lewin, 1951). Barnard (1938) and Roethlisberger and Dickson (1939) treated climates as implicit features of organizations; but as Jablin (1980a) noted, the first explicit linkage of psychological climate to organizational behavior appeared in McGregor's (1960) book. McGregor contended that "many subtle behavioral manifestations of managerial attitude create what is often referred to as the 'psychological climate' of the relationship" (p. 134).

"Organizational climate" differed from communication climate in its focus on organizational structure (e.g., rules, constraints), individual responsibility, rewards, job challenge, warmth, and tolerance (Litwin & Stringer, 1968). "Communication climate" became associated with such concepts as trust and openness (see Ireland, Van Auker & Lewis, 1978). Even though researchers characterized climate as a product of shared meanings among organizational members, they persisted in treating climate as

having an existence of its own, one that could be approximated through summary measures of individual perceptions.

Specifically, researchers employed questionnaires that measured individual perceptions; then they inappropriately applied summary statistics to indicate how organizational members felt on the average about climate factors (see the review by Falcione & Werner, 1978). Climate factors, then, became atmospheric or meteorological elements located in the organizational environment. For example, Roberts and O'Reilly (1974b) developed a climate-type measure of 16 "atmospheric conditions" of organizational communication, including trust, influence, accuracy, overload, percent of time spent communicating in different directions, and time spent on different communication media. Muchinsky (1977), in an assessment of the Roberts and O'Reilly questionnaire, concluded that it discriminated well among organizations on the basis of individual perceptions, but it was conceptually similar to job satisfaction.

Shifting the focus of climate to leadership functions, Redding (1972) offered a holistic prescriptive model for managers known as the "Ideal Managerial Climate" (IMC). The five components of the IMC consisted of supportiveness, participative decision making, trust, openness, and emphasis on high performance goals. The IMC represented an important attempt to bridge theory and practice in organizational communication, although it was limited by its managerial view of organizational effectiveness. During the 1970s, many organizational researchers adopted an applied interest in communication climate, linking it to job satisfaction. In a detailed review, Falcione and Werner (1978) discussed empirical support for this connection. Even though Redding (1972) acknowledged the "slippery" nature of this construct, he contended that climate was more important than were communication skills "in creating an effective organization" (p. 111).

In 1983 communication climate research took a dramatic shift from previous approaches. Poole and McPhee (1983) treated climate on the *intersubjective* level, based on members' beliefs, attitudes, values, and interpretations. This conceptualization introduced an intermediate level of analysis—one between objective and subjective variables. Further, Poole and McPhee employed a "structuralational" model (Giddens, 1979) to examine "the production and reproduction" of organizational climates through the use of generative rules and interaction resources. This conceptualization moved communication climate out of the confines of its meteorological metaphor by examining the way climate is produced through values and beliefs, rather than through "atmospheric" elements external to individuals.

Network Analysis

Climate research represented one attempt to characterize, understand, and explain communication patterns in the organization; another was network analysis. Jablin (1980a, p. 341) noted parallels between the two "schools," but argued that a major reason they developed distinct traditions was that climate focused on communication consequences while network research concentrated on communication antecedents and determinants. In addition, the two approaches became associated with different speech-communication programs—climate work with Purdue University and network analysis with Michigan State and Stanford universities.

The origins of network analysis can be traced to (1) early sociometric studies (Moreno, 1953); (2) small-group studies (Bavelas, 1950; Leavitt, 1951; Shaw, 1964); (3) information diffusion (Rogers, 1962); and (4) the mass communication work of Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet (1948). Simply put, "a network consists of interconnected individuals who are linked by patterned communication flows" (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976, p. 110). Network analysis,

which became popular both inside and outside the speech communication field, used data about communication flow to analyze interpersonal linkages and to identify the communication structure of a larger system (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). The earliest network studies were the 1950s' small-group laboratory experiments that contrasted different network structures, such as circle, wheel, and chain. They found that (1) centralization, as in the wheel network, contributed to rapid performance, especially of simple tasks; (2) decentralization; as in the circle network, was associated with high satisfaction among members; (3) network structures affected leader emergence; and (4) persons in key network positions often experienced information overload (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976).

In the 1970s organizational network research employed a systems model by treating linkages among all organizational members as "nodes" in a larger set of dyadic relationships (Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977; Monge, Edwards & Kiriste, 1978). Richards (1974b) suggested four key characteristics of linkages: (1) symmetry, (2) strength, (3) specificity, or the uniqueness of linkage function, and (4) transitivity, or consistency of linkages. Properties of network systems included centrality, connectedness, reachability, density, and range (Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977; Tichy, Tushman & Fombrun, 1979).

Research revealed that organizations were composed of a number of interrelated and often overlapping networks (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). In a study of three military organizations, Rogers and O'Reilly (1978) found that members rarely followed formal authority networks; rather they communicated in task-focused clusters. Moreover, the task network was larger and better developed than was the social one, but the two were closely related. Treating the group as the unit of analysis, Danowski (1980) found that production and innovation networks had stronger connectivity and greater uniformity in attitudes between groups than did

maintenance networks. Researchers also investigated roles that individuals assumed in organizational networks. MacDonald (1976) observed that liaisons (persons who linked groups but were not necessarily members of them) were more satisfied with managerial messages and perceived themselves as more influential than did nonliaisons. Albrecht (1979) discovered that "key" communicators in a network identified more with management and with their jobs than did members who were not in key positions.

