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Fundamental Theories of Business Communication

Laying a Foundation for the Field

Milton Mayfield
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ISSN 2730-5333 ISSN 2730-5341 (electronic)
New Perspectives in Organizational Communication
ISBN 978-3-030-57740-7 ISBN 978-3-030-57741-4 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

We are extremely grateful for the opportunity to write this book. It has been a wonderful and challenging aspiration from which we learned a great deal. To share one lesson learned, this book is a journey that we hope will be continued. The field of business communication theory is vital and dynamic so we encourage its members to pursue their important work on theory development and evolution. We will do so too.

There are many significant contributors to our effort. We begin with the inspiration found with the scholarship of Drs. Jeffrey A. Miles and John B. Miner who made enormous strides in management theory by surveying, summarizing, ranking, and raising relevant theoretical implications for researchers and managers. We are equally grateful to our mentor and friend, Dr. Ronald Dulek, who has guided us over the years with his superb vision of what makes effective business communication. Also important, we thank our anonymous survey respondents, comprised of organizational communication experts, who made the time and took the effort to send us their feedback. This book would not exist without their help and support. Their rankings and commentaries allowed us to identify and categorize the theories in this book. Hats off to all these instructive participants!

In the same vein, we are thankful for the other experts who informed the process of book writing. Kudos to Drs. Ryan Bisel, Rita Men, and Jef Naidoo for their invaluable advice on new and emerging theories. And we truly appreciate the insightful theory discussions with Ken O'Quinn as

well as the feedback from our anonymous book reviewers which was very helpful. Another source of instrumental advice came from the Association for Business Communication (ABC) members and Executive Director, Jim Dubinsky. Thank you for that insightful meeting in Albuquerque almost four years ago. The suggestions which all of you offered for this book resonated and have carried us forward. In fact, this book is especially intended as a response to your contagious enthusiasm to advance scholarship and knowledge in our field.

Our gratitude also extends to other key players in this book's professional support system. Marcus Ballenger, Commissioning Editor at Palgrave and Sophia Siegler, his assistant, offered perfect sources of encouragement, patience, and feedback to create this book. Many thanks to both of you. In addition, Drs. Steve Sears, Ned Kock, and Texas A & M International University were gracious in providing research funds and release time for this book. Thanks for your resources too.

We finally want to mention our personal support systems. Applauds go out to patient family members (pets included of course) who cheered us on and never complained when we were knee deep in book research and writing. Lastly, we are very grateful to each other for high persistence, collaboration, and dedication towards this project. This book has been a remarkable journey indeed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

'Tis hard if all is false that I advance. A fool must now and then be right by chance.
—William Cowper, Conversation, Line 96

Business communication needs theories. As a field, business communication exists as a unique intersection of diverse areas, and, as such, must fulfill many expectations. Business communication draws from the broader field of communication research and draws from organizational behavior, public relations, psychology, sociology, neurobiology, and even more areas. This foundation gives business communication a rich set of ideas to build on, but the multiplicity also creates difficulties. Specifically, researchers can find it challenging to choose ideas on which to base their work. Business communication researchers also face another issue—relevance to the business world. Business communication—as indicated by its name—must give value to businesses, employees, and stakeholders.

Unfortunately, business communication researchers can feel lost about how to examine the many questions that confront the business community. Most researchers recognize the issue they want to study—how to improve leader communication, what promotes discussions in meetings, how to make communication more honest and ethical—but they do not see how to grapple with these questions. Even when researchers develop a study framework, it often remains idiosyncratic—a framework that addresses a particular situation, but does not provide a way for other

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_1

researchers to build upon the findings (Almaney, 1974; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005). This situation simply frustrates everyone. Researchers abandon essential questions because they see no way to study them, quality findings remain isolated because of difficulties in extending the results, business people fail to find consistent advice about how to improve their business situations, and the field of business communication sees only isolated progress toward a common body of knowledge.

However, the field of business communication has the building blocks to become a unified field (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a, 2017b). We have the tools needed so researchers can find models to examine most business communication phenomena. More so, these tools provide frameworks where researchers can apply their findings to business applications and deliver results which other researchers can further develop. Through many years, the field has generated theories that give researchers what they need to craft quality work. Unfortunately, most business communication researchers—and those in other fields (Miles, 2012; Miner, 2002)—do not know the wide range of theories available to them. Many researchers know only a handful of theories they learned in their doctoral classes and have come to rely on them in their research. They have forgotten, overlooked, or never been exposed to the majority of theories which we have available.

In business communication, our theories mostly remain covert. The catalog of our basic, fundamental theories only exists as tacit knowledge (Allred, 2001; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Lunce, 2008), accessible through limited networks of friends, colleagues, and research reports (Eisenberg, Johnson, & Pieterson, 2015; Latour, 2005). Such implicit knowledge needs to be made explicit—a source available to our field's members for discussion, debate, and change (M. Mayfield, 2010; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). The very nature of implicit knowledge, however, makes identifying the theories challenging. Different researchers know some theories better than others, various texts are built around diverse research, and business communication experts find certain models more useful than others. Still, other business disciplines—notably organizational behavior (Miner, 2003) and organizational theory (Miles, 2012)—have faced similar challenges and successfully identified core theories relevant to diverse researchers across these fields.

We believe that business communication faces unique difficulties because of its diversity and relative newness (Aritz & Bargiela-Chiappini, 2014; Kuhn, 1996). While business communication has likely existed

since our paleolithic ancestors first discussed how to trade bananas for pomegranates, the study of business communication has emerged more recently. Dedicated business communication journals such as the International Journal of Business Communication (founded 1963), Journal of Advertising (founded 1972), and Management Communication Quarterly (founded 1987) have only existed a few short decades. While on a human time scale, this period may seem long, Kuhn (1996) showed developing a field often takes several generations. As such, business communication finds itself fragmented and still searching for an identity. This fragmentation also stunts our field's growth (Fort, 1975; Kuhn, 1996), hinders our acceptance by other business and social science researchers, and limits how much (financially) universities value business communication professors (Abbott, 2014).

How can we reduce this fragmentation and still preserve our field's richness? We believe making these divergent perspectives explicit and easily accessible is key. A shared worldview binds people together—be they friends, work colleagues, or members of an academic community (Brodie, 2011; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001). Case in point: Within academic communities, theories help forge members' identities, even when vast distances and long years separate them (Kuhn, 1996; Latour, 2005). Theory underlies the research we immerse ourselves in and underpins the texts we use to teach. These same theories offer a compass to all members in our community: a guide for researchers seeking robust, well-supported frameworks for examining phenomena in the field; for teachers crafting pedagogy based on useful and well-understood principles; for writers looking to develop texts grounded in our field's best practices; for consultants trying to benefit the workforce.

To develop such coherence, we need a set of widely recognized theories. While we believe these theories exist, few business communication researchers know more than a handful. (As an aside, part of the reason we started this project was to develop our knowledge of these theories—we wanted this list so we could know the field better.) While researchers do not need an in-depth understanding of all of the major theories in an area, we hope this book helps researchers recognize these theories and gain a general idea of their legitimacy and utility. By distributing such shared knowledge, a field can grow a cohesive speech community with a free exchange of ideas (Boulanger & Gagnon, 2018; Lo, 1999). We hope this book contributes to the development of such a community by bringing to light the foundational blocks the field already possesses.

To facilitate this process, we present the fundamental business communication theories. Knowing these theories will help researchers have a stronger understanding of our field—what shapes research and promotes a better understanding of business communication phenomena. Also, knowing these theories will help you develop research by building on well-established knowledge that speaks to other researchers. To help you develop this knowledge, we will present you with descriptions of the major business communication theories and also explanations about how these theories fit together to define the field.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will lay out specifics of what we mean by business communication, theory, and our motivation for writing this book.

What Is Business Communication

Many people have presented diverse definitions of business communication (Locker, 1998; Shelby, 1993). Such diversity arises naturally from our expansive field. People even hold different views about the appropriate name for our field, and people may call the field of study corporate, organizational, management, or business communication (Shelby, 1993).

Annette Shelby (1993) provided a useful typology that incorporated the various terms' nuances. She distinguished the terms based on how a particular area examined dyadic or collective communication (along one axis) and internal or external communications (along another axis). She proposed that both organizational and business communication investigated similar topics, but business communication concentrated more on applied communication while organizational communication focused more on theoretical matters. In contrast, management communication focused more on internal communications and corporate communication focused on communications with external entities.

As such, it seems researchers could use the term business or organizational communication for many of the same concepts, and that either of these terms would cover the areas explored in management and corporate communication. Since the terms organizational and business communication seem quite similar, we will use business communication because we use this term most often. However, we intend to use this term to cover all aspects of Corporate/Organizational/Management/Business communication research. We hope that our choice of business communication

does not deter anyone who views the field differently or prefers a different name.

As for how we define business communication, we consider it consists of any information exchange processes used to interpret, identify, determine, achieve, sustain, or subvert organizationally related individual or collective goals. These communications include verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Such exchanges occur between various entities—individuals, teams, and entire organizations—in any combination. These communications can occur either entirely inside an organization or across organizational boundaries. Researchers can examine such interactions from micro, macro, or multilevel perspectives.

What Is Theory

Now that we have a working definition of business communication, we also need a definition of how we will use the term theory in this book. Corley and Gioia (2011) provide a concise definition of a theory as "… a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs." However, this statement is perhaps too concise, and we would like to supplement it with a brief discussion of Dubin's (1978) theory definition, and, later, an expansion on his ideas for business communication.

Dubin (1978) offered one of the most well-known theory definitions. He defined a theory as any set of statements that give a clear set of beliefs about a phenomenon and included three specific elements. The first element was that a theory had to define at least two constructs. (In this definition, a construct was simply some element that could act upon or could be influenced by some other construct.) For example, motivating language (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Sullivan, 1988), communication satisfaction (MacDonald, Kelly, & Christen, 2019; Raina & Roebuck, 2016), and community (Cardon, 2016; Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018) can all serve as constructs. In essence, anything that we can measure, could influence another construct, or could change because of another construct fits the definition of a construct.

Dubin also required that at least one construct have a defined relationship with another construct. We can think of constructs as the nouns in Dubin's grammar of theory, and his second element—the relationship—as the verbs. We need to note that the relationship could state that no

influence exists between constructs, i.e., construct A doesn't influence on construct B.

Dubin also said a theory needed to define under what circumstances construct relationships would change and when they no longer apply. The change requirement essentially means that a theorist should identify what moderators influence the relationship between a set of constructs (Dubin, 1978; Pettit, Goris, & Vaught, 1997). For examining when a theory no longer applies, a theorist should include its boundary conditions—in what situations the theory no longer holds (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012, 2019). While these requirements complete Dubin's theory definition, they usually only appear through empirical tests (Hale et al., 2005; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017).

