Organizational Communication

Prelude and Prospects

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Organizational communication as a discipline grew tremendously over the latter part of the 20th century, but accompanying that growth was a struggle to establish a clear identity for the field. And even as we enter a new millennium, the ongoing evolution of complex organizations in an equally complex global environment has scholars continuing to define and redefine the focus, boundaries, and future of the field. This prelude to *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods* takes a historical approach to assessing where the field has been, as a way of surveying the directions the field is taking. The contributions we discuss here are by no means meant to include all of the paths the field has started down from time to time, nor does it propose to outline all future areas of expansion and development. However, we do believe that the select perspectives we discuss here reflect major past and current approaches and research foci associated with the study of organizational communication.

We concentrate, then, on providing first a brief history of the rubrics, categories, and ideologies that have shaped the identity of the field. We do so by summarizing the findings of major reviews of the field that have been written over the years; in other words, we present a review of the conclusions of previous surveys of the field. Second, we note some trends in the study of organizational communication that we believe demonstrate a certain maturation of the field in that each moves the field in ways that question and de-

construct categories of the past while integrating domains and methods thought to be permanently at odds with each other. Old terministic screens give way to more inclusive ones. Division yields to merger. Mergers are subdivided. The field of organizational communication is enriched.

REVIEWING THE REVIEWS

Generally speaking, the "modern" study of organizational communication dates from the late 1930s and early 1940s (e.g., Heron, 1942; Jablin, 1990; Redding & Tompkins, 1988). The first major state-of-the-art summaries and theoretical frameworks associated with organizational communication began to appear in the mid-1960s (e.g., Guetzkow, 1965; Thayer, 1968; Tompkins, 1967). Among speech communication scholars, Tompkins's (1967) review represents the first summary of organizational communication research that focused on summarizing solely empirical research studies (about 100 in number). He used the categories of (1) formal and informal channels of communication and (2) superior-subordinate relations to integrate the many different problems and hypotheses pursued in the literature he assessed. As Burke (1966) noted in his famous essay "Terministic Screens," the nomenclature used to define a field not only serves to reflect and select reality, it also *deflects* reality; hence, the vocabulary/language of organizational communication draws attention to certain phenomena, and simultaneously draws it away from others. Thus, while Tompkins's review of the literature found that a downward, top-down management-focus shaped the majority of research about communication in organizations, including that conducted under the rubric of superior-subordinate communication, it is important to note that these labels and concerns deflected attention away from other topics and perspectives that would later be considered by a more mature field (e.g., upward communication, vertical feedback loops, and participation).

The next major summary-integration of organizational communication was published six years later by Redding (1972). This was a massive 538-page "book" in mimeograph form that was influential and highly valued among scholars and practitioners, although not widely available. Therefore, we give some attention to this very rare, out-of-print reference.

Redding's work, unlike Tompkins's much briefer, state-of-the-art paper, placed no empiricist restraints on itself, using even "how-to" literature as stuff for analysis. Redding suggested that while many of the categories Tompkins cited remain useful, "understanding of organizational communication will be enhanced if we go beyond the traditional categories and look at our subject in a frame of reference of basic theoretical concepts" (p. vii). Hence, Redding looked at the internal communication of organizations in terms of ten "postulates" and a set of related "corollaries or extensions" derived from human communication theory and interpreted in terms of the organizational setting. In addition, he discussed the concept of organizational climate and its relationship to effective communication.

The ten postulates presented a way to reframe the relevant research from an organizational communication perspective, and in doing so, to point to potential future areas of study. By discussing the research around these principles of human communication, Redding privileged the process and in some cases put a new spin on research findings (much of which were extrapolated from other social scientific fields). This, in turn, provided future leads or directions for communication researchers. Redding also extended Tompkins's discussion of the topics the field examined at the time: concepts such as feedback, redundancy, communication overload, and serial transmission effects.