One type of communication role that attracted interest during the 1970s was boundary spanning. Boundary spanners are members who excel within their own work units and who also span the boundaries of work groups, departments, or organizations, or all three (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981a, 1981b). Boundary spanners, like liaisons and linking pins (members of two or more overlapping groups) perform essential integrative functions. Early studies by Blau (1954) and Erbe (1962) linked activity across organizational boundaries with professional relationships inside the company. Similarly, Tushman and his colleagues at Columbia University noted that professional employees typically assumed boundary-spanning roles and that roughly 40% of them were also "stars" within their own work groups (Tushman & Scanlan, 1981b). Thus, boundary spanning became fertile terrain for examining multiple roles in communication networks.

In the 1980s, as organizations became reliant on advanced technology, researchers began to examine the impact of computers on communication networks (Danowski, 1983; Fowler & Wackerbarth, 1980; Hintz & Couch, 1978; Plain, 1980; Rice, 1982a). In a dissertation completed at Stanford University, Rice (1982b), who gathered two years of computer-monitored conferencing data among 800 researchers, reported that group members typically exhibited reciprocal relationships and that nontask groups occupied more information-rich roles than did task groups. Computer-based network analysis

might become even more prevalent as computers perform essential information processing functions for all employees.

Most network studies gathered data with self-report instruments and analyzed it with sociograms, matrix methods, and multidimensional scaling. In speech communication, the most popular data analysis technique was Richards' (1974a, 1974b) NEGOPY, developed at Stanford University. NEGOPY, designed to analyze an entire set of system relationships, accounted for indirect and direct communication links (Rogers & Agarwala-Rogers, 1976). Techniques such as NEGOPY, although useful for characterizing communication structures at particular points in time, over-emphasized the frequency of communication and gave little or no attention to the content and meanings of interaction (Putnam, 1982b). Albrecht and Ropp (1982) at the University of Washington suggested using non-directive interviews and ethnography to examine content and interpretations of network context and quantitative techniques to assess the frequency and configuration of communication systems.

Superior-Subordinate Communication

Similar to channel and climate research, the "tradition" known as superior-subordinate communication centered on information flow between subordinates and their supervisors. Jablin (1979) defined superior-subordinate communication as "exchanges of information and influence between organizational members, at least one of whom has formal . . . authority to direct and evaluate the activities of other organizational members" (p. 1202). Two key figures in research on superior-subordinate communication were W. C. Redding (1972) at Purdue University and Fredric Jablin (1979) at the University of Texas. Their reviews clustered this "tradition" into seven areas: (1) perceptions of the amount, frequency, and mode of interaction; (2) upward distortion; (3) upward influence; (4)

openness; (5) feedback; (6) communicator style; and (7) effectiveness of superior-subordinate relationships. Because researchers found it natural in the 1960s and 1970s to apply concepts from channel and climate to the superior-subordinate dyad, most of the above research foci were borrowed from other "traditions." Three of the areas, however, accounted for specific task-oriented aspects of dyadic relationships: feedback, perceptual congruence, and communicator style. Studies on feedback noted that it was a multidimensional concept and that the quantity of feedback was less important than its relevance and accuracy (O'Reilly & Anderson, 1980). Cusella (1982) observed that a subordinate's intrinsic motivation increased with positive task-related feedback given by expert sources. But he posited that the timing, specificity, and rules for communicating the feedback would mitigate this effect (Cusella, 1980).

"Perceptual congruence," a concept similar to semantic information distance, referred to agreements between superiors and subordinates about aspects of their work life. Research concluded that superiors and subordinates generally disagreed about the requirements of their jobs (Boyd & Jensen, 1972), the amount of communication between them (Webber, 1970), and the personality traits of each other (Infante & Gordon, 1979). Effective supervisors were able to bridge these gaps through a relaxed, attentive communicator style (Bradley & Baird, 1977) and through asking, persuading, and passing along information (Redding, 1972). Also, supervisors who exhibited an employee-centered communication style, tolerance for disagreement, and innovativeness achieved higher employer satisfaction scores than did other supervisors (Richmond & McCroskey, 1979; Richmond, McCroskey & Davis, 1982).

Because most studies highlighted task-related messages, a significant break occurred with research that emphasized the relational dimensions of superior-subordinate interaction. Jablin (1978a) demonstrated that subordinates who

perceived an "open" relationship with their superior viewed certain types of superior-subordinate interaction as more appropriate than did subordinates who perceived a "closed" relationship, thus extending climate research on trust and openness. Openness, in this sense, referred to "candid disclosure of feelings" and "a willingness to listen to discomfoting information" (Redding, 1972, p. 330). Jablin (1978a) also suggested that over time different norms and communication patterns developed for "open" as opposed to "closed" superior-subordinate dyads. In two recent studies Watson (1982a, 1982b) (applied RELCOM, a coding scheme for relational control (Ellis, 1979), to an analysis of superior-subordinate interaction. She reported that superiors showed resistance to and subordinates showed compliance with each other's attempts to control the relationship.