Dubin's definition provides a very thorough, robust, and easily applied definition. However—as Dubin admits—it does not cover all types of theory—including typologies or grand theories. As we will show in this book, such model types have—and continue to play—essential roles in business communication research. To incorporate such ideas, we will have to supplement and broaden Dubin's (1978) and Corley and Gioia's (2011) definitions.

For our definition, we will state that a theory must fulfill the following conditions:

- It helps us understand the world better.
- It provides a coherent statement about some phenomena.
- It allows for researchers to build upon the theory.

This definition gives us a definitive enough framework to distinguish between a theory and a simple collection of facts while also giving us enough flexibility to fully explore theories that provide the foundations of business communication research.

Why We Wrote This Book

First and foremost, we wrote this book to start a conversation. While it may seem strange that we consider our book as the start of a conversation rather than the end of our work, writing this book has increased our humility about what we do not understand about business communication theory. The area of business communication contains a multitude

of ideas and goals—a multitude that has proven challenging to codify (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b).

Theory helps us to codify and systematize our knowledge. How we codify this knowledge; however, must come from the members of the field; it should naturally arise as the field develops (Fort, 1975; Kuhn, 1996). As members of the field, we want to help this process. We hope to do so by raising awareness of existing theories and fostering a shared discussion of how we can use them.

As such, we hope that our work starts a debate among members of the field. While we would like to think that our work presents the perfect set of theories to advance business communication research, we also realize our many shortfalls. We want readers to think about what theories we have missed or what disagreements you have with our rankings; we want readers to talk about how some theories do not really help advance the field or are not really business communication theories; most of all, we want you to find theories that will help your work or inspire you to create new theories to capture emerging phenomena.

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CHAPTER 2

How We Selected the Theories

The solution of this problem is trivial and is left as an exercise for the reader.
—anonymous from multiple sources.

Developing a list of theories from any field presents many challenges—but it presents particular challenges for the area of business communication when no unified source exists to examine what theories researchers in the area consider to be most important (Griffin & McClish, 2011; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b). Kuhn (1996) posited that a unified field forms around widely read and accepted textbooks. These textbooks provide a shared set of ideas that everyone in a field learns and internalizes as they train in the area. These shared ideas—in essence—create a speech community where members work with the same theories and have a general knowledge of all of these theories (Lo, 1999; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). This shared set of ideas forms the basis of fields that have become sciences and differentiates these fields from those that have not.

However, in areas that have not achieved the level of a science—scientific disciplines—such shared texts do not exist (Kuhn, 1996; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a). Business communication faces an extra hurdle in that the field lacks a strong base in universities (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). While almost all business schools have introductory business communication classes, and business-focused communication courses and majors exist in most communication

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_2

and public relations programs, few business academic programs exist where people can obtain a business communication major. Without such programs, little incentive exists for authors to develop the more advanced texts that would identify and showcase business communication theories (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). Instead, these programs seem to either use books from other communication areas or draw from research articles (Dyrud, 2011; Partridge, 2015). While introductory texts (for any discipline) often provide theory information, they usually focus more on general concepts and application guidelines (Dyrud, 2011; Swales, 1995). Simply put, such texts do not seem to fill the role that Kuhn identified as catalyzing agents for theory recognition.

The lack of such texts makes extracting the fundamental theories difficult. Instead, we had to turn to journal articles, a variety of business communication books, and expert opinion to create our list. This chapter lays out how we generated the theories we present in this book.

Initial Theory Search

We started our search with a systematic review (Shamseer et al., 2015; Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019) of what theories have appeared in business communication sources. While we did not expect to uncover all major theories, we believe that such a systematic search would give us a good starting list. We began with texts that focused on business communication theories or communication texts with a strong business communication component (Greenhalgh et al., 2005; Staples & Niazi, 2007). After we had developed our initial list from such texts, we expanded the search to include major business communication journals. The journals included the *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, Corporate Communications, Communication Research, Communication Research Reports, Human Communication Research, IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, International Journal of Business Communication, Journal of Applied Communication Research, Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, Management Communication Quarterly, Technical Communication, Technical Communication Quarterly,* and *Written Communication* (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019; Staples & Niazi, 2007). We selected these journals for their (collective) broad coverage of the study of business communication, influence on the field (as indicated by their journal impact factors), and their strong focus on

theory-based research. We next searched web sites that listed business communication theories. Finally, we included theories of which we had personal knowledge that seemed influential on business communication research.

We wanted to use diverse sources to develop our list so that we could create an expansive theory list. We wanted a broad set of theories for two reasons. First, we felt a more extensive list was appropriate for our field's diversity (Marsen, 2020; Pagel & Westerfelhaus, in press). As we said in Chapter 1, we need a variety of theories to match our field's diversity of interests and topics. Also—since we ultimately planned to use field experts to evaluate the theories—we felt that an expansive set of theories would not be a problem. Lesser known (or useful) theories would receive lower ratings while the experts would note the theories that have proven more central to our field. The combination of an expansive list and ranking the theories would provide us with an overview of what theories business communication researchers use while also allowing us to identify those theories that were more or less central to the field.

We had similar reasons for including grand and middle-range theories (Merton, 1968; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). However, we did not include what we call—based on Parson's (1967) terminology—empirical theory. Empirical theory consists of a collection of propositions designed to understand a specific set of observations. For example, a study may examine communication through electronic channels (Braun, Bark, Kirchner, Stegmann, & van Dick, 2019; Darics, 2020) or communication in team dynamics (Aritz, Walker, Cardon, & Zhli, 2017; MacDonald, Kelly, & Christen, 2019), but the study does not place these observations into a broader theoretical framework. While such studies help us better understand various phenomena, they do not present a framework that others can easily develop and expand (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Instead, such researchers can only incorporate these findings in a theory that they develop to understand the related phenomena. On a practical note, we were not able to include such work simply because such empirical theories lack a name that others can refer to or we can use. However, within the scope of grand and middle-range theories, we tried to make the list as inclusive as possible.

Our decision to be more inclusive does bring up a potential criticism of what we have included in our list. Some theories—such as discourse analysis—can be considered analytic methods rather than theories (G. Brown, Gillian, & Yule, 1983; Duffy & O'Rourke, 2015). However, for

such included theories, we believe that they also act as grand theories. In drawing from communication research, business communication has inherited several theories that serve as both an overall world view (a grand theory) and inform the method by which researchers can capture this world. For example, with discourse analysis, its earliest development stated that all-important social interactions come from the discourse between participants, and these discussions shape these participants' reality (Chia, 2000; Jaworska, 2018). The theory also put forward that such interactions had unique emergent properties (even if regularities existed between these discussions). As such, the theory proposed that the only way to capture the phenomena was through a specific methodological practice (G. Brown et al., 1983; Van Dijk, 2006). While researchers today often use the method without reference to its initial underlying theory, we believe that such models hold value today and provide a fundamental way of modeling communication.

Similarly, we have included theories that do not specifically focus on communication such as the attraction-selection-attrition framework (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2008), the functional perspective on group decision-making (Gouran, Hirokawa, Julian, & Leatham, 1993; Li, 2007), and the theory of reasoned action (Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2014; Fishbein, 1979). However, these theories have a strong communication component, and business communication researchers widely use these theories. We also feel they underline areas where business communication has had to borrow non-communication theories to map out phenomena relevant to our field. As such, these theories point out areas where we need to take the time to modify such theories to become more communicative ones or develop our theories specifically to better incorporate business communication.

This last set of theories points out an important issue for business communication: most of the theories used in our field did not arise from business communication research. Instead, we have adopted (or adapted) most of our theories from other areas. Most frequently, these theories have come from (general) communication, but we also have adopted theories from management, psychology, sociology, and education. As such, these theories have some inherent degree of mismatch between their development and our usage. For general communication-oriented theories—such as rhetorical theory (Abrahams, 1968; Hartelius & Browning, 2008) or media richness theory (Bjorvatn & Wald, in press; Daft & Lengel, 1986)—we have had to adapt theory propositions to work

within a business framework. For theories that have arisen in such areas as management or education—such as groupthink (Baron, 2005; Janis, 1972) or communication competence (Allen & Brown, 1976; Blood, Blood, Tellis, & Gabel, 2001)—we have had to tease out communication implications. Theories specifically created to understand business communication phenomena—such as motivating language (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Sullivan, 1988) or strategic messaging (Fielden & Dulek, 1984, 1990)—have been rare.

There is nothing wrong with borrowing theories from other areas—such cross-pollination provides strength to our field. However, to advance our field, we will need to develop more native theories that specifically address the needs of our research. Adapting theories wholesale will always lead to some mismatch between our phenomena of interest and the frame we use to interpret these phenomena.

Since our task was descriptive (how the field stands) rather than normative (how we feel the field should be), we thought it necessary to include theories regardless of where they originated from or original purpose. As such, we retained theories that frequently appeared even if they did not seem to be specifically business communication theories. However, we expect if a similar exercise occurs in ten years, the list would include more theories that had originated from (or at least been highly adapted for) business communication purposes.

Refining the Theory List

We started refining our list by first checking how often a theory appeared in different sources. We eliminated theories that only appeared in communication-focused texts and not in business communication-oriented texts or journals. We considered such theories as false positives—communication theories but not business communication theories. We next eliminated any theories that had not appeared in our journal search at least ten times, since we considered that these theories have only had a minor effect on our field.

We next consolidated theories that appeared under different names. This step proved difficult since we found several theories that slowly evolved into new theories, while at other times, researchers used variant names. For example, face theory (Knobloch, Satterlee, & DiDomenico, 2010; Moore, 2017) and politeness theory (R. Brown, 1990; Goldsmith, 2013) seem to be different theories, but researchers often use them

interchangeably (Mao, 1994; Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991). Only rarely—as with dialogic theory (Kent & Taylor, 2002; McClellan, 1989) and its later iterations—did we find clear distinctions about when a new theory had emerged.

Survey Stage

Once we had refined our list, we moved to our survey stage. In this stage, we asked business communication experts to rate the theories. To accomplish this task, we provided our generated list to members of business communication editorial boards. We decided to poll these editorial boards because we felt they would serve as appropriate experts—people who had a broad view and understanding of research in business communication. We requested feedback from board members of the following journals *International Journal of Business Communication*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, and *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. For the survey, we provided the judges with the name of each theory and a brief description. We also gave alternate names for each theory, in case a judge knew the theory under a less frequently used designation.

We asked these judges to use four rating criteria for each theory and asked them only to rate theories they knew. For each theory they knew, we asked them to rate it on *importance*, *knowledge*, *application*, and *scientific support*. We asked the judges to rate the theories on a scale from 1 to 5 for each of the four criteria. The importance criteria rated how important they believed the theory was to the field of business communication. The knowledge criterion was how well they knew the theory (tapping into how widely understood it was). The application criterion was for how useful they felt the theory was for business situations. And the scientific support criteria measured how well supported they believed the theory was by evidence. We used the judges' ratings to develop a typology (see Chapter 4 for more details) of theories in business communication.