Redding's first postulate positioned *meaning* in the interpretive processes of receivers

—not in the transmission (in contrast to the typical communication model of earlier eras). The failure to interpret messages correctly resulted in what Redding (1972) called the *content fallacy:*

> What happens all too often is that we keep tinkering with the content of the message-sender's message, rather than trying to find more ways of making sure that the message-receiver's responses are appropriate. This content fallacy leads us to believe that we are "getting through" to our audience, merely because we are getting through to ourselves. (p. 29)

Next, Redding claimed that in an organization "anything is a potential message" (p. ix). He proposed that the role of both verbal and nonverbal communication had yet to be sufficiently explored in organized settings. The third postulate he discussed was the importance of input/listening, suggesting that much of the "how to manage" literature was in reality targeting good listening skills. With a considerable amount of prescience, he noted that a key behavioral characteristic of a

> participative manager is his [*sic*] ability to listen to his associates, especially his subordinates. Moreover, such listening is generally described as "empathic"—which should be differentiated from other kinds of listening, e.g., listening in order to comprehend and retain information, listening in order to analyze logically, and listening in order to refute. (p. 34)

The fourth postulate proposed that the message received (versus the one sent or intended) is what a receiver will act upon. He used the psychological concept of selective perception to make the case that individuals in organizations will respond to messages based on their personal frames of reference. The fifth postulate supported the importance of feedback in organizations. He made an important distinction between *feedback receptiveness* (the extent to which managers are open to subordinate feedback) and *feedback responsiveness* (the extent to which managers give feedback to subordinates). In brief, he recognized that being an open, receptive receiver of feedback and being a responsive receiver, that is, appropriately responding to the feedback (doing something about the information provided by followers), are not the same things.

Redding's sixth postulate addressed the "cost factor," or efficiency, of communication interactions in organizations. Communication always entails the expenditure of energy. More communication is not necessarily better as he expressed in this simple formula: efficiency = effectiveness/cost. His seventh postulate suggested that the social need for *redundancy* must be balanced by the economic need of efficiency. Too much can evoke boredom; too little makes some messages incomprehensible, particularly if there is "noise" in the system. The eighth postulate, *communication overload,* described the problems associated with an individual's "channel capacity," or the individual's limits of message processing. Redding recommended the further investigation of such concepts as "uncertainty absorption" (how message senders and receivers absorb ambiguity and clarify and make sense of messages as they communicate them upward in the organization hierarchy; e.g., March & Simon, 1958) and the "exception principle" that organizations seemed to use in trying to cope with communication overload.

The ninth postulate dealt with the "serial transmission effect," or the changes of meaning—due to filtering and distortion—as messages are passed from individual to individual in a hierarchy or informal network. Redding again recommended research on this topic to gain a better understanding of the optimal number of "relays" in serial transmissions. And again, the emphasis is on the fidelity of reception—shared meanings. Finally, in the tenth postulate, Redding suggested that the organization's "climate" for communication was more important than communication skills and techniques. After summarizing the work of many researchers and theorists, Red-

ding articulated a trend or a growing consensus; he called it the ideal managerial climate, the components of which are (1) supportiveness; (2) participative decision making; (3) trust, confidence, and credibility; (4) openness and candor; and (5) emphasis on high performance goals (pp. 139-416). The strength of the model was its comprehensive synthesis of research (representing work conducted in many fields).

In summary, Redding tried to connect his conception of communication theory to the study of organizations. This was necessary because many of the early studies were done in cognate disciplines with implicit and superficial notions about the communication process. Redding's communication theory in retrospect is interesting and penetrating in its own right, and also interesting for its degree of self-consciousness of the transition from the *transmission-orientation* of the speech field into a *reception-orientation* of the communication field. Postulate four—"message received in the only one that counts"—perfectly illustrates his awareness of the major changes then under way. In fact, the first five postulates all express in one way or another the new reception-orientation.

Postulate eight turned contemporary assumptions upside down by conceiving of organizations as devices that *restrict* the flow of information. Curiously, Redding felt the need to put the word *networks* in quotation marks to indicate that he was talking about serial communication systems rather than about the broadcasting variety that most people thought of when hearing the word at that time. Moreover, in his discussion of ten major research topics/extensions in the final section of the book, Redding concluded with an attempt to see the future via "the role of communication in an open-system, dynamic organization (a matrix of networks)," an expression that was prescient then and fresh today. Redding had linked the theoretical and empirical nomenclatures for the first time.