Most superior-subordinate studies employ questionnaires, rarely matched for dyadic analysis. Smircich and Chesser (1981) address this failure to assess reciprocal influences directly. Other researchers are beginning to expand and enrich the literature by emphasizing how superior-subordinate relationships create and share symbolic realities (Pfeffer, 1981a; Trujillo, 1983). In their comprehensive reviews of this literature, Jablin (1979) and Kelly (1982) lament the relative lack of attention to systemic variables that affect a dyadic relationship and urge researchers to consider situational and developmental approach to superior-subordinate communication. In a pioneering effort to place superior-subordinate openness within an organizational system, Jablin (1982) reports that organizational size reduces openness while a supervisory position, especially at lower levels, tends to increase it.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

The emergence of any discipline or subdiscipline must be understood within a sociopolitical context. So it is with organizational communication. The research priorities of the first four decades are colored by (1) the human relations approach, which was quite popular until recently; (2) a related preoccupation with effective management; (3) treatment of communication either in terms of the visible, easily measured aspects of information flow or in terms of simple perceptions; and (4) an accompanying bias toward positivistic research methodologies. In an informative essay, Jablin (1978b) crystallizes the priorities and concerns of organizational communication researchers during each decade. We reprint his table (see Table 1.10) to help visualize the progress of the field.

In the 1980s the study of organizational communication is rapidly expanding to include a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches. For ease of presentation, we identify four "families" of related, but not necessarily compatible, research efforts. In each case, the "family resemblance" is based on a shared general conception of how to look at organizations; yet members of the same family may be oriented toward different methods and goals. Thus, we urge the reader to consider the family names as heuristic, or perhaps as loosely-defined perspectives. The four families of emerging research are (1) the information-processing, (2) the rhetorical, (3) the cultural, and (4) the political perspectives. Each is discussed in terms of its actual and potential contribution to organizational communication research.

TABLE 1.10
Past Research Priorities in Organizational Communication

Era	Predominant Research Questions
1940s	What effects do downward directed mass media communications have upon employees? Is an informed employee a productive one?
1950s	How do small-group communication networks affect organizational performance and members' attitudes and behaviors? What are the relationships between organizational members' attitudes and perceptions of their communication behavior (primarily upward and downward communication) and their on-the-job performance? What is the relationship between the attitudes and performance of workers and the feedback they receive? Is a well-informed employee a satisfied employee?
1960s	What do organizational members perceive to be the communication correlates of "good" supervision? In what ways do actual and perceived communicative behaviors of liaison and nonliaison roles within organizational communication networks differ? What is the relationship between subordinates' job-related attitudes and productivity and the extent to which they perceive they participate in decision-making?
1970s	What are the communicative components and correlates of organizational communication climates? What are the characteristic and distribution of "key" communication roles within organizational networks?

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The Information-Processing Perspective

Treating organizations as information-processing systems has gained widespread appeal outside the speech-communication field. The essence of organizing, in this perspective, is the gathering, transmitting, storing, and using of information (Galbraith, 1973; O'Reilly & Pondy, 1979). Information refers to messages and data, often treated as energy that reduces uncertainty and aids predictability. Consistent with a systemic view of organizations, information processing pervades all activities, from decision making and control to organizational design and conflict management (Huber, 1982). Initiated by organizational design theorists (Galbraith, 1973), studies of information processing center on microlevel activities, such as communication between work groups, coordination among group members, and the impact of task structure on information flow and on macro-issues, such

as decision making and adaption to organizational environments.

Information-processing research examines the impact of structural variables on communication networks, channel usage, and amount of information flow. Studies at the microlevel reveal that task uncertainty (Van de Ven, Delbeque & Koenig, 1976), work flow interdependence (Tushman, 1978; Stech, 1980), and decentralized decision making lead to higher frequencies of interaction between work units. When the task is uncertain, work units coordinate their efforts through horizontal meetings (Van de Ven et al., 1976), tightly connected contacts outside the group, and loosely structured ones inside the group (Connolly, 1977). In contrast, task complexity (March & Simon, 1958; Tushman, 1978); task routineness (Bacharach & Aiken, 1977); and task specialization across work groups (O'Reilly & Pondy, 1979) restrict the flow of communication between subunits. Other studies seek to determine whether information-

processing requirements match work group capacities by examining type of information; information adequacy (Penley, 1982); and the routing, delaying, and modifying of messages (Huber, 1982).

At the macrolevel, information processing influences adaptation to external environments and organizational decision making. In rapidly changing environments, organizations typically increase their information flow to cope with uncertainty (Tushman & Nadler, 1978). Information flow is also critical for effective decision making at both the individual and the systemic levels. Research on individual decision makers centers on the cognitive aspects of information processing—the way managers make choices with imperfect information and within bounded rationality (March & Simon, 1958). Connolly (1977) argues that important decisions are typically made on ill-structured problems through a diffuse, multiperson process. Critical components of this process are decision networks and the effects that decisions have on relevant constituents (Ungson, Braunstein & Hall, 1981). In the decision network, credibility, accessibility, and quality of information sources assume important roles (Cusella, 1984). O'Reilly (1982) reports that organizational members use accessible sources more frequently than they do timely, relevant, or accurate ones.