In addition to the theories we uncovered, we asked the judges to suggest and rate business communication theories that we might have missed. In total, the judges only suggested five new theories (with only four judges suggesting any new theory). Since there was no consensus on any missing theory, we did not include the theories in our main list

or typology. Also, the lack of additional, consensus-based theory suggestions indicates that our initial list did an adequate job of uncovering the fundamental business communication theories.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented the method by which we discovered and analyzed business communication theories. We attempted to uncover the diversity and richness of the field through this process. This chapter also lays the foundations for our next one, where we develop a typology that groups the theories into more understandable sets.

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CHAPTER 3

A Typology of Business Communication Theories

I know the scientific names of beings animalculous;
In short, in matters vegetable, animal, and mineral,
I am the very model of a modern Major-General.
—Arthur Sullivan and William Schwenck Gilbert
The Pirates of Penzance: Act I. "I am the very model of a modern Major-General"

In addition to uncovering and rating business communication theories, we also wanted to develop a typology of these theories (Bailey, 1994; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b). While having a list of theories should help business communication researchers, researchers also need a way to classify these theories. Having such a typology helps researchers quickly locate theories to use in their research, and, therefore, makes it more likely that researchers will employ appropriate theories with which to frame their studies. Typologies can also serve as meta-theoretical constructs that researchers can use to advance the field (Bailey, 2005; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012).

Before beginning this chapter, we want to briefly define typology (Bailey, 1994; Doty & Glick, 1994). Typologies provide classification models that exhaustively categorize all items in a domain. When developed correctly, they offer a classification method that helps to quickly locate items within the typology, and provide a better understanding

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_3

of how they relate to each other. Typologies contrast with taxonomies because people create typologies qualitatively by grouping items together based on perceived similarity or by creating exhaustive classification rules. In contrast, researchers create taxonomies mechanically through a data classification process.

We had several goals in developing this typology. First, we wanted to create a typology that would help researchers locate the theories they needed for their work. We imagined many researchers would have an idea about what phenomenon they wanted to investigate, but not know a theory that would help them examine it. As such, we tried to create categories based on what seems to be the most common types of questions business communication researchers investigate. If a researcher could match their general question area to a group, then he or she could look in that category to find an appropriate theory.

Next, we wanted the typology categories to have enough flexibility and clarity that they would serve for the inclusion of future theories. We expect that the theory list will change over time, but we hope that the typology will prove robust enough to accommodate these new theories.

Finally, we wanted distinct categories. This desire works in partnership with our other goals. Having distinct groups should help researchers locate an appropriate theory for the work and make it easier to place new theories into a category.

In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss how we developed our typology.

Typologies in Theory Development

Having a typology of business communication theories helps in many areas of business communication research. Perhaps most obviously, having such a typology aids researchers in selecting a theory for their research (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2004; Kelly & MacDonald, in press). By grouping similar theories together, researchers can identify the general area of the phenomena they want to understand better, and then select an appropriate theory from within this group. In this way, a typology allows researchers to quickly narrow down theories applicable to their questions (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014; Witkemper, Blaszka, & Chung, 2016).

In this way, a typology serves a role in locating an appropriate theory that is analogous to the role a theory plays in a research study (Bailey, 2005; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). In both cases, they (the

typology and the theory) reduce the cognitive requirements necessary to conduct research, and they improve the quality of the final outcome (Ma, Mayfield,& Mayfield, 2018; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a). A theory lessens the effort needed in a study because it allows the researcher to employ an existing and tested framework to her or his work rather than having to create one from scratch. For a typology, the framework allows a researcher to more quickly and reliably identify the theory needed to begin the study. A researcher can then redirect the reduced time and effort expended on determining the framework into the analysis itself—thus allowing the researcher to devote those resources to increased study quality.

When researchers use a typology in selecting a theory, they can also improve the quality of their research by comparing different, appropriate theories. A researcher will often find a given phenomenon amenable to multiple business communication theories—separate theories will better model various aspects of the phenomenon. When a researcher has multiple theories he or she can compare, the researcher can more easily pick among them for suitability (Bailey, 2005; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Genestre, 2001). Having these various theories will allow the researcher to engage in thought experiments about how a study might unfold under different theories (Frappier, 2015; Schick & Vaughn, 2012). These thought experiments should help the researcher better understand their research and allow for multiple interpretations of their results. Researchers may even find that they can fruitfully combine more than one theory to create a better understanding of business communication.

The use of the business communication theory typology to compare multiple theories introduces a less obvious typology result. A typology allows researchers to more clearly see when theories within a typological group have similarities (or differences) (Mayfield, Mayfield, Genestre, & Marcu, 2000; Mayfield, Mayfield, & Stephens, 2007). Through making such a comparison, the researcher can decide if an existing theory would benefit from expanding it by including aspects of other theories. For example, combining the Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations (Campos, 2007; Fuchs & Mosco, 2012) with Semantic Networks theory (Duda, Hart, Nilsson, & Sutherland, 1977; Rice & Danowski, 1993) could allow researchers to better examine the power dynamics and ethics of different communication interchanges. Similarly, researchers can use the typological groupings to cross-pollinate theories between categories and better develop their questions.

We can also use a typology to advance the theories it classifies (Bailey, 2005; Doty & Glick, 1994). By reducing the number of theories we have to consider at one time (through grouping similar theories together), we can determine if theories in a given category approach business communication from a limited perspective (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012a, 2012b). For example, we may find that the category covering persuasion and motivation mainly approaches the topic from a managerial perspective (Fuchs & Mosco, 2012; J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Neck, in press). As such, we could expand existing theories to bring in other perspectives or create new theories.

Typologies can also help us to recognize when we need to develop new theories within a group (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). If each group should fully cover phenomena within that group—for example, the category of motivation and persuasion—then we should have a theory within that group to analyze and explain all business communication related to motivation and persuasion. If we find that no theory exists within a group to answer our questions, we have evidence that we need a new theory (Boxenbaum & Rouleau, 2011; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012b).

Typologies can also help us decide if we can consolidate theories within a group. They make a collection of items (theories in this case) more parsimonious and generalizable. If we see that two or more theories have substantial overlap, we can work to consolidate them to create a single one capable of explaining the phenomena. By unifying such theories, researchers will have more robust frameworks to work with. In addition, this smaller set of theories can cover more business communication ideas. If we look outside of our field, we can find many examples of how such consolidation aided rapid advancement. Einstein's relativity theory was able to combine Newtonian physics with other physical properties in a more elegant description of reality, and this new theory unleashed (and continues to drive) many advancements in the fields of physics and engineering.

Finally, a typology provides a tool for reflective analysis: We can use a typology to refine itself over time. We can do so by looking for gaps between typology categories—have we missed any important group of business communication interactions? If so, we need to create a new category or at least imagine the parameters of such a category. Once we have identified a missing group, then we can work to identify or create theories

that should exist within the category. Similarly, we may discover substantial overlap between two or more categories and decide that we can merge these categories.

Creating the Typology

To create our typology, we had three requirements. First, every theory should fit in only one category. Second, every theory had to appear in a category. Finally, the range of categories had to cover the major business communication areas—they had to cover our field's breadth.

In selecting the number of categories, we had to make a trade-off between category homogeneity and parsimony. More categories create greater homogeneity within each category. However, an increased number of categories would also lead to less utility of any one category. At the logical extreme, we would have one category per theory, thus negating any typology utility. At the other extreme, too few categories would lead to us grouping dissimilar theories together. Based on the number of theories we had identified, we decided a priori to have between five and ten categories. This range seemed a good compromise between complexity arising from the number of categories and category homogeneity. Also, with this number of categories we could expect to have from around eight to sixteen theories within a given category. This number of categories and theories within a category seemed sufficient to create homogeneity within a category while not having too many elements for a researcher to work with.

We developed the actual categories through an affinity exercise. We began by writing each theory's name and a brief description on index cards. We next grouped theories that addressed similar topics. After we had our initial groupings, we gave these groups tentative names and descriptions about what they represented. We then took the theory cards and placed them in the category where we felt they best belonged. While most theories remained in their initial groups, we did recognize that some theories now fit better in other categories. We then refined our definitions, updated category names, and decided if we needed to add or remove a category. We repeated the process until we stopped making changes. At the end of the process, we had seven categories.

Typology Categories

Now that we have laid out the uses for a typology, and how we developed ours, we can present the categories and category definitions we constructed.

Channels and Barriers: This category lists theories about a vital business communication research stream that addresses how people, groups, and organizations transmit their communications (channels). Theories in this category also examine what factors interfere with these communication flows, and how channel selection improves transmissions. Shannon and Weavers' Information Theories model (Shannon & Weaver, 1963) provided a seminal examination of these topics, and it remains one of the most widely used frames in business communication textbooks (DuBabcock, 2006; Miller, 2004). However, over the years, researchers have elaborated and developed this theory, and these additions have spawned many diverse theories. This category also includes approaches that give us a better understanding of what factors distort communications and strategies for reducing these distortions.

Table 3.1 presents the theories in this category.

Cultural Characteristics and Influences: Culture has an interactive relationship with communication. Their intersection has given researchers a fertile ground for theory development, and this ground has yielded fruitful results. These discoveries have given us knowledge about how business communication signals cultural attributes, creates a barrier to outsiders, alters cultures, morphs under cultural pressures, and responds to support cultural needs. Theories in this category examine culture from

Table 3.1 Channels and Barriers

Business English as a Lingua Franca	Media Richness Theory
Communication Apprehension	Media Synchronicity Theory
Communication Competence	Multimodality
Genderlect Theory	Social Presence Theory
Information Theories	Source Credibility
Media Naturalness	Uncertainty Reduction/Initial Interaction Theory

many lenses. These facets include the level of analysis (national, organizational, and small group), communication's role in forming and signaling cultures, and how culture influences communication and communication patterns. High-Context vs. Low-Context Culture (Hall, 1977; Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, & Savery, 2001) describes a complete national communication culture typology, and Employee Voice and Silence (Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009; Morrison, 2014) gives an example of how communication culture strongly influences specific employee behaviors.

You can find the theories in this category in Table 3.2.

Flows and Patterns: Many major questions in business communication research come from how information flows between different entities. Many theories have identified recurring patterns in the paths that communication takes under different circumstances, and how the use of different patterns can affect these communications. Theories in this category showcase these flows and patterns. The Theory of Communication Networks (Monge & Contractor, 2003; Pandurangan & Khan, 2010) provides an explanation that incorporates many existing communication network theories, and Actor-Network Theory (Latour, 1996, 2005) offers an interesting grand model for the category.

Theories in this category appear in Table 3.3.