Building on and consistent with much of Redding's review, Jablin (1978) summarized research conducted during the 1940s-1970s in terms of the predominant research questions associated with each era (see Table P.1). His analysis suggested that during each decade, scholars tended to explore many similar research topics and issues: characteristics of superior-subordinate communication, emergent communication networks and channels, and components and correlates of communication climates. As we shall see, many of these research questions continued as major foci of organizational communication research during the 1980s-1990s, although often packaged in terms of "new" research issues and problems associated with communicating and organizing. The late 1970s and early 1980s also saw several, more focused, reviews of research related to organizational communication, including summaries of studies in organizational/industrial psychology (Porter & Roberts, 1976), communication networks (Monge, Edwards, & Kirste, 1978), superior-subordinate communication (Jablin, 1979), organizational group communication (Jablin & Sussman, 1983), and feedback and task performance (Downs, Johnson, & Barge, 1984), among other topics. As Tompkins (1967) observed about the studies conducted in the 1960s, the study of organizational communication relied almost exclusively on "objective means of measuring the operation and consequences of an organizational communication system" (pp. 17-18). Thus, to a considerable degree, the field in its infancy and early adolescence was rather unquestioning about the nomenclature and assumptions of logical positivism (see also Redding & Tompkins, 1988).

Twelve years after Redding's review and 17 years after his first state-of-the-art paper, Tompkins (1984) again surveyed the field of organizational communication. In this analysis, he challenged what he described as the prevailing paradigm by arguing that the field was dominated by the "rational model," that the epistemological-methodological stance of most scholarship was positivistic, and that most research questions emanated from a managerial bias. He developed four overlap-

TABLE P.1 Past Priorities in Organizational Communication Research: 1940s-1970s

Era	*Predominant Research Questions*
1940s	- What effects do downward directed mass media communications have on employees? - Is an informed employee a productive employee?
1950s	- How do small-group communication networks affect organizational performance and member attitudes and behaviors? - How can emergent communication networks in organizations be measured? - What are the relationships between organizational members' attitudes and perceptions of their communication behavior (primarily upward and downward) 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? - To what degree is superior-subordinate semantic-information distance a problem in organizations? - What is the relationship between subordinates' job-related attitudes and productivity and the extent to which they perceive they participate in decision making? - In what ways do the actual and perceived communication behaviors of liaison and nonliaison roles within organizational communication networks differ?
1970s	- What are the components and correlates of superior-subordinate, work-group, and overall organizational communication climates? - What are the characteristics of work-group and organizational communication networks (and in particular, the distribution of "key" communication roles)?

SOURCE: Adapted from Jablin (1978).

ping challenges to the paradigm: action, power, levels, and process. Central to Tompkins's challenge or critique was the fallacy of reification, the idea that organizations are entities where communication is situated. Instead, Tompkins (1984) asserted that "communication *constitutes* organization" (p. 660, emphasis in the original), an idea inferred from Barnard (1938). From this standpoint, he suggested that organizations might be viewed as "systems of interacting individuals," who through communication are actively involved in the process of creating and re-creating their unique social order. In retrospect, we can say that this was a call for theoretical development of the notion of communication as *both figure and ground* (see Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996).

Tompkins then surveyed the literature with the four challenges or critiques as terministic screens, developing four categories that supported the prevailing paradigm yet had potential for opening the field to other perspectives. Studies on the first two categories, formal and informal channels of communication, were characterized as "variable analysis" and as presenting merely a "slice of the organization." As a result, such an approach gave no account of how organizational systems are related to each other. Studies dealing with the

third category, systems and holistic research, attempted to remedy that shortcoming by encouraging an understanding of communication-as-social-order. Finally, the fourth category moved beyond the intraorganizational communication issues and highlighted organizational environments and interorganizational research in expanding the domain of the discipline. Tompkins noted that much of the environment of an organization is other organizations, an idea first advanced again by Barnard (1938). As these interorganizational networks become more and more complex (and more and more global) and defined by technological change, organizational boundaries become less formal and rigid. Research in this area was said to have the potential for expanding the exploration of networks outside the defined boundaries of the organization, as well as "lining a profile of the organizational society itself" (p. 706).