Most information-processing studies adopt a mechanistic view of communication, emphasizing the amount, direction, structure, and type of information flow while ignoring message reception and interpretation. However, one theorist, Karl Weick (1979), offers an alternative information-processing model based on the formation and processing of "enactments" or meanings of organizational events. In Weick's theory the context and the degree of equivocality affect the interpretation of information. Equivocality refers to conditions that evoke multiple meanings. Weick's (1979) model posits a complex explanation for the way organizational members select, interpret, and retain equivocal information.

Three published communication studies test Weick's model. Bantz and Smith (1977) examine the number of adjectives deemed necessary to reduce equivocal literacy passages. Kreps (1980) assesses the number of double interactants used to process equivocal motions during faculty senate deliberations; Putnam and Sorenson (1982) test for the number of individuals, the type and number of rules, and the content of written and oral messages used to process equivocal messages in two simulated organizations. Even though these studies report different results, they attest to the importance of adding message characteristics (equivocality) and meaning to tradition models of information processing (see Eisenberg, 1983). Daft and Macintosh (1981) echo this appeal and report that work units seek out less information when message cues are equivocal. They surmise that organizations condense information into symbol systems that capture the rich meanings of organizational experiences. Indeed, "information" may serve more of a symbolic than a pragmatic function in organizations. Reacting to rational views of decision making, Feldman and March (1981) conclude that information is often misrepresented, serves a surveillance rather than a decision mode, and symbolizes social efficiency. Perhaps this is why organizational participants gather more information than they can use, act first and examine information later, and find value in data that lacks decision relevance.

The Rhetorical Perspective

The study of symbolic influence, while only of recent concern to information-processing researchers, has its roots in ancient Greco-Roman writings on rhetoric and persuasion. Today, communication scholars are applying classical and modern rhetorical theory to the study of complex organizations. This section reviews four lines of rhetorically informed organizational research. The first approach, known as "symbolic convergence theory," is being

carved out by Ernest G. Bormann (1972, 1982, 1983) and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota. Symbolic convergence theory derives from "fantasy theme" analysis, a form of rhetorical criticism that highlights the way groups construct shared symbolic realities. Fantasy themes are creative and imaginative interpretations of events that are "chained out" in social settings. When a number of fantasy themes merge, they form a "rhetorical vision" that sustains formal and informal groups. Symbolic convergence theory attends to the dramatic aspects—for example, sagas, narratives, heroes, villains, inside jokes—that foster common understandings within work groups, departments, and entire organizations (Cragan & Shields, 1981). Most importantly, fantasy themes and rhetorical visions aid organizational members in making sense of the past, acting in the present, and anticipating the future (Bormann, 1983). For instance, in a study of a zero-history organization, Bormann, Pratt, and Putnam (1978) show how shared fantasies of organizational members serve as symbolic reactions to power, authority, and male-female leadership and thereby guide group behavior.

A second rhetorically grounded program, under the direction of Phillip K. Tompkins and George Cheney at the University of Colorado (Cheney, 1983; Tompkins & Cheney, 1982; P.K. Tompkins, Fisher, Infante & Tompkins, 1975) is tentatively labeled "communication and unobtrusive organizational control." This approach attempts to blend Aristotle's (1954) "enthymeme" and Kenneth Burke's (1969) "identification to interpret, explain, and critique how organizational members are influenced and controlled. The theory posits two "enthymemic" models: enthymeme¹, which resembles Aristotle's rhetorical syllogism in that members bring with them to the organization the major premises necessary for making "appropriate" responses through organizationally desired decisions; and enthymeme², where conclusions are drawn from premises inculcated by

controlling members of the organization (Tompkins & Cheney, 1982). The process of identification complements the two enthymemes; it is a highly "internal" means of organizational control that is often encouraged and initiated by organizational messages (Cheney, 1983). In this sense, identification serves as a motivating and often emotionally charged master premise, "Do what's best for the organization" (Simon 1976).

A third area, the study of "corporate issue advocacy," has attracted interest at the University of Houston and at Purdue University. Corporate advocacy aims to introduce, change, or reinforce public attitudes on issues of importance to organizations. As a form of purposive "external" organizational communication, corporate advocacy is amenable to analysis through traditional sender-oriented argumentation methods and through contemporary process-oriented approaches. Two types of corporate advocacy programs have emerged: an applied one at Houston and a theoretical one at Purdue. The Houston program investigates communication efforts aimed at advancing the policies of business, educational, governmental, and nonprofit organizations (Heath, 1980; Judd, 1979). Such research aids in the development of effective advocacy campaigns designed to meet organizational needs, especially ones created by external pressures. The Purdue program under the direction of Richard Crable aims to understand the rhetorical and ethical implications of organizational advocacy campaigns. Crable and Vibbert (1983), for example, examine Mobil Corporation's *olios* in Sunday newspaper magazines as epideictic rhetoric that reinforces particular American values.

A final area of rhetorically oriented research draws from the public address literature, but applies it to organizational settings. As businesses increase their participation in public affairs, Knapp (1970) argues for a concomitant growth in the study of "business rhetoric," that is, field research on the public speeches of business executives. Knapp recommends the blending of

qualitative and quantitative methodologies in order to develop, "a reliable profile of rhetorical themes, topics, and arguments for business speakers" (pp. 254-255). Organizational communication researchers are beginning to respond to this plea. In a study of an Exxon executive's speech, Geist (1982) illustrates how corporate rhetoric reestablishes a "hierarchy" of values that has been challenged through a loss of public credibility. Focusing on a religious organization, McMillan (1982) examines rhetorical adaptation in an analysis of a formal position paper prepared by officials of the Presbyterian Church. Through these and similar efforts, the scope of public address can be broadened beyond its traditional focus on political leaders.