Meaning-Making and Discovery: Several major researchers in business communication assert that communication does more than transmit or represent ideas. These scholars believe that communication uncovers and even creates our reality. Theories from this category fully explore these ideas, and associated researchers have conducted compelling studies to grapple with their implications. The decision-making theories in the category—such as Groupthink (Esser, 1998; Janis, 1983)—give us

Table 3.2 Cultural Characteristics and Influences

Activity Theory	High-Context vs. Low-Context Culture
Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework	Memetics
Competing Values Framework	Narrative Theory
Cultural Approach to Organizations	Speech Codes Theory
Employee Voice and Silence	Symbolic Convergence Theory

Table 3.3 Flows and Patterns

Actor-Network Theory	Rhetorical Sensitivity Model
Contagion Theory	Social Penetration Theory
Diffusion of Innovation Theory	Spiral of Silence
Grapevine Communication	Theory of Communication Networks
Homophily-Proximity Theories	Uses and Gratification Approach
Interpersonal Ties	

insights into how people use communication to find solutions to different business problems. For other theories in this category, communication plays a role in creating and negotiating self-image—Face Negotiation (Oetzel, Meares, Myers, & Lara, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2004)—or mutually discover/create an agreed-upon reality—such as Sense-Making (Erbert, 2016; Weick, 1988).

Theories of meaning-making and discovery appear in Table 3.4.

Motivation and Persuasion: Academics and managers alike want to know how communication can motivate and persuade people. The theories in this category explore this interest from many different perspectives including Agenda-Setting Theory's (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 1997; Mccombs & Valenzuela, 2007), Rhetorical Theory's (Farrell, 1976; Webb, 2016) persuasion focus, Impression Management's (Adame & Bisel, 2019; Bromley, 1993) self-presentation tactics, and Motivating

Table 3.4 Meaning-Making and Discovery

Attribution Theory	Interaction Analysis
Constructivism	Open Communication and Teamwork
Coordinated Management of Meaning	Organizational Identification
Ethnomethodology and Ethnography	Politeness Theory
Expectancy Violations Theory	Sense-Making
Face Negotiation	Social Information Processing
Groupthink	Symbolic Interactionism

Table 3.5 Motivation and Persuasion

Agenda-Setting Theory	Interpersonal Deception Theory
Cognitive Dissonance	Motivating Language Theory
Communication Accommodation Theory	Regulatory Focus Theory
Dialogic Public Relations Theory	Rhetorical Theory
Dramaturgical Theory	Social Influence Theory
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Social Judgment Theory
Framing in Organizations	Theory of Reasoned Action
Impression Management	

Language's (Holmes & Parker, 2017; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018) leadership lens.

We have listed the theories of motivation and persuasion in Table 3.5.

Organizational Structures: Theories in this category try to answer questions about how organizational structures shape communication and how communication within an organization shapes organizational structures. Most of the theories in this category look at the processes as mutually influential—communication patterns create and shape structures, which then influence communication patterns. However, each of these theories takes a different approach to the processes and provides many insights into this area. Social Constructionism (Allen, 2005; Burr, 2015) offers a good start for understanding the basic ideas behind theories in the category.

You will find the theories that fall in this category in Table 3.6.

Reasons and Representations: Most theories in the other categories remain neutral about the purpose behind business communication research and rarely try to integrate business communication processes into

Table 3.6 Organizational Structures

Adaptive Structuration Theory	Social Constructionism
Enactment Theory	Social Context of Communication
Organizational Information Theory	Structuration Theory

Table 3.7 Reasons and Representations

Conversation Analysis	Functional Perspective on Group Decision-Making
Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations	Interpretive School of Communication, The
Dialogic Theory	Semantic Network
Discourse Analysis	Speech Acts Theory
English for Specific Purposes	Strategic Messaging

a single framework. In contrast, theories in this category bring these issues to the forefront. They examine how business communications operate as a unified system and what we should use this system to accomplish. Some theories—such as the Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations (Fuchs & Mosco, 2012; Hasian & Delgado, 1998)—answer these questions by highlighting ethical communication issues. Others, such as Conversation Analysis (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Hammersley, 2003), focus on what communication factors and methods researchers should use. Theories such as the Semantic Network model (Doerfel & Barnett, 1999; Jang & Barnett, 1994) give general modeling guidance for representing communication interchanges. The Strategic Messaging model (Fielden & Dulek, 1984, 1990) combines all of these perspectives and describes an entire communication system for achieving organizational results.

You will find the theories in this category listed in Table 3.7.

Conclusion

With these categories in mind, we can move on to presenting our theories' ratings. We will provide a background for the theory ratings and discuss what they mean for a better understanding of the theories and our field. We will then group the theories by their scores. Hopefully, this grouping will make it easier for the reader to understand the different research areas of business communication.

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CHAPTER 4

Theory Classification

If you can't give me poetry, can't you give me poetical science?
—Ada Lovelace

In addition to understanding what functional areas a theory belongs to, we also need to identify the role it plays in research. Understanding a theory's typology classification helps researchers grasp how they can apply a theory—what broader questions a theory attempts to address (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Yokochi, Masumoto, & Takai, 2000). However, we also need to know how researchers view a theory's utility. To address this issue, this chapter examines our theories' utilities in the areas of knowledge, application, scientific support, and importance.

Classifying the Theories

To classify the theories, we used each theory's score in four areas based on our judges' evaluations. These four areas were knowledge, application, scientific support, and importance. For knowledge, we asked each judge how well he or she understood a theory. If a judge did not know a theory at all, then that judge would skip rating the theory in the remaining areas. For the remaining areas, we asked the judges to rate a theory's usefulness for application to business communication (how relevant a theory was for

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_4

people in the workplace), how well research supported the theory, and how important the theory was to the business communication field.

We used the judges' ratings to classify the theories into four categories: notable, focused, major, and core. To categorize the theories, we first averaged all raters' theory scores for each theory across all four areas. We next classified the theories into high or low for an area based on a median split for each category. For example, the Knowledge score for Multimodality theory (Casado-Molina et al., in press; Kress, 2010) was 1.11 (below that area's median score) and so this theory was rated as low for knowledge of the theory—the judges had relatively less knowledge of this theory. However, the theory's score for Application was 2.83 (above the median score for that area) and so was rated high in that area—the judges who know the theory saw it as having a high utility in the application of business communication research.

We then used the following classification rules to categorize the theories: core theories were those rated highly (equal to or above the median score) in all four areas; major theories were rated highly in two or three areas; focused theories were rated highly in one area; and notable theories were the remaining theories. Even when theories received all low scores, we considered them as *notable* because they were prominent in multiple sources. In addition, while the notable theories scored lower than other theories, at least 10% of our judges had knowledge of these theories, and this percentage was higher than any theory nominated by the judges as additional theories. As such, we concluded that notable theories should still be considered as essential to our field.

Area Reinforcement and Incongruence

Examining where the four areas do and do not overlap gives us some interesting insights into our field. Figure 4.1 provides a diagram of the theories' overlaps among the different areas. With four areas (each having a classification of high or low), we have sixteen possible groups. Of those sixteen possible groups, we had twelve actual groups. (The diagram shows eleven of these realized groups since it does not show the empty set that contains theories rated as low in all areas.) While our conclusions must remain limited, we can draw some inferences from what we see and what it means for our field.

Before looking at the realized groups, it can help to examine the non-realized groups. First, we see that *Importance* is an empty set. As such,

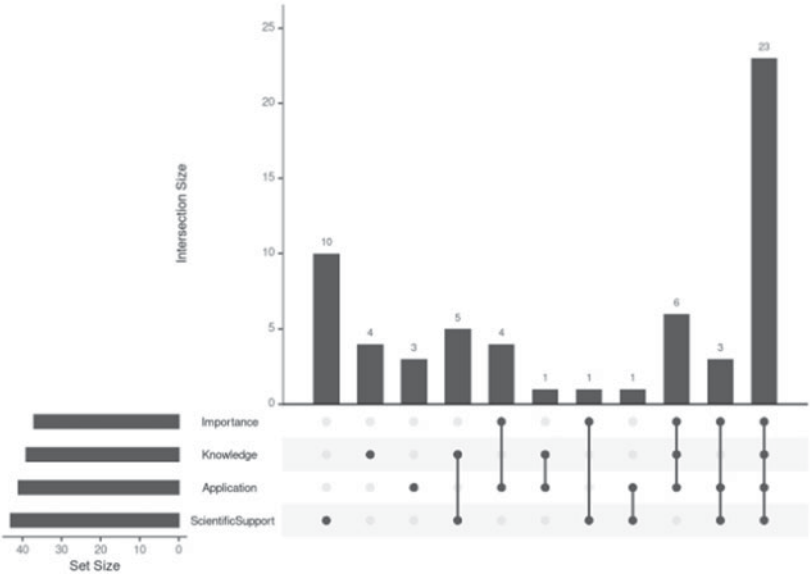

Fig. 4.1 A diagram of overlapping areas among the business communication theories

it appears that knowledgeable members of our field do not view theory as important without some underlying reason—that our field appreciates a theory's robustness rather than being driven by fashion. While fads can (and will) appear in our field, basing research on established theories can help improve the long-term utility of studies (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019; Miner, 2002).

A more ambiguous empty set comes from the (missing) intersection of knowledge and importance. We could interpret this void occurring as raters may not have spent much time learning about low importance theories or that they attributed their lack of knowledge to a theory's lack of importance. The first conclusion provides a positive view of our field—that as it develops, low importance theories will fade from our collective view—thus leaving us to concentrate on theories that provide greater value for our understanding of business communication (Argenti, 2017; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018). However, the second interpretation provides more of a cautionary tale. If researchers tend to dismiss theories they do not know much about, then our field may grow more narrow while new

and promising theories will have greater trouble in gaining traction (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017).

We also note that a set low in Importance but high in the other three areas remains empty. As such, it appears that being high in at least two areas will always create a belief in a theory's importance. Similarly, we see that no set exists with strong Scientific Support, Application, and Importance, but also with low Knowledge. This absence suggests that achieving high levels in the first three areas will drive a theory's widespread knowledge.

Core Theories

Core theories represent the best the field of business communication has to offer. These theories score high in all four ratings areas—they have strong scientific support, have high application utility for practice, are well known by academics in the field, and these same academics see the theories as important to the field. In short, these theories provide the strongest foundation for development in the field of business communication.

Table 4.1 presents the core theories and the typology areas that these theories came from. The classifications show theories from all classification areas. This cross-mix offers evidence of our field's diversity and lends support for all major areas seen in business communication research.

These theories also present a mix of purposes and include grand theories (such as Social Constructionism), theories that are training and pedagogy directed (such as Communication Apprehension and Communication Competence), organizational level theories (such as Diffusion of Innovations Theory), and individual focused theories (such as Organizational Identification and Politeness theories).

Table 4.2 shows the major theories—those rated highly in two or three areas. These theories tended to be application oriented with all but four of the theories being rated highly in that area. Also, only Speech Acts Theory might be considered a grand theory, with the rest being firmly middle-range theories (Bourgeois, 1979).

Table 4.3 presents the focused theories. These theories were rated highly in one area and represent a mix of different types of theories. The two major areas represented in this group were Knowledge and Scientific Support.