In conclusion, Tompkins suggested that the then-current model or paradigm did not pay sufficient attention to the root metaphors of its concepts and approaches. Tompkins encouraged a shift from a mechanistic to an organic root metaphor, one that refuses to conceive organizational actors as cogs or nodes, and one that would have the advantage of framing organizations from an idiographic perspective rather than the ideal of the mechanistic root metaphor. And as such, this perspective had the potential to address the four critiques of the rational model by refocusing on (1) the importance of the actions of organizational members in creating and negotiating organizational reality; (2) power as an overarching force and organizational rhetoric as the system of persuasion; (3) the variability of levels or boundaries and the impact of interorganizational interaction on the system; and (4) process as the ongoing negotiation of organizational order, topics that have been sufficiently explored since then to warrant detailed attention in this handbook.

In 1983, an important "turn" came in the field with the publication of *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach,*[1] edited by Putnam and Pacanowsky, a volume that grew out of papers given at the First Conference on Interpretive Approaches to Organizational Communication at Alta, Utah, in 1981. The impact of the essays in this book was not so much in defining the boundaries, concepts, and research problems for the field—it was an anthology, not an integrative literature review—as it was in questioning what counted as knowledge in organizational communication. As explained in the introduction, the purposes of the book were (1) to explain the interpretive approach as it might apply to organizational communication, (2) to divide the interpretive approach into naturalistic and critical studies, and (3) to provide exemplar studies using the naturalistic and critical approaches. Thus, essays in the book suggested that the interpretive approach would enrich extant methodologies, which, as indicated above, were mainly "objective," quantitative in nature, and based on functionalist assumptions. In brief, the book reflected some new approaches to studying organizational communication by the use of a new terministic screen (albeit one based on the analytic framework of Burrell and Morgan, 1979, which was developed to explore sociological paradigms evident in organizational analysis generally; see Deetz, 1986, and Chapter 1, this volume).

A couple of years later, Putnam and Cheney (1985) took a slightly different approach by taking into account disciplinary roots of the field. They saw four general categories in previous analyses: channels, climate, network analysis, and superior-subordinate communication. In addition, they identified several trends or directions for future research, including information processing; political perspectives to communicating in organizations; organizational rhetoric, communication and organizational culture; the extension of Weick's (1979) work on enactment or meaning (cf. Redding's first postulate considered above); and research seeking to depict multiple perspectives on organization communication, not just that of management.

The most definitive *history* of the field of organizational communication was written by

Redding in 1985. This book chapter suggested a multitude of influences, both practical and academic, on the creation and development of the field and its emergence as a central area of study in the speech communication discipline. He gave three explanations to suggest why speech communication scholars assumed the organizational communication banner. The first was that other social scientists had abdicated responsibility, regarding communication problems as mere symptoms of deeper conditions. The second was that the speech field was well suited to fill this void because of its traditions, including the rhetorical perspective. The third explanation was given over to identifying persons in the speech field who had provided the leadership necessary to develop the new field (and characteristically, Redding modestly excluded himself from the group).

In 1988, Redding and Tompkins extended Redding's (1985) longitudinal perspective in commenting on the evolution of organizational communication theory, practice, and research methods. The period from 1900 to 1970 was divided into three approaches: *formulary-prescriptive, empirical-prescriptive,* and the *applied scientific.* The formulary-prescriptive position relied primarily on the development of sets of rules or commonsense prescriptions (based on traditional rhetorical theory) for effective business communication. This body of literature bore such titles as "business English," "business and professional speaking," and "winning friends and influencing people." The empirical-prescriptive phase was noted by a dependence on anecdotal and case study data, with a how-to perspective. The final position, applied scientific, was closely identified with traditional forms of scientific measurement used to explore organizational issues "objectively."