The Cultural Perspective

A more popular approach to the study of organizational communication is known by the catchwords, "organizational cultures." The diversity of ways that organizational culture is examined is not surprising given the ambiguities that surround "culture" itself. Thus, we view the concept's usefulness to organizational study as "a family of concepts" (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 574), rather than as a unitary perspective. As an anthropological concept, culture refers to a social unit's collective sense of what reality is, what it means to be a member of a group, and how a member ought to act. Although students of "organizational culture" approach their subject in a variety of ways, most of them stress the achievement of intersubjective meaning, understanding, and common pursuits among organizational members. Smircich (1983a) offers a useful five-part schema for classifying research approaches to the study of culture.

The first approach, "culture and comparative management," treats culture as a background variable that frames different organizational structures and managerial practices across countries. Much of this research as it appears in the popular press compares U.S., Japanese, and

Western European organizations (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981). The second approach, "corporate culture," treats culture as a collection of symbols, ceremonies, and practices that are produced internally through organizational interaction ("Corporate Cultures," 1980; Martin & Powers, 1983; Whorton & Worthley, 1981). Cultural research with this conception displays a systems framework. An organization's culture emerges as a response to environmental demands (Pfeffer, 1981a). Thus, it becomes appropriate to speak of "strong" and "weak" organizational cultures, the "strong" being more fitted to organizational survival than the "weak" cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982). In this perspective the manifestations of culture include symbols and symbolism (Dandridge, Mitroff & Joyce, 1980; Johnson, 1977), stories (Martin & Powers, 1983; Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976); myths (Boje, Fedor & Rowland, 1982; Smith, 1973); sagas (Clark, 1972); rituals (Deal & Kennedy, 1982); folklore (Kreps, 1983); rules and norms (Shull & Del Beque, 1965), and specialized language (Hirsch & Andrews, 1983).

In the first two approaches, culture is treated as a variable—as part of a system of patterns that can be discovered and to some extent controlled for managerial improvement (Smircich, 1983b). The following three programs use culture as a *root metaphor* for understanding organizations; they view culture as something an organization is, rather than merely something an organization has (Smircich, 1983a). However, while the latter three approaches share a general concern, they differ in the anthropological base from which they borrow. The third, labeled as the "cognitive perspective," is tied to Goode-nough's (1971) ethnoscience and treats culture as a system of shared cognitions, knowledge, and beliefs (Rossi, 1974). In this vein, Harris and Cronen (1979), at the University of Massachusetts, outline and apply a rules-based theory that treats "an organization [as] analogous to a culture and that . . . can be analyzed by identify-

ing its collectively defined master contract" (p. 12). Within this framework, researchers examine member competence in "coorienting" to the master contract and in following the constitutive and regulative rules of the organization.

The fourth approach, labeled the "symbolic perspective," is grounded in the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), who views societies as elaborate systems of shared symbols and meanings. From this view, an organization is conceived of as discourse; communication, as the process of organizing (Hawes, 1974). Organizational scripts thus need to be interpreted (Manning, 1979), read (S.P. Turner, 1983), deciphered (Van Maanen, 1973), and thematically discerned (Smith, 1973). This approach has attracted a speech communication following, particularly at the Universities of Utah, Texas, and Southern Illinois. At Utah, Pacanowsky, and his colleagues (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1982, 1983) articulate a comprehensive view of organizations as cultures. The spirit of this work is captured by Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983); "Anthropologically considered, communication is not information transfer, but language use. And organizations are not to be seen as computer-like machines, but rather more like tribes" (p. 127). Along these lines, they identify and examine crucial characteristics of organizational performances. Deetz and his colleagues at Southern Illinois University (Deetz, 1984; Koch & Deetz, 1981) have developed a "metaphor analysis" of organizations as a means of describing how an organization's reality is produced and reproduced through language use and dominant metaphors. Following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) work, Koch and Deetz (1981) identified metaphors that show "not only the current reality of the organization but also the other possibilities open to it" (p. 13). Finally, under the direction of Browning (Brown, McMillan & Blackman, 1981; Browning, 1978; Henderson, 1981; Whitfill, 1981; Browning & Hopper, 1979), researchers at Texas are conducting detailed case studies of

reality construction in a variety of organizations. Browning and Hopper (1979) argue that through such descriptive research, "the reader gets a feel for characters, their relationships, and their responses to the stream of events with which they have contact" (p. 8).

The fifth and final approach to the study of organizational culture, "structural and psychodynamic perspectives," is the visible expression of unconscious psychological processes (Levi-Strauss, 1963). The analysis of structure as ordered relations that turns "parts" into a coherent, meaningful whole is central to this view (B.A. Turner, 1971). This approach to culture can reveal structures that direct behavior and that exist below the level of conscious awareness. Very few organizational analysts adopt the structural-psychodynamic approach (a few who have are McSwain & White, 1982; Walter, 1980). In an interesting structural-semiotic study, Broms and Gahmberg (1982) examine the "deep structure" of myths surrounding the "Chrysler Crisis" and report that the crisis is not the Japanese or small-car problem, but the preservation of the American Dream.