Finally, Table 4.4 presents the notable theories. These theories demonstrated enough use by researchers to be included in the list of essential

Table 4.1 Core Theories—those that scored highly across all four areas

Theory Name	*Classification*	*Know.*	*App.*	*Sci. Supp.*	*Imp.*
Communication Apprehension	Channels & Barriers	1.46	2.81	2.88	2.56
Communication Competence	Channels & Barriers	1.79	3.11	2.80	2.94
Conversation Analysis	Reasons & Representations	1.73	2.74	2.89	2.55
Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations	Reasons & Representations	1.42	2.88	2.85	2.92
Cultural Approach to Organizations	Cultural Characteristics & Influences	1.97	3.06	2.90	3.00
Diffusion of innovations Theory	Flows & Patterns	1.25	2.88	2.71	2.75
Discourse Analysis	Reasons & Representations	2.40	3.17	3.05	3.23
Ethnomethodology and Ethnography	Meaning-Making & Discovery	2.18	3.03	2.92	2.95
Face Negotiation	Meaning-Making & Discovery	1.73	2.93	2.79	2.76
Framing	Persuasion & Motivation	1.99	3.39	2.86	3.19
Groupthink	Meaning-Making & Discovery	2.12	2.89	2.79	2.95
Impression Management	Persuasion & Motivation	1.76	2.83	2.66	2.70
Interpretive School of Communication	Reasons & Representations	1.40	2.88	2.64	2.85
Narrative Theory	Cultural Characteristics & Influences	2.06	3.03	2.62	2.89
Organizational Identification	Meaning-Making & Discovery	1.59	3.04	3.00	3.04
Politeness Theory	Meaning-Making & Discovery	1.87	2.82	2.75	2.68
Rhetorical Theory	Persuasion & Motivation	2.18	3.05	2.75	2.92
Sense-Making	Meaning-Making & Discovery	1.99	3.21	2.83	3.12
Social Constructionism	Communication & Organizational Structures	2.50	2.93	2.67	2.81
Source Credibility	Channels & Barriers	1.25	2.86	2.65	2.68
Structuration Theory	Organizational Structures	1.80	2.78	2.70	2.78

(continued)

Table 4.1 (continued)

Theory Name	*Classification*	*Know.*	*App.*	*Sci. Supp.*	*Imp.*
Theory of Communication Networks	Flows & Patterns	1.66	3.03	3.03	2.97

theories, although their relative scores in the four areas were low. Also, several of the theories are more widely used outside of business communication (such as Media Naturalness) (Kock, Verville, & Garza, 2007) and Memetics (Brodie, 2011) or have business communication attributes, but do not have communication as a central focus of the theory—such as Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2011).

Table 4.5 presents summary statistics for the theory areas.

Each area was rated on a five-point scale from 0 (lowest) to 4 (highest). We present the survey question template below.

Theory Name

Were you aware of this theory before you were contacted about this survey? (Yes/No question with directions to move on to the next theory if the respondent answered no.)

How well do you know this theory?

How well can this theory be applied to business communication practice?

How scientifically supported is this theory?

How important is this theory to the field/study of business communication?

Conclusion

This chapter presented our theories, their ratings, and what rating classification they belong to. One interesting outcome from this analysis was discovering that the field's major theories come from all scholarly areas of business communication research. Similarly, the ratings infer that a theory only attains Importance when it scores highly in all other three ranking areas. As a result, it appears that our field has been moving towards identifying strong theories to serve as foundations for our research.

Table 4.2 Major Theories

Theory name	*Group*	*Know.*	*App.*	*Sci. Supp.*	*Imp.*
Enactment Theory	Application & Importance	0.94	2.88	2.45	2.59
Motivating Language Theory	Application & Importance	0.76	2.77	2.50	2.73
Multimodality	Application & Importance	1.11	2.83	2.61	2.86
Open Communication and Teamwork	Application & Importance	1.09	2.76	2.42	2.75
Strategic Messaging	Application & Importance	0.91	3.25	2.25	2.94
Adaptive Structuration Theory	Application, Scientific Support, & Importance	1.07	2.71	2.71	2.52
Employee Voice and Silence	Application, Scientific Support, & Importance	1.01	3.05	2.71	2.85
Organizational Information Theory	Application, Scientific Support, & Importance	0.93	2.80	2.68	2.70
Social Information Processing	Application, Scientific Support, & Importance	0.93	3.00	2.82	2.80
Coordinated Management of Meaning	Knowledge, Application, & Importance	1.16	2.77	2.56	2.59
English for Special Purposes	Knowledge, Application, & Importance	1.21	2.67	2.43	2.67
Functional Perspective on Group Decision-Making	Knowledge, Application, & Importance	1.17	2.88	2.48	2.67
High-Context vs Low-Context Culture	Knowledge, Application, & Importance	2.42	2.79	2.40	2.74
Media Richness Theory	Knowledge, Application, & Importance	1.85	3.00	2.57	2.89
Attribution Theory	Knowledge, & Scientific Support	1.71	2.59	2.75	2.47
Cognitive Dissonance	Knowledge, & Scientific Support	2.13	2.35	3.02	2.30
Speech Act Theory	Knowledge, & Scientific Support	2.23	2.49	2.63	2.42
Interpersonal Ties	Scientific Support, & Importance	0.74	2.53	2.64	2.53

Table 4.3 Focused Theories

Theory Name	*Group*	*Know.*	*App.*	*Sci. Supp.*	*Imp.*
Communication Pattern Theory	Application	1.03	2.74	2.25	2.45
Genderlect Theory	Application	0.70	2.79	2.25	2.50
Social Context of Communication	Application	0.94	2.85	2.56	2.50
Dialogic Public Relations Theory	Importance	0.67	2.64	2.45	2.64
Social Influence Theory	Importance	0.92	2.45	2.56	2.53
Agenda-Setting Theory	Knowledge	1.31	2.13	2.54	2.00
Actor-Network Theory	Knowledge	1.25	2.62	2.48	2.50
Communication and Accommodation Theory	Knowledge	1.39	2.53	2.61	2.39
Constructivism	Knowledge	1.74	2.35	2.46	2.28
Dialogic Theory	Knowledge	1.65	2.66	2.54	2.46
Dramaturgical Theory	Knowledge	1.35	2.44	2.21	2.36
Information Theories	Knowledge	2.11	2.05	2.33	1.93
Symbolic Interactionism	Knowledge	1.51	2.43	2.52	2.41
Uncertainty Reduction Initial Interaction Theory	Knowledge	1.22	2.26	2.27	2.30
Attraction Selection Attrition Framework	Scientific Support	0.36	2.29	2.67	2.29
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Scientific Support	1.13	2.57	2.65	2.33
Expectancy Violations Theory	Scientific Support	0.92	2.47	2.69	2.22
Interpersonal Deception Theory	Scientific Support	0.57	2.14	2.73	2.07
Regulatory Focus Theory	Scientific Support	0.16	2.33	3.00	2.33
Semantic Network	Scientific Support	0.93	2.32	2.72	2.23
Social Penetration Theory	Scientific Support	1.02	2.32	2.67	2.15
Speech Codes Theory	Scientific Support	0.94	2.37	2.62	2.00
Uses and Gratification Approach	Scientific Support	1.00	1.95	2.65	1.71

Table 4.4 Notable Theories

Theory Name	*Group*	*Know.*	*App.*	*Sci. Supp.*	*Imp.*
Activity Theory	Notable Theory	0.89	2.60	2.44	2.40
Business English as Lingua Franca	Notable Theory	1.09	2.38	2.47	2.38
Competing Values Framework	Notable Theory	0.99	2.38	2.33	2.36
Contagion Theory	Notable Theory	0.80	2.35	2.62	2.24
Homophily-Proximity Theories	Notable Theory	0.46	2.08	2.60	2.18
Interaction Analysis	Notable Theory	1.12	2.59	2.54	2.41
Media Naturalness	Notable Theory	0.26	2.17	2.33	2.17
Media Synchronicity Theory	Notable Theory	0.52	2.36	2.44	2.36
Memetics	Notable Theory	0.66	2.21	2.25	2.08
Rhetorical Sensitivity Model	Notable Theory	0.70	2.40	2.00	2.20
Social Judgment Theory	Notable Theory	1.00	2.33	2.29	2.36
Social Presence Theory	Notable Theory	0.91	2.45	2.21	2.35
Spiral of Silence	Notable Theory	0.64	2.12	2.42	2.14
Symbolic Convergence	Notable Theory	1.04	2.15	2.05	1.90
Theory of Reasoned Action	Notable Theory	0.98	2.28	2.44	2.22

Table 4.5 Summary statistics for each evaluation area

Area	*Minimum*	*1st Quartile*	*Median*	*Mean*	*3rd Quartile*	*Maximum*
Knowledge	0.20	1.17	1.43	1.61	2.16	3.13
Application	1.95	2.37	2.66	2.64	2.88	3.39
Scientific Support	2.00	2.45	2.62	2.59	2.73	3.05
Importance	1.71	2.31	2.51	2.53	2.78	3.23

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Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2019). The diffusion process of strategic motivating language: An examination of the internal organizational environment and emergent properties. *International Journal of Business Communication, 56*(3), 366–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416629093.

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CHAPTER 5

Channels and Barriers

Something there is that doesn't love a wall
—Robert Frost, Mending Wall

Chapter Theories

- Business English as a Lingua Franca
- Communication Apprehension
- Communication Competence
- Genderlect Theory
- Information Theories
- Media Naturalness
- Media Richness Theory
- Media Synchronicity Theory
- Multimodality
- Social Presence Theory
- Source Credibility
- Uncertainty Reduction/Initial Interaction Theory

We should value clear messages in any business communication. By clarity, we mean transparency, or "sharing [all] genuine information that is relevant to an employee's work in a timely manner" (J. Mayfield

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_5

& Mayfield, 2018c, p. 52). Transparency leads to increased engagement, workplace trust, organizational commitment, and perceived leader effectiveness (Holmes & Parker, 2017; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018c; Norman, Avolio, & Luthans, 2010). Just as important, clear business communication matters because it is ethical. We will discuss this impact in more detail later in this introduction.

Theories in this category reap the advantages of transparency by giving us the tools to understand and examine the barriers to clear communication and the channels through which communication (clear or not) travels. Plus, these same theories explore the bedrock requirements of communication—how to send a message. If a sender has no channel to send a message through or if barriers prevent someone from receiving the intended message's meaning, then no communication can occur. These theories also grow our awareness of how communication travels through diverse channels, how these channels affect a message's reception, and what barriers a message can encounter during transmission.

The earliest and one of the most influential theories in this category, information theory, comes from Shannon and Weaver (1963) Ironically, they did not develop their model for human communication. Instead, their conceptualization was designed to capture the transmission of information between machines and the criteria for trade-offs between the chance of making a successful information transmission and that transmission's cost.