Redding and Tompkins (1988) divided the work done after 1970 as *modernistic, naturalistic,* and *critical,* spelling out in a matrix the main assumptions, methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies used in each of the three. The modernistic (emerging postmodern perspectives at the time began to create a perspective on what it was assumed to be supplanting) approach assumed that organizations were natural, objective forms and, as such, subject to prediction and control. The modernists' mode is nomothetic, the discovery of lawlike regularities that can be applied across organizational contexts. The naturalistic orientation attempts an understanding and anticipation of communicative interactions through an ethnographic lens, a picture of "Gestalt-like knowledge of wholes, or a hermeneutic understanding of part-to-whole and vice versa" (p. 24). At the heart of this approach is the assumption that organizations are subjective forms that are socially constructed by their members. Finally, the critical approach is described by the authors as "a type of consciousness-raising, if not emancipation for, organizational members themselves" (p. 23). Today we could say that the critical theorists substituted for the previous identification with management—the management bias—an identification with other organizational stakeholders, often the lower-ranking members and workers. Redding and Tompkins articulated the primary goal of critical theorists as the critique and exposure of organizations and their practices in the hope of changing them from oppressive to empowering sites.

The publication in the late 1980s of two handbooks focused on compiling and interpreting organizational communication research and theory (Goldhaber & Barnett, 1988; Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, & Porter, 1987) represented a major milestone in the field's development. However, given that the editors of these two volumes did not join together to produce one handbook, the publication of two handbooks may suggest a lack of consensus among scholars with respect to the "stuff" of organizational communication, and as a consequence each of these efforts may reflect and deflect unique categories and approaches to defining the field.

The Jablin et al. (1987) volume clearly reflects a view of the study of organizational

communication as (1) a phenomenon occurring at multiple, interrelated levels of analysis (dyadic, group, organizational, and extraorganizational); and (2) a multi-/interdisciplinary research enterprise, as evident in the volume's title, *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective,* as well as the various backgrounds of the editors and contributors to the book. As stated in the book's preface, the editors view organizational communication as a field "intersecting" many areas that had grown so rapidly in recent years that the problem in putting together a handbook was what to exclude versus what to include (a far cry from the task that faced Guetzkow, 1965, and Tompkins, 1967, in earlier reviews). In the end, they organized the book into four terministic "screens" or parts: (1) Theoretical Issues, (2) Context: Internal and External Environments, (3) Structure: Patterns of Organizational Relationships, and (4) Process: Communication Behavior in Organizations. Consistent with earlier reviews of the literature, the editors suggested that the last two parts of the book, *structure* (emergent communication networks, formal organization structure, superior-subordinate communication, and information technologies) and *process* (message exchange processes, power, politics and influence, conflict and negotiation, message flow and decision making, feedback, motivation and performance, and organizational entry, assimilation, and exit) "constitute what is ordinarily regarded as the central core of organizational communication" (Jablin et al., p. 8).

Goldhaber and Barnett (1988) parsed the field in a somewhat different manner. Their handbook is organized into three sections: (1) Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Advances in Organizational Communication, (2) Methodological Approaches, and (3) Organizational Communication in the Information Age. While these are merely section labels, and there is overlap in content among chapters included in Jablin et al. (1987) and Goldhaber and Barnett (1988), the lack of congruence in nomenclature between the two books in categorizing the field is noteworthy and indicative of distinct views on the centrality of various topics to the study of organizational communication. For example, Goldhaber and Barnett's book includes a section "Methodological Approaches," which draws attention to specific research methods the editors perceive as associated with the study of organizational communication. The methods discussed in this section (e.g., network analysis, gradient analysis) tend to focus on quantitative research methodologies associated with the study of communication and formal organizational structures. The methods section of the book does not include any chapters that specifically focus on qualitative, interpretive, or critical research methodologies, although in the foreword to the book the editors acknowledge that these approaches have grown in popularity among researchers (p. 2). Thus, while Jablin et al. (1987) deflect attention away from organizational communication research methods generally (perhaps because of the breadth of methodologies associated with a multi-/interdisciplinary perspective), Goldhaber and Barnett deflect attention away from interpretive methodologies in particular. In turn, whereas Jablin et al. draw attention to the information-communication contexts or environments of organizations by devoting a section of their book to these issues, Goldhaber and Barnett devote an entire section of their book to a more focused topic: organizational communication and new information technologies. Further, both volumes deflect attention away from ethical issues associated with the study and practice of organizational communication (e.g., Conrad, 1993; Redding, 1992), in that there are no chapters or even index entries related to this topic. While the above stances may reflect the preferences of the editors of the two books, they also may suggest that in the late 1980s the field was still in the process of conceptualizing its traditional domain and grappling with ways of approaching emerging areas of study.