The Political Perspective

The political perspective, as developed in this essay, subsumes a number of diverse yet related orientations to organizational communication; namely, studies of power, politics, conflict, bargaining, and deviance. Drawing from Cyert and March's (1963) view of organizations as political coalitions, this perspective treats organizations as sets of different interest groups, "fractured by subcultures" (Baldrige, 1971, p. 25). In this view decisions emerge through an influence process frequently characterized by compromise and bargaining among groups with competing interests. However, one school within this perspective, critical theory, contends that this competition is not among equals because "dominant coalitions" or power groups control most organizational actions. This section

focuses on communicative approaches to the study of organizational power, politics, conflict, and control. Communication, in this sense, refers to overt or covert means of exercising power, signaling control, or manifesting conflict.

"Power," like conflict, is a frequently used and often abused construct. This abuse stems in part from equating it with coercion, manipulation, leadership, and authority. Moreover, power is seen paradoxically as static and dynamic, actual and potential, moral and immoral, intentional and unintentional. Yet, despite this confusion, power is defined in general terms as influencing another person's behaviors to produce a desired outcome (Pettigrew, 1973; Schein, 1977). Theorists differ, however, in treating power more specifically as an individual drive (McLelland, 1975), as an interpersonal influence process (Emerson, 1962), as a resource (French & Raven, 1968), or as a characteristic of a bureaucracy—for example, technology or ideology (Bendix, 1970; Salaman & Thompson, 1980). In light of these disagreements, Goldberg, Cavanaugh, and Larson (1983) at the University of Denver survey organizational members for their meanings of power. Their study uncovers six dimensions: power as (1) instinctive drive, (2) personal charisma, (3) influence, (4) politics, (5) resource dependence, and (6) a good force (an exciting, desirable action).

Organizational scholars concentrate primarily on three of these: resource dependence, influence, and politics, with a special emphasis on resource control (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1974), work-unit centrality, dependability (Crozier, 1964), and ability to cope with uncertainty (Hickson, Hinings, Lee, Schneck & Pennings, 1971). From a communicative view these dimensions translate into influence, information control, politicking, and symbolic power. Influence models treat power as an interpersonal process defined by access to critical resources and the use of persuasive tactics. Resources

typically derive from French and Raven's (1968) classic bases of power: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent, and expert power. Research on influence tactics examines the effects of goals and targets (superiors or subordinates) on the choice of particular strategies (Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980; Patchen, 1968; Wilkinson & Kipnis, 1978). Other studies treat influence as a strategic maneuver for gaining power; for example, forming alliances, maintaining flexibility, neutralizing the opposition (Izraeli, 1975; Kanter, 1977).

One strategic maneuver often cited as a means of gaining power is manipulating information flow (Du Brin, 1972; Martin & Sims, 1956). Information, then, becomes a resource or a power base, controlled through accessing, withholding, distributing, or evaluating specific messages. Mechanic (1962) notes that lower-level members gain organizational power through control of complex technological information that is unavailable to high-ranking officials. A work unit's ability to generate and supply others with information becomes a source of power and autonomy (Poole, 1978). For example, work units, in their desire to be autonomous, often withhold information from and consciously ignore messages sent from other departments (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1977).

Especially important are gatekeepers who control message flow between critical sources and decision-making bodies (Pettigrew, 1972). But, such information control signifies powerlessness as well as power in that organizational members who lack access to critical resources—for example, first-line supervisors and clerical staff—frequently grasp for power through protecting their turf and blocking information flow (Kanter, 1977). The distinction between power-holders and the powerless, however, may reside in the types and practices of information control. The political approach adopts influence models of power but examines them in terms of individual versus organizational needs. Thus, political behavior often represents actions di-

rected toward self-aggrandizement, instead of company goals (Du Brin, 1972). In a communication study of organizational politics, Jablin (1981) reports that subordinates are less open and less satisfied with superiors who are highly involved in organizational politics, as compared with those who are only minimally or moderately political.

A final approach to the study of power stems from interpreting organizational information and events. In the symbolic approach power accrues to individuals who, through the use of political language and symbolic ceremony, give meanings to both physical referents, such as budgets and products, and organizational events (Johnson, 1977; Pfeffer, 1981b). Influence, in this perspective, is the ability to use symbols, stories, and myths to promote consensus on the interpretation of events. In a provocative essay, Conrad (1983a), at the University of North Carolina, recasts traditional approaches to organizational power by placing argument at the surface level and myth and metaphor at the deeper levels that ultimately shape decisional processes. In a parallel manner, Lukes (1974) proposes a three-dimensional model of power with the third dimension based on keeping decisions out of politics through inaction and latent conflict.

Another area closely related to power and politics is organizational conflict. "Conflict" is often confounded with such concepts as "misunderstanding," "hostility," and "competition"; however, it is usually defined as the interaction between interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals or values (Mack & Snyder, 1957). Literature on the role of communication and organizational conflict is beginning to grow as researchers link conflict to intrapersonal role dilemmas (Baird & Diebolt, 1976; Barker, 1982; Van Sell, Brief & Schuler, 1981); superior-subordinate relationships (R.J. Burke, 1970); and boundary spanning between departments, line-staff personnel, and organizations (Adams, 1976; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967). Al-

though a number of typologies exist for the study of organizational conflict, communication researchers focus primarily on distinguishing constructive from destructive conflicts (Folger & Poole, 1983), on the dimensions and assumptions of conflict (Hawes & Smith, 1973), and on process or stage development models of conflict (Pondy, 1967). This review employs Pondy's (1967) typology of bureaucratic, system, and bargaining conflicts to organize research trends in this emerging area.