However, Shannon and Weaver envisioned a broad enough model for adaptation by researchers to other communication applications—prominently including business communication. Yet the original roots and general nature of their information theory mean that scholars have taken very divergent paths in interpreting communication channels and barriers. Berger and Calabrese (1975) were some of the earliest researchers to add a human factor to Shannon and Weaver's work when they developed their theory of initial interaction/uncertainty reduction. These authors were interested in how people try to reduce ambiguity in initial interactions by seeking out information. This theory also made the receiver—not just the sender—an active participant in the communication process.

Despite initial interaction/uncertainty reduction's symmetry, most theories in this group still give the message sender a dominant role in the communication process. Such theories as communication apprehension, communication competence, and source credibility all afford the sender control over and responsibility for reducing communication barriers. In

contrast, Tannen's (1993, 2013) genderlect theory takes an expansive view by proposing that socialized gender roles will cause both parties to select and utilize different channels and react disparately to the same communication barrier. In brief, her theory asserts that the influence of communication channels and barriers emerges as the co-creation of multiple parties.

As you might imagine, much work has examined how discrete channels affect communication and what barriers arise from using these multiple channels. Media naturalness, media richness theory, media synchronicity theory, and multimodality theory all investigate how different communication methods influence the receiver's message perception and acceptance. Most research on these theories has found that the effect of channel choice diminishes as the receiver gains experience with a channel. This unexpected discovery points to training opportunities (and needs) to decrease communication barriers across various channel options (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 1995; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018b).

Scholars should also research the costs and benefits of clear communication. While we generally think of more transparent communication as always being worthwhile, such messages usually have a cost, and little work has examined the trade-offs (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012a). We need to tackle this issue to offer guidance on times when using richer channels merits the expected pay-offs over lower cost (if less effective) methods. For example, organizations can transmit parking permit information electronically, and such communications don't always require a time consuming, face-to-face meeting (Kock, Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton, & De La Garza, 2018; J. Mayfield et al., in press).

We will also profit by examining how theories in other categories complement those in the channels and barriers group. For example, theories in the *flows and patterns* category help us grasp how communication networks develop and transmit communication between parties, thus offering us a macro perspective of the evolution of and impacts from communication channels and barriers. Similarly, theories in the *organizational structures* and *cultural characteristics and influences* group enrich knowledge about how unique channels and barriers emerge in organizations and how existing structures inform or limit our channel choices. Also, a better understanding of the effects of channels and barriers lends us insight into how to more effectively implement theories in the *motivation and persuasion* category.

While theories in the channels and barriers category present an extensive and well-tested literature of communication channels and flows, a gap exists in the models that points to an ethical issue. These theories have an underlying assumption that people want to communicate information clearly (Fielden & Dulek, 1984; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a). We take issue with this assumption. Fuzzy business communication can arise for many reasons, some of which intersect. People may lack the training to communicate transparently or may be afraid to do so (Law, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2009; M. Mayfield, 2011). Unfortunately, some individuals or even organizations want to distort information to gain an advantage over the receiver. For instance, someone may present a credit card's benefits through multiple, low barrier channels, but the card's high-interest rates and stiff penalties only appear in a densely worded, jargon-filled text addendum. In such cases, the message may achieve its sender's purpose of increasing market share through selective communication distortions, but lack transparency and appropriate ethical standards (Buller & Burgoon, 1996; Burgoon & Buller, 2008).

We need extensions to existing channels and barriers theories that will address this ethical shortcoming. Theorists might fruitfully look to the fields of communication, organizational behavior, psychology, behavioral economics, neurobiology, or even what we generally know about deceptiveness and con artists. With this advocated progress, we can take steps to help people recognize and effectively deal with senders who use communication channels and barriers to exploit receivers.

Theory Descriptions: Channels and Barriers

Theory Name: Business English as Lingua Franca (BELF)
Brief Theory Description: BELF research examines how speakers of different native languages use English as a common business tongue (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2017; Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009). Researchers have largely developed this theory through observation, and work has focused on how model aspects operate in practice. Relatedly, scholars have often used this theory to help us understand how people with disparate native languages use English to communicate in business situations (Ehrenreich, 2010; Evans, 2013).

At its heart, this theory proposes that people need to have a common language with which to conduct business communications (M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Genestre, 2001; Patricia Pullin, 2010). Without a common

language, people cannot practice business (A. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, Genestre, & Marcu, 2000). English serves as the most frequently selected common language largely because so many people speak English as a second language. This widespread understanding of the language has come from both the historical dominance of the British empire and, in more recent times, the power of the USA in global business dealings (M. Kankaanranta & Salminen, 2013; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014).

In this way, BELF usage follows the adoption of other languages as a trade lingua franca (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2017; Takino, in press). A dominant culture's influence effort might impose its language on other groups in order to leverage its control, or other groups might adopt the language to improve their chances of fitting in with the dominant group (M. Kankaanranta & Salminen, 2013; Pullin, 2013). As more people incorporate the lingua franca into business, the pressure increases for even more groups to also adopt the language. In this way, we can view the process by which groups pick-up a given language as a macro-level operation of the Spiral of Silence theory (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997).

Research on BELF use has also emphasized the similarities between the adoption of English in global business with other historical trade languages (Babcock, 2013; Du-Babcock, 2009). However, BELF is quantitatively and qualitatively different from these prior trade language uses. People choose English far more than prior trade languages—since international trade has become much more common during the modern era (Evans, 2013; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b). Also, people who use English in these situations have a far greater chance of having received formal language training—either through standard academic settings or through commercial training programs. As a consequence, we see formal structures that promote the use of BELF that did not exist for prior languages (A. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; M. Kankaanranta & Salminen, 2013).

Research on this topic has uncovered some characteristics that seem to be common across BELF uses.

- The grammatical rules and communication norms for BELF use are heavily influenced by the reason for its adoption (e.g. business, travel).

- BELF communication norms are more heavily influenced by situational or functional circumstances than native-speaker norms.
- BELF users place a higher importance of using the language to achieve goals rather than being grammatically correct.
- BELF speakers will intersperse other—mutually known—languages when doing so will improve goal achievement.

Work on BELF has uncovered many interesting aspects of this practice. However, several future avenues exist for broadening our understanding of how this practice operates as a whole. One avenue we believe bears investigation comes from the supporting structures that drive the use of BELF. For such analysis, researchers may want to employ simulation models to better understand the forces that have lead to, support, and could—ultimately—diminish the dominance of English as the major business trade language (Epstein, 2006; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2013).

Similarly, the ethics and power dynamics of BELF deserve more study. While people may require adopting a common tongue for business interactions, selecting English in a given transaction will likely privilege those with a better command of the language (A. Kankaanranta & Louhiala-Salminen, 2010; A. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010). As a result, selecting English can provide unfair advantages that parties exploit in competitive situations. In the broader scope, organizations from English-speaking countries may use their language dominance to foster business control, and then exert this business power to continue the use of English as the dominant language (A. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Seidlhofer, 2010). Again, we would like to see more explorations of this topic, both from an ethical point of view and through examining the dynamics that might exist to promote the process.

Major Publications:

Davies, A. (1996). Ironising the myth of linguicism: Review article. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development, 17*(6), 485–496.

Firth, A. (1996). The discursive accomplishment of normality: On "lingua franca" English and conversation analysis. *Journal of Pragmatics, 26*(2), 237–259.

Firth, A. (2009). The lingua franca factor. *Intercultural Pragmatics, 6*(2), 147–170.

Major Associated Researchers: Bertha Du-Babcock, Anne Kankaanranta, Brigitte Planken, Barbara Seidlhofer, and Ulrike Pölzl

Theory Name: Communication Apprehension

Brief Theory Description: This theory examines why people experience anxiety or dread about communicating. Researchers have focused on both the personal traits and individual characteristics that lead to communication apprehension (Beatty & Pascual-Ferrá, 2015; Daly & McCroskey, 1975). For business outcomes, researchers have examined how communication apprehension influences people's workplace performance, engagement, and even career choices (Daly & McCroskey, 1975; Richmond & McCroskey, 1997). Most researchers in this area agree that communication apprehension poses serious problems for workplaces in that it degrades communications with people who suffer from this problem, and reduces overall organizational effectiveness and cohesion (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998; Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018).

You can divide research on this subject into three categories: mitigation methods, personal characteristics, and situations characteristics (Beatty & Pascual-Ferrá, 2015; McCroskey, 1982). Mitigation refers to studying methods by which people can reduce the effects of communication apprehension. Research on mitigation seems to dominate work on the theory since even studies focusing on personal or situational characteristics seem to assume that the end goal will weaken the effects of communication apprehension. Thus, researchers have found interventions for reducing communication apprehension, however, many of these methods apply to educational settings (McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne, 1989; Scott & Rockwell, 1997). As such, we would like to see more investigations done in business settings, either with applying methods that work in educational settings, or developing new methods.

Research on personal characteristics and communication apprehension has uncovered a variety of triggers (Gerritsen & Nickerson, 2009; Takino, in press). However, further fruitful avenues exist with examining the biological aspects of communication apprehension. Scholarship incorporating neurological and evolutionary factors could advance our understanding of this process. Similarly, we need more research on what structural aspects exist in organizations that promote or reduce communication apprehension (A. Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012b).

Contingency theories that incorporate these factors could also improve our understanding of the theory. We expect that, even though some people experience communication apprehension in all or most instances,

certain structural situations exist that increase or decrease their apprehension. As such, examining the interactions between personal and organizational influences can open up new avenues for how to design organizations to reduce communication apprehension.

Major Publications:

McCroskey, J. C. (1978). Validity of the PRCA as an index of oral communication apprehension. *Communication Monographs, 45*(3), 192–203.

McCroskey, J. C., Daly, J. A., & Sorensen, G. (1976). Personality correlates of communication apprehension: A research note. *Human Communication Research, 2*(4), 376–380.

Major Associated Researchers: James C. McCroskey

Theory Name: Communication Competence

Brief Theory Description: In some ways, communication competence acts as a complement to communication apprehension. Where communication apprehension investigates the stress someone feels from communication tasks, communication competence examines how well someone actually performs when they have to communicate (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Takino, in press). As partners, these two theories address different but related aspects of similar events. An interesting (and unexplored) line of research would look at how the two intersect. Such research might give us fresh insights about optimal levels for communication apprehension: perhaps people need a certain level of stress to craft the best communications.

The communication competence model examines how well someone can exchange information with others through oral, verbal, written, and nonverbal means—as well as the factors that influence such exchanges (Jablin & Sias, 2001; Westerman, Reno, & Heuett, 2018). Researchers usually measure the success of such exchanges by how well a communication goal (persuasion, data delivery, influencing an affective state, etc.) the person achieves while maintaining positive relationships related to future communication exchanges (Bostrom, 1984; Jablin & Sias, 2001). The theory is inherently a contingency model in that an individual's competence can differ depending on the message receiver, subject, or environmental setting. (Fielden and Dulek's strategic messaging theory (Fielden & Dulek, 1984, 1990) provides one of the few other business

communication theories that specifically addresses how communications influence long-term sender-receiver relationships.)