Applying the Redding and Tompkins (1988) matrix to organizational communica-

tion articles published in 15 communication journals, Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, and Meyers (1991) categorized research conducted in the field during the decade 1979-1989. They found that during that decade five topics accounted for over 65% of the research: (1) climate and culture; (2) superior-subordinate communication; (3) power, conflict, and politics; (4) information flow; and (5) public organizational communication. Methodologically, 57.8% of the research articles were modernistic (or positivistic) in orientation, 26% used a naturalistic approach, and only 2.1% manifested the critical approach. Although the sample of journals that Wert-Gray et al. included in their study is not inclusive of all the major outlets in which organizational communication research is published, their findings, along with the foci of chapter topics included in the two handbooks noted above, suggest that the so-called interpretive-critical revolution of the early 1980s was not quite as complete as many believed. Modernism was fairly well entrenched during the decade studied—even though the percentages may have changed in the years since the study was conducted.

In what the authors describe as a "reference index" of articles published in 61 journals, Allen, Gotcher, and Seibert (1993) identified the most heavily researched organizational communication topics from 1980 through 1991. Their typology (see Table P.2) emerged as a by-product of analyzing the articles, although the researchers suggest that the areas they used to categorize research are similar to those used in past reviews. According to their study, interpersonal relations, and in particular superior-subordinate communication, was the most researched topic, followed by communication skills, and organizational culture and symbolism. Deetz (1992) suggests that the review shows across topics significant growth in the "social construction of organizations and reality" (p. *xiii*) during the ten-year period reviewed. Although fairly comprehensive, this review has been criticized for what the researchers left out of their analysis (e.g., handbooks, yearbook chapters, selected studies) and the manner in which they classified particular articles into topical areas, among other things (DeWine & Daniels, 1993).

The most recent major review and compilation of organizational communication research and theory was completed by Putnam et al. (1996). They approached the process of reviewing and interpreting the literature in a manner distinct from those discussed above: by identifying perspectives, in the form of metaphor clusters, that they believed characterize conceptualizations and approaches to the study of organizational communication. Each of the seven metaphor clusters they identified—conduit, lens, linkage, performance, symbol, voice, and discourse—can be considered a terministic screen/perspective, and as such "researchers can examine any organizational topic from one of these clusters" (Putnam et al., 1996, p. 394). However, it is important to note that since each metaphor varies in complexity and completeness with respect to the study of organizational communication (see Table P.3), it also reflects—as well as neglects—key elements of organizational communication phenomena.

For example, they illustrate the ways boundaries are part of organizational metaphors and how alternative ways of conceiving of organizations remove boundary as a central element. In addition, Putnam et al. (1996) suggest that "the criteria for choosing a particular metaphor are the researcher's goals, the ontological basis of both communication and organization, and the phenomenon that is most central to the organizing process" (p. 394).

In looking back at their analysis of the literature, Putnam et al. (1996) drew three conclusions about organizational communication research:

1. Despite limitations with respect to the completeness and complexity of the perspectives, "the conduit and the lens metaphors are the primary ways that organizational scholars treat communication" (p. 396).

TABLE P.2 Frequency of Publication of Organizational Communication Journal Articles by Topical Areas: 1980-1991

Frequency (total = 889)	Topic/Sample Subtopics
233	Interpersonal relations: includes superior-subordinate relations; interpersonal communication and conflict, stress, race and gender; and interviewing
120	Communication skills and strategies: includes persuasion, influence strategies, self-presentation, listening, feedback seeking and giving, supervisory communication skills, interviewing, and associations between skill proficiency and outcomes
99	Organizational culture and symbolism: includes rites and rituals, communication rules/norms, metaphors, organizational texts, stories, images, and myths
74	Information flow and channels: includes factors affecting information flow, information transmission, direction of communication, media preferences, and innovation
67	Power and influence: includes power and influence tactics, social construction of power, politics and games, language use, negotiation, bargaining, and argumentation
67	Positive outcomes associated with communication: includes studies that link communication outcomes such as commitment, performance, satisfaction, productivity, and burnout
67	Decision making and problem solving: includes participative decision making, factors influencing how decisions are made, and constraints on decision making
57	Communication networks: includes antecedents and outcomes associated with network membership, network measurement, network roles, and interorganizational networks
57	Cognitive, communication, and management styles: includes identification of styles and their relationships to outcomes, and relations between styles and behavior
53	Organization-environment communication interface: includes image-related communication, boundary spanning, information flows, and corporate discourse
45	Technology
42	Structure
41	Language and message content
41	Groups and organizational effectiveness
40	Uncertainty and information adequacy
28	Ethics
24	Cross-cultural
18	Climate