Bureaucratic conflict focuses on incompatibilities between superiors and subordinates, particularly those that relate to autonomy and control. Following models developed by Blake, Shepard, and Mouton (1964) and Kilmann and Thomas (1977), studies conducted at Purdue University (Bullis, Cox & Bokeno, 1982; Putnam & Wilson, 1982), at Ohio University (Ross & DeWine, 1982), and at the University of Wisconsin (Riggs, 1983; Sillars, 1980) have developed scales and coding schemes for analysis of superior-subordinate conflict strategies. These studies report that conflict between superiors and subordinates is inevitable and often a constructive force (Sussman, 1975). Tests of these scales reveal that managers typically use forcing strategies with subordinates; but supervisory level, skill, and sense of self-confidence affect the choice of conflict strategies (Conrad, 1983b; Putnam & Wilson, 1982). In a study that combines bases of power with conflict management, Richmond, Wagner, and McCroskey (1983) observe that active conflict strategies, referent power, and employee-centered leadership are linked to increased communication satisfaction and decreased communication anxiety.

Conflicts with organizational peers in the same departments are frequently managed through avoidance tactics (Putnam & Wilson, 1982). In a study on attitudes toward conflict, P.K. Tompkins, Fisher, Infante, and E. Tompkins (1974) report that individuals at upper levels with high organizational identification scores respond more favorably to organizational con-

flicts than do lower-level employees. System conflicts differ from bureaucratic ones in that they focus on horizontal communication and coordination across organizational levels. Putnam & Wilson (1982) report that interdepartmental conflicts are typically managed through forcing strategies. Because managers often serve as liaisons or integrators between departments, their influence often facilitates effective horizontal conflict management (Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967).

Bargaining research differs from studies of bureaucratic and system conflicts by focusing on struggles over scarce resources between interest groups. Game theoretical models with a focus on the characteristics of labor-management negotiators, availability of communication, and bargaining outcomes typify early work on bargaining (see Donohue, 1978; Smith, 1969; Steinfatt & Miller, 1974). More recent studies, however, test for the effects of message strategies on negotiated outcomes (Bednar & Glauser, 1981; Donohue, 1981b; Putnam & Jones, 1982a; Theye & Seller, 1979). (For a detailed review of the literature on the role of communication in bargaining, the reader is referred to Putnam & Jones, 1982b). Two lines of work, however, merit special attention. Research at Purdue University under the direction of Linda Putnam (Keough, 1983; Putnam & Jones, 1982a) is exploring bargaining as the social construction of meanings through interaction between and within bargaining groups. With a micro-level orientation, work at Michigan State (Donohue, 1981a, 1981b; Donohue, Diez & Stahle, 1983) explores the conversational rule-structure of bargaining interaction. Both the Purdue and the Michigan State programs extend earlier research on intergroup relationships, information management, issue development, and argumentation in negotiations (Reiches & Harral, 1974; Walton & McKersie, 1965).

Research on bargaining and conflict typically assumes that organizational subgroups participate equally in competition for resources. Criti-

cal theorists, however, contend that unequal distribution of power constrains and represses many participants in organizations. (Deetz, 1982). Technical rationality and the impersonal practices of bureaucracy often disguise this oppression (Deetz & Kersten, 1983). The goal of critical research is emancipation, realized through exposing the irrationality of organizational behavior, the way structure is taken for granted and embedded in organizational talk, and the way ideology and technology control belief systems (Deetz & Kersten, 1983; Zey-Ferrell & Aiken, 1981). Individuals and groups become emancipated through contradictions, the driving force of change (Benson, 1977); direct and indirect social intervention (Deetz & Kersten, 1983); and organizational deviance (Stanley, 1981). Stewart (1980), in her study of "whistle blowing" of scientists and engineers, illustrates a direct form of member dissent. Putnam's (1984) investigation of message patterns that can produce paradoxes and contradictions offers suggestions for "getting out" of organizational traps. The political perspective, through its focus on power and conflict, provides organizational communication scholars an opportunity to uncover subtle factors that constrain a person's work life.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Social scientists and organizational practitioners exist in an inseparable bond that stems from the bridge between theory and practice and from the dual roles of researcher and consultant (Albrow, 1980; Zey-Ferrell & Aiken, 1981). Just as academicians shape practice with theoretical models and research findings, practitioners influence research through sharing their "personal theories" of organizational life. This section examines the links between research and practice with special attention to the history of this relationship, communication training and consult-

ing, organizational communication audits, and implications of the emerging approaches for communication practice.