Researchers have developed and tested communication competence theory since the 1960s. However, we see an increasing attention to business settings starting in the 1980s (Krauss & Glucksberg, 1969; McCroskey, 1984). Research on this theory has employed a wide variety of assessment and analytic methods with converging results. Drawing from this evidence, we can have high confidence in the conclusions researchers have drawn about its phenomena. Findings from this body of work have resulted in an understanding of precursors to communication competence, outcomes associated with the focal construct, and cultural and environmental moderators.

Major Publications:

McCroskey, J. C. (1984). Communication competence: The elusive construct. In R. P. Bostrom (Ed.), *Competence in communication: A multidisciplinary approach* (pp. 259–268). Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

McCroskey, J. C., & McCroskey, L. L. (1988). Self-report as an approach to measuring communication competence. *Communication Research Reports, 5*(2), 108–113.

Major Associated Researchers: James C. McCroskey

Theory Name: Genderlect Theory

Brief Theory Description: Deborah Tannen first used the term *genderlect* to describe communication style differences between men and women (Tannen, 1993, 1994). The genderlect theory posits that gender-based communication differences arise from social conditioning. Simply put, the communication goals and methods used by men and women differ (Carolyn Peluso Atkins EdD, 1995; Loosemore & Galea, 2008). Men tend to use communication to establish status hierarchies, and women tend to use communication to achieve connections (Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016; Ray, 2016). Other differences include preferred conflict management methods, communication frequency, direction-giving methods, and turn-taking norms (Ayan, 2016; Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016). Thus, these differences can create conflicts in inter-gender communications, especially in business settings. However, the theory also posits that by understanding these diverse perspectives, and working to adapt to different gender communication styles, men and women can create better communication interchanges. Tannen has also suggested that researchers should

explore such interchanges using methods for examining cultural communication differences.

Major Publications:

Tannen, D. (2013). *You just don't understand*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.

Major Associated Researchers: Deborah Tannen

Theory Name: Information Theories (Shannon & Weaver Model of Communication)

Brief Theory Description: Originally developed as a model of electronic communication transmission, this theory was the first to provide a mathematical model of communication (Shannon & Weaver, 1963). This model defines communication as any procedure through which one entity can influence another (Cole, 1997; Krippendorff, 2009). Based on the theory's nature, these influences include a wide range of types: behavioral, emotional, or knowledge changes.

The general public probably knows this theory more than any other listed in the book, and it may be one of the best known social science theories. People have used the theory's graphical depiction (presented in Fig. 5.1) to represent communication in texts, presentations, and general

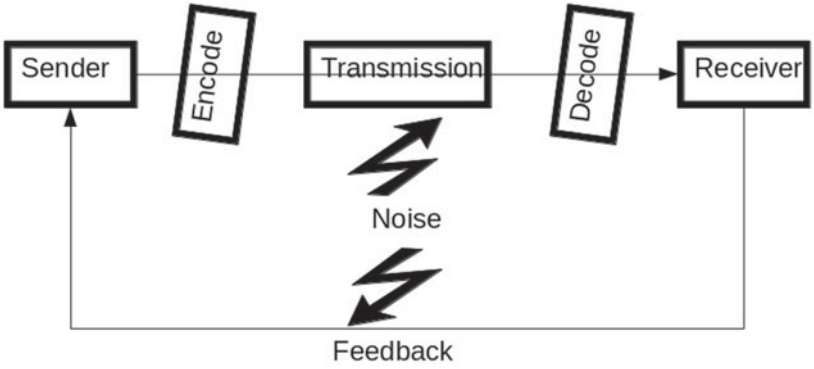

Fig. 5.1 Information Theories Model

press articles for decades. Yet, most of these presentations only focus on the theory's noise and feedback aspects.

The theory posits a communication process where a sender encodes information into a signal (using some form of language) and transmits the signal to a receiver who decodes the signal into information. The signal transmission process can reduce the message's information content by distorting the signal, and any such distortion source is called noise. The receiver can, in turn, provide feedback to the original sender on the message's transmission quality (or signal loss). The receiver can give this information intentionally (such as by repeating the message received), or through indirect means such a demonstrating a lack of message understanding (Krippendorff, 2009; Lynch, 1977). Since Shannon and Weaver initially developed the theory for electronic signals, researchers have done little to explore how noise and feedback operate on cognitive and emotional aspects of messages and noise.

Using this model, an outside observer can measure any communication's quality based on its efficiency and accuracy. We measure a message's efficiency based on how much information it transmits in a given time. We measure accuracy by how much effort a receiver needs to expend to decode the message. Shannon and Weaver also included the use of redundancy (sending multiple communication transmissions through one or more channels) as a means for increasing communication accuracy.

An interesting—but little explored—aspect to the theory comes from evaluating messages based on the amount of usable information it transmits. Even when an entity transmits a message perfectly, if the receiver gains no new information, no communication occurs. Most business communication researchers (and text authors) have overlooked this portion of the model as well as its quality and accuracy attributes (Gao, Darroch, Mather, & MacGregor, 2008; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b).

Major Publications:

Shannon, C. E., & Weaver, W. (1963). *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1st ed.). Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver

Theory Name: Media Naturalness (Psychobiological Model, Compensatory Adaptation Theory)

Brief Theory Description: Media Naturalness Theory provides an evolutionary/biologically based framework for understanding why different media channels (written text, video recording, face-to-face, etc.) have

greater or less effectiveness for different communication messages (Kock, 2004, 2005). The theory posits that evolutionary factors favor face-to-face communications and that other communication channels pose greater communication barriers because the receiver must expend more effort to decode the message. The theory proposes that the less a communication channel is like face-to-face interactions, the more effort a receiver must expend to understand the communication. Going further, the theory also posits that individuals will overcome these barriers through compensatory adaptation behaviors if they communicate through electronic or mediated communication channels for extended periods of time. In these cases, people will exert similar efforts in both face-to-face communication and communication using the mediated channel.

While this theory has similarities to Daft and Lengel's media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1986), media naturalness draws from Darwin's evolutionary theory (Kock, 2004, 2005). Thus media naturalness has a strong grounding in a well-developed theory, and that foundation provides a rich field for expansion (Illies, Arvey, & Bouchard, 2006; Kock, 2002).

Researchers have tested this theory in multiple settings including leadership, education, and information system contexts (DeRosa, Hantula, Kock, & D'Arcy, 2004; Kock, Verville, & Garza, 2007). Methodologically, researchers have examined the model's validity through experimental design—providing evidence of causality—and self-response methods—providing a more accessible path to conduct research on this model.

Major Publications:

Kock, N. (2004). The psychobiological model: Towards a new theory of computer-mediated communication based on Darwinian evolution. *Organization Science, 15*(3), 327–348.

Kock, N. (2005). Compensatory adaptation to media obstacles: An experimental study of process redesign dyads. *Information Resources Management Journal, 18*(2), 41.

Kock, N., Verville, J., & Garza, V. (2007). Media naturalness and online learning: Findings supporting both the significant-and no-significant-difference perspectives. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovative Education, 5*(2), 333–355.

Major Associated Researchers: Ned Kock

Theory Name: Media Richness Theory

Brief Theory Description: This theory provides a model for examining the effectiveness of different communication channels (media) for transmitting different types of message (Armengol, Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2017; Sun & Cheng, 2007). The theory has an underlying assumption that organizations and organizational members use communication to reduce uncertainty about expected behavioral outcomes. In the theory's original form, Daft and Lengel stated that you can classify all media by examining the following: natural language use; feedback speed and potential; capacity to transmit multiple information types; and the medium's focus (individual to mass).

The poorest media can only transmit limited contextual information—a bare minimum of information content. An example of such media is a symbolic road sign such as a child crossing alert. Written communication provides more contextual cues than a road sign in that someone can use written language to provide more nuances about the intended message, but written communication still provides a relatively limited amount of information (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a). Audio and visual transmissions can provide even richer content, and face-to-face, individual interactions provide the richest medium (Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Daft & Lengel, 1986). Not explored in the original model, recent technological advances can include even more information content: using certain available platforms (e.g. tablets, smart phones, and online meeting software), people can provide face-to-face interactions combined with such extra communications as as graphics and text.

The model proposes that the richer the medium, the greater its potential for resolving communication ambiguity (Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 1999; Dennis & Kinney, 1998). However, not all messages require this richness, and generally, richer communication channels require more effort or resource allocation (El-Shinnawy & Markus, 1997; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). As such, individuals must base media selection on the message sender's goal and context of the message (Dulek & Campbell, 2015; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a). Finally, Daft and Lengel found that people's ability to decode information from a given channel increased over time, thus reducing some of the negative effects of using poorer channels (Dennis & Kinney, 1998; Trevino, Lengel, & Daft, 1987).

Major Publications:

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1984). Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. In *Research*

in Organizational Behavior (Vol. 10, pp. 191–233). Homewood, IL: JAI Press.

Daft, R. L., & Lengel, R. H. (1986). Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Science, 32*(5), 554–571.

Daft, R. L., Lengel, R. H., & Trevino, L. K. (1987). Message equivocality, media selection, and manager performance: Implications for information systems. *MIS Quarterly, 11*(3), 355–366.

Lengel, R. H., & Daft, R. L. (1989). The selection of communication media as an executive skill. *The Academy of Management Executive, 2*(3), 225–232.

Trevino, L. K., Lengel, R. H., & Daft, R. L. (1987). Media symbolism, media richness, and media choice in organizations a symbolic interactionist perspective. *Communication Research, 14*(5), 553–574.

Major Associated Researchers: Linda K. Trevino, R. K. Lengel, and R. L. Daft

Theory: Media Synchronicity Theory (MST)

Brief Theory Description: MST provides a framework for examining the suitability of different communication channels for achieving successful communication interchanges—especially interchanges needed for collaborations (Berry, 2006; Dennis, Valacich, Speier, & Morris, 1998). Using the MST framework, you can classify all communication into two different processes: conveyance and convergence. The conveyance process involves a sender transmitting information new to a receiver, the receiver then decoding this information, and the receiver creating or updating existing mental models from this decoded information. The convergence process involves two or more individuals mutually agreeing (or failing to agree) on the *meaning* of communicated information (DeLuca & Valacich, 2005; Dennis, Fuller, & Valacich, 2008).

The conveyance processes require time for a receiver to decode and process the information. To properly decode this information, people need low synchronicity channels: those not requiring rapid mutual communication exchanges. The greater time given by these low synchronicity channels lets the receiver decode and comprehend the message. In contrast, convergence processes—because they rely on collaboration in the co-creation of meaning—require high synchronicity channels: those that allow rapid mutual communication exchanges (Dennis et al., 1998, 2008).

You can determine a media's synchronicity by examining five different channel characteristics: transmission velocity (how rapidly a message travels from sender to receiver); symbols sets (the number of different ways someone can encode a message); parallelism (how many different types of communication you can simultaneously transmit through a channel); rehearseability (how much someone can target and adapt a message to a receiver or purpose before transmission); and reprocessability (how much a receiver can access a message after its initial transmission).