SOURCE: Adapted from a descriptive review of organizational communication articles published in 61 journals from 1980 to 1991 by Allen, Gotcher, and Seibert (1993). Articles may be included in more than one topical category.

TABLE P.3 Metaphors of Organizational Communication Research

Metaphor Cluster	*Orientation to Organization/ Communication Perspective/Examples of Research Foci*
Conduit	- Organization viewed as *containers* or channels of information flow - Communication equated with *transmission;* functions as a *tool* - Examples of research foci: formal and informal channels; comparisons among communication media; organizational structure and information overload, capacity, and adequacy
Lens	- Organization viewed as an *eye* that scans, sifts, and relays information - Communication equated with a *filtering* process, reception and perception processes - Examples of research foci: message distortion and ambiguity, information acquisition and decision making, gatekeeping, media richness
Linkage	- Organization viewed as *networks* of multiple, overlapping relationships - Communication equated with *connections* and interdependence - Examples of research foci: intra- and interorganizational network roles, patterns and structures, characteristics of ties/linkages
Performance	- Organization viewed as *coordinated actions* that enact their own rules, structures, and environment through social interaction - Communication equated with *social interaction,* dynamic processes of interlocking behaviors, reflexivity, collaboration, and sensemaking - Examples of research foci: enactment cycles, storytelling, symbolic convergence, jamming, co-constructing improvisations
Symbol	- Organization viewed as a *novel* or *literary text,* a symbolic milieu in which organizing is accomplished - Communication equated with *interpretation* and representation through the creation, maintenance, and transformation of meanings - Examples of research foci: narratives, organizational metaphors, rites, rituals, ceremonies, paradoxes and ironies, culture and language
Voice	- Organization viewed as a *chorus* of diverse voices - Communication equated with the *expression, suppression,* and *distortion* of the voices of organizational members - Examples of research foci: hegemony, power, ideology, marginalization of voices, empowerment, legitimation, unobtrusive control
Discourse	- Organization viewed as *texts,* ritualized patterns of interaction that transcend immediate conversations - Communication equated with *conversation,* as both process and structure/ context, intertwining both action and meaning - Examples of research foci: discourse as artifact/codes, structure and process, discursive practices, communication genres

SOURCE: Adapted from Putnam, Phillips, and Chapman (1996).

2. Examination of the metaphors provides strong support for the notion that "communication and organization are equivalent" (p. 396).
3. As evident in the growing popularity of metaphors of organizations as voice, texts, and discourse, it is possible that organizational communication "no longer mirrors or reflects reality, rather it is formative in that it creates and represents the process of organizing" (p. 396).

In other words, "figure and ground" are becoming more difficult to isolate in organizational communication research.

PROSPECTS AND CONCLUDING COMMENTS

In this section, we consider the implications of our review of reviews for future research and theory development in the field of organizational communication. Our conclusions are not meant to be comprehensive in nature, but reflect just a handful of themes we perceive are evident in our history and perhaps in the field's future.