Organizational communication grew out of a concern for developing managerial skills, improving the effectiveness of various media, and discovering why communication fails (Sexton & Staudt, 1959). Early efforts to address these issues applied simple solutions to complex problems and virtually ignored developments in communication theory (Redding, 1966; Van Voorhis, 1974). In the 1950s communication training, evaluation, and consulting began to flourish. To ascertain the need for these programs, researchers surveyed employees on the amount of time they spent communicating (Klemmer & Snyder, 1972) and on the importance of such skills as listening, persuading, and interviewing for different organizational roles (DiSalvo, Larsen & Seiler, 1976; Hanna, 1978). To understand the nature and extent of organizational training programs, researchers investigated the frequency, content, and materials used in public speaking training (Hicks, 1955; Knapp, 1968, 1969; Zelko, 1951); the importance, goals, and attitudes toward communication training (Wasylik, Sussman, & Leri, 1976); the frequency, targets, and methods of training (Meister & Reinsch, 1978); and the role functions and conflicts of communication trainers and consultants (Putnam, 1979).

Training activities and problem-solving consultation are often combined in practice by organizational trainers. External consultants, who are not members of the organization, serve primarily as "trouble shooters" to diagnose problems and determine appropriate intervention techniques. Redding (1979a) defines communication consulting as a broad-ranged "helping" activity and indicates that the role requires "a thorough grounding" in rhetorical, interpersonal, and mass communication theories. Approximately one-third of 200 respondents in a survey on communication consulting employ intervention techniques associated with organiza-

tional development, a system of planned organizational change (Eich, 1977). In a literature review on the role of communication in organizational development, Axley, (1980) concludes that the goals of such techniques as team building, process consultation, T-groups, and participatory decision making include improving communication, without careful attention to the repercussions these improvements will have on other organizational behaviors.

The organizational communication audit, as a type of consulting, provides an evaluation of a corporation's entire communication system. Initiated by Odiome (1954) as a concept for the study of information flow, the communication audit now refers to a multi-instrument procedure for collecting, analyzing, and feeding back data on communication climate, networks, media usage, information flow, and communication satisfaction (Goldhaber et al., 1978; Goldhaber & Rogers, 1979). Audit systems provide standardized data-gathering techniques and a normative data bank for comparison of research results. The International Communication Audit represents a joint effort of over 100 scholars "to provide organizations with reliable, factual data about their internal communication" (Greenbaum, Hellweg & Falcione, 1983, p. 89). Richetto (1977) recaps the history of this process, and Greenbaum et al. (1983) present a very comprehensive review of studies that evaluate organizational communication systems, including research that employs the ICA Audit and the Organizational Communication Development audit developed in Finland under the leadership of Osmo Wiio (Wiio, Goldhaber & Yates, 1980). As of 1979 researchers and practitioners had administered the ICA Audit to over 5,000 employees in 19 organizations.

In many respects, theory and practice in organizational communication have taken diverse turns. Emerging areas of theory and research appear less concerned with problems that managers face and more concerned with understanding the complexities of organizational life.

Communication trainers who adhere to emerging approaches might concentrate less on media usage and presentation skills and more on developing problem-solving skills for analyzing messages and organizational symbols (Smircich, 1983b). As Johnson and Shaw (1978) propose, "consultant-heroes," as opposed to "trainer technicians," deal in ideas, inspire clients to think, strive for impartiality, and have a vision for what is being done and why. From the political perspective, organizational members would need to intensify their training in bargaining and strategic decision making (Tushman, 1977).

Communication consulting, while primarily a tool of management, might be used for organizational reflection to expose repressive actions and unnecessary bureaucratic controls. While it is unlikely that consultants will become critical theorists, they might increase their awareness of the political implications of their interventions (Tushman, 1977; Browning, 1977); the value and ethical dilemmas of consulting (Redding, 1979a); and the managerial bias inherent in projects commissioned and directed by "elite" organizational members (Zey-Ferrell & Aiken, 1981).

CONCLUSION

What we have tried to do in this review is to paint, with broad strokes, a "mural" of organizational communication as a subunit of the speech communication field. We have depicted the emergence of "organizational communication" as an identifiable area of study—how it has borrowed from other fields and how its research foci have shifted during its short history. Because of the nature of this effort, we have had to organize and "color" bodies of research in ways that may make them seem too sharply distinguished; indeed a "true" painting of organizational communication would be rather impressionistic. Nevertheless, we have offered what we think is a useful scheme for viewing the field now.

As organizational communication progresses, we expect it to follow the strong lines already being sketched in the 1980s. Organizational communication researchers will probably emphasize message content and process even more, striving to capture meaning, context, and changes in symbolic activity among organizational actors. We see researchers continuing to explore to a much greater extent the multiple perspectives of organizational actors, rather than looking at the world solely through a managerial lens. Third, and along similar lines, we anticipate that the meaning of "practice" or "application" will continue to broaden, as researchers attempt not only to help "the organization" (that is, upper management) but also individuals and groups within it, often through critique of the existing order. Fourth, we expect that researchers will continue to employ a pluralism of methods in order to view organizational life from a variety of angles. Finally, and perhaps most important for the student of organizational communication, we anticipate that the field will eventually move toward a clearer image of itself, a coherent identity embracing preferred concepts, theories, methods, and interventions.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What sociopolitical factors contributed to the early research programs in organizational communication research?
2. What are the primary research foci to organizational communication from an information-processing perspective?
3. Describe the different rhetorical approaches to studying organizational communication.
4. Distinguish between the different approaches to studying organizations as cultures.
5. Identify the dimensions of power described by the political perspective to study organizational communication.