First, examination of the topical reviews of literature suggests that a good part of our future research will continue to extend past research by developing "new" perspectives on "old" issues and problems associated with communication and organization. Thus, the field's traditional focus on leader-follower communication; communication networks and structures; the creation, sensing, and routing of information; information flow and participation in decision making; filtering and distortion of messages; communication channels; feedback processing; and the like will remain significant areas of study (see Tables P.1 and P.2). To a large extent, these topics tend to focus on the sorts of communication structures and processes that Jablin et al. (1987) suggested are frequently "regarded at the central core of organizational communication" (p. 8). Thus, while the specific research questions will vary (e.g., the effects of a new communication technology on the processing of feedback, or communication patterns and roles in "new" organizational forms), much of our research will be expanding on topics that have a long history of study in organizational communication. However, since researchers who explored these topics in the past have tended to conceptualize and operationalize them in terms of the metaphors of "conduit," "lens," "linkages," and more recently "symbols" (Putnam et al., 1996), there is considerable room for advancement of knowledge through the investigation of these topics through (1) other appropriate metaphors and representations (ones that don't confound related assumptions about communication and organization), and (2) the chaining of "threads" of related metaphor clusters together to reveal interrelationships and possibly new metaphors.

Second, we see the emergence of research traditions founded on the metaphors of "voice," "discourse," and "performance" as part of a maturation of the field in that each moves the field in ways that question and deconstruct metaphors and categories of the past while integrating domains and methods thought to be permanently at odds with one another. For example, recent research exploring a construct central to the history of the field (see Redding, 1972)—participation—has enriched our understanding of this notion via consideration from a number of voice-based perspectives including concertive control (e.g., Barker, 1993; Tompkins & Cheney, 1985) and critical theory (e.g., Deetz, 1992), as well as in terms of "discourse" (e.g., Taylor, 1993, 1995) and network metaphors (e.g., Stohl, 1995). Another area of study that has been a focus of interest since the beginning of the field—communication networks—has also benefited from consideration via voice, discourse, and performance perspectives. For example, Taylor (1993) has suggested that networks themselves might be viewed as texts in that they represent relatively ritualized,

structured patterns of interaction that "transcend" immediate conversations (see also recent research exploring "semantic" networks in organizations [e.g., Contractor, Eisenberg, & Monge, 1992] and recent studies of networks, meaning, and solidarity [e.g., Kiianmaa, 1997]). Reflective of the voice metaphor he adds that communication networks practically guarantee "that some influences remain unheard, and hence that some of the accounts which all organizations spontaneously develop are attended to regularly, and others are ignored" (p. 90). Alternatively, based on Tompkins and Cheney's (1985) work on control, Stohl (1995) posits that participation in networks can blur distinctions among individuals and groups in organizations and thereby "further an organization's ability to control unobtrusively individuals" (p. 147). These are important issues to consider and we believe demonstrate how traditional areas of organizational communication research can be enriched through analysis via the discourse, performance, and voice metaphors. They give us a richer nomenclature than we had in the past with which to select and reflect reality for analysis.

Finally, our analysis suggests that the field is now focusing more on communicational theorizing about organizing than in the recent past. In particular, Taylor's (1993, 1995; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichard, 1996) work is noteworthy in that it attempts to "reconstruct" a communication-based theory of organization. In brief, he argues that conversations are the stuff of organizations, conversations lead to narratives or texts meaningful to the conversationalists, and organization is a communication system—"an ecology of conversation" (p. 244). Thus, he moves from a metaphor of communication as both the figure and ground, the paint and the canvas of an organization, to one of a "text produced by a set of authors, through conversation" (Taylor, 1993, p. 96). Recent contributions such as Taylor's as well as those of other scholars (e.g., Stohl's, 1995, effort to link relational theories of interpersonal communication with network explanations of organizational functioning), like Redding's (1972) little-known attempt decades earlier, ground organizational studies in communication theory. Thus, they facilitate a view of organizations as communicational in nature, a perspective that we expect will be central to understanding the more fluid, fragmented, and chaotic forms of organizations and organizing that are expected in the future (e.g., Bergquist, 1993; McPhee & Poole, Chapter 13, this volume). In these contexts communication and organization are equivalent, discourse is organizing; it is the paint and the canvas, the figure and ground.

NOTE

1. Although Tompkins's summary chapter in the Arnold and Bowers handbook was published in 1984 and the Putnam and Pacanowsky book in 1983, we reverse the apparent chronological order because the Tompkins chapter was submitted in early 1980, some time before the Putnam-Pacanowsky book went to press. In fact, Putnam (1983) refers to the chapter as "(Tompkins, in press)" in her chapter on the interpretive perspective.

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