Increases in transmission velocity and symbol sets will increase synchronicity. Increases in parallelism, rehearsability and reprocessability, will decrease synchronicity. You enhance performance through the use of channels with appropriate synchronicity properties, or (when possible) by using multiple channels with different synchronicity properties.

Major Publications:

Dennis, A. R., Valacich, J. S., Speier, C., & Morris, M. G. (1998). Beyond media richness: An empirical test of media synchronicity theory. In *Proceedings of the Thirty-First Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (Vol. 1, pp. 48–57). Kohala Coast, HI: IEEE.

Major Associated Researchers: A. R. Dennis, R. M. Fuller, J. S. Valacich, J. R. Carlson, and J. F. George.

Theory Name: Multimodality

Brief Theory Description: Multimodality provides a broad ranging theory that examines the evolution and effects of multiple communication methods (Jewitt, Bezemer, & O'Halloran, 2016; Loncke, Campbell, England, & Haley, 2006). The term multimodality refers to either using more than one medium (such as text *and* images) in communication or the same communication form in multiple contexts. Regarding affective propositions, the theory posits that multimodal communications will increase recipient arousal and comprehension (Elleström, 2010; Hull & Nelson, 2005). Organizational applications of this theory include examining multimedia presentations, advertising methods, and corporate training and education programs (Garzone, Poncini, & Catenaccio, 2007; Iedema, 2003). Another important aspect of this theory for organizational communication comes from its proposition that message recipients must learn the different communication modes. While recipients may already understand certain modes (such as written text), these same recipients must learn new modes (such as emoticons/emojis or field-specific

jargon) before the modes will be useful (G. Kress, 2000; G. R. Kress, 2007).

Major Publications:

Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Kress, G. R., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Major Associated Researchers: Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen

Theory Name: Social Presence Theory

Brief Theory Description: Social presence theory models the effect of an individual's awareness of someone's involvement (the sender's presence) in a communication interchange (Biocca, Burgoon, Harms, & Stoner, 2001, Biocca, Harms, & Burgoon, 2003). In other words, during a communication a receiver may either have a strong awareness of someone actively sending a communication or may not think about the person who sent the message (Biocca & Harms, 2002; Cui, Lockee, & Meng, 2013). The theory rates a sender's presence from high (in the case of a face-to-face conversation) to low (in the case of a person reading a print advertisement). The second important factor in this theory comes from the appropriateness of the sender's presence. This aspect measures how appropriate or desirable it is for someone to be aware of another person's presence in a communication interchange (Dunlap & Lowenthal, 2009; Keil & Johnson, 2002). In a discussion about how a new hire can contribute to a workplace, you would normally want high presence levels since all parties should have an awareness of the other as an active conversation participant. However, in a product placement appearing in a movie, you would not want the audience to think of someone purposefully crafting the advertising message.

While a higher presence awareness usually leads to more engagement in communication interchanges, such high presence is not always desirable (Rettie, 2003; Tu & McIsaac, 2002). For example, online brainstorming session may be more effective because participants have a low awareness of other members. This lack of awareness can reduce social status cues that would normally inhibit idea generation (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Swan & Shih, 2005). In more recent years, researchers have applied this theory to better understanding online communication and training processes.

Major Publications:

Short, J., Williams, E., & Christie, B. (1976). *The social psychology of telecommunications*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Major Associated Researchers: John Short, Ederyn Williams, and Bruce Christie

Theory Name: Source Credibility

Brief Theory Description: One can arguably trace source credibility back to Aristotle's theory of persuasion effectiveness (the presence of logos-logic, pathos-emotion, and ethos-credibility). Even its modern incarnation began in the mid-twentieth century (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; McCroskey & Young, 1981). In essence, this theory examines how much an audience accepts a communicator's message. Source credibility examines both the factors that influence the audiences acceptance and the effects of this acceptance.

Throughout its decades of existence, researchers have expanded on the theory for modern business communication research (Bochner & Insko, 1966; Westerman et al., 2018). Researchers have done so by adding dimensions which account for a message sender's perceived credibility, competence, character, sociability, composure, and extroversion (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Westerman et al., 2018). Research has found that sociability, competence, character, and credibility were the most influential of these factors (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994; McCroskey & Young, 1981).

Researchers have added an extra dimension to the theory by proposing that we should consider two credibility types: surface and terminal (Fogg et al., 2001; Jones, Sinclair, & Courneya, 2003). Surface credibility captures a source's initial credibility—how trustworthy someone judges a message sender from first impressions. Terminal credibility captures trustworthiness after transmission completion. Similarly, researchers have examined the theory in situations with non-human message senders. These situations occur when messages come from entities without apparent human actors—such as web pages or advertising campaigns (Pornpitakpan, 2004; Tseng & Fogg, 1999).

Major Publications:

Hovland, C. I., & Weiss, W. (1951). The influence of source credibility on communication effectiveness. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 15*(4), 635–650.

Pornpitakpan, C. (2004). The persuasiveness of source credibility: A critical review of five decades' evidence. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 34*(2), 243–281.

Major Associated Researchers: J. McCroskey, B. Fogg

Theory Name: Uncertainty Reduction/Initial Interaction Theory

Brief Theory Description: This theory arose as an offshoot of C. Shannon's and W. Weaver's information theory. Information theory predicts that a message sender can reduce ambiguity in initial interactions by limiting choices and repeating messages (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gudykunst, 1983). Expanding this line of research, information reduction/initial interaction theory explains how communication decreases uncertainty between people who do not know each other before their first conversational encounter (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1984). The theory asserts that communication acts to dispel ambiguity in initial interactions between strangers (Dockery & Steiner, 1990; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a).

According to the theory, people operate with two classes of uncertainty: cognitive (relating to attitudes and beliefs) and behavioral (relating to behavioral appropriateness). These uncertainties can lead to power differentials with those having less uncertainty having greater power than those with more uncertainty. Similarly, when no agreed upon norms exist, participants may engage in sense-making communication to create such norms (Bradac, 2001; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018b).

Research has identified several factors that influence the uncertainty reduction/initial interaction process. People can seek to reduce uncertainty by obtaining information before the scheduled meeting. For example, someone may read about business etiquette expectations in France before an international trade conference. Studies have also shown that certainty increases with people's similarity, shared social networks, and information repetition. Most importantly for business communication research, studies have shown that increased verbal exchange between parties substantially reduces uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Sunnafrank, 1986).

Evolution of this theory has included cross-cultural and computer-mediated applications, in-group identification, as well as the job hiring process. Michael W. Kramer has drawn upon information reduction/initial interaction theory to create the motivation to reduce uncertainty model, which predicts that variance in a person's motivation to diminish ambiguity will translate into her or his communication actions.

Major Publications:

Antheunis, M. L., Schouten, A. P., Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2012). Interactive uncertainty reduction strategies and verbal affection in computer-mediated communication. *Communication Research, 39*(6), 757–780.

Berger, C. R., & Calabrese, R. J. (1975). Some explorations in initial interaction and beyond: Toward a developmental theory of interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 1*(2), 99–112.

Kramer, M. W. (1999). Motivation to reduce uncertainty. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *13*(2), 305–316.

Major Associated Researchers: C. Berger and R. Calabrese, M. Marjolijn, K. Kellerman and R. Reynolds, M. Kramer

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Babcock, B. D. (2013). English as Business Lingua Franca: A comparative analysis of communication behavior and strategies in Asian and European contexts. *Ibérica: Revista de La Asociación Europea de Lenguas Para Fines Específicos (AELFE)*, *26*, 99–130.

Beatty, M. J., McCroskey, J. C., & Heisel, A. D. (1998). Communication apprehension as temperamental expression: A communibiological paradigm. *Communications Monographs, 65*(3), 197–219. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759809376448.

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CHAPTER 6

Cultural Characteristics and Influences

The Empress seem'd well satisfied with all those answers, and enquired further, Whether there was no Art used by those Creatures that live within the Earth?
Yes, answered they: for the several parts of the Earth do join and assist each other in composition or framing of such or such particulars; and many times, there are factions and divisions; which cause productions of mixt Species …
—The Description of a New World, Called The Blazing-World, Margaret Cavendish

Chapter Theories

- Activity Theory
- Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework
- Competing Values Framework
- Cultural Approach to Organizations
- Employee Voice and Silence
- High-Context vs. Low-Context Culture
- Memetics
- Narrative Theory
- Speech Codes Theory
- Symbolic Convergence Theory

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_6

Overview

Organizational culture and business communication have an intertwined, dynamic relationship. Communication constructs and transmits culture while culture molds most organizational communications. Theories in this group guide us to interpret how this interdependence unfolds. Organizations must comprehend and learn from their cultural communications, yet often neglect to do so (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014, 2019). Why is prioritizing cultural communication so vital? Cultural communication has a tremendous impact on organizations and their stakeholders since it influences such important outcomes as performance, turnover, employee well-being, and ethical behaviors (Robbins & Judge, 2014; Schein, 2016). Plus, a deep understanding of the associated communication processes also gives organizations requisite tools to modify cultures when environments or performance call for change (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012, 2018). These theories also form the basis for cultural communication audits which give managers the ability to grasp how norms are rooted and evolve in an organization.

While definitions of organizational culture abound, we broadly establish its meaning as a generally shared set of norms, beliefs, values, and behavioral patterns (Dixon & Dougherty, 2009; Walker & Aritz, 2015). Furthermore, organizational culture runs deep (especially in its values) and finds expression both verbally and nonverbally through artifacts, symbols, and rituals (Schein, 2016). In this conceptualization, communication both represents an attribute and offers a means for shaping organizational culture (Alvesson, 2011; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012a). The *cultural approach to organizations* asserts the strongest statement about how cultures (and cultural communication) influence organizations—going so far as to say that researchers should place culture at the heart of any organizational study (Geertz & Pacanowsky, 1988). Schneider's *attraction-selection-attrition theory* (Chatman, Wong, & Joyce, 2008; Schneider, Smith, & Goldstein, 2000) provides a commendable model of how researchers can do so by examining the dynamics by which people form, reinforce, and (to a lesser extent) alter a culture. Other theories that construct similar frameworks include *activity theory* (Corman & Scott, 1994), *employee voice and silence (*Ashford, Sutcliffe, & Christianson, 2009*)*, *narrative theory* (Currie, 2010), *speech codes theory* (Philipsen, Coutu, & Covarrubias, 2005), and *spiral of silence* (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). S*ymbolic convergence theory* (Bormann, 1982) similarly

contributes a feasible model of how cultures emerge and change. Yet even though these theories paint rich insights into the communication-culture partnership, we can add more perspectives to the picture.

Case in point, few theories give premises that scholars can easily test and which managers can implement. Previously noted models (such as attraction-selection-attrition and spiral of silence) tend to focus on narrow aspects of culture creation and effect. And more encompassing theories (such as narrative theory and symbolic convergence theory) do not readily lend themselves to generalizability testing or inferences for practical applications. While such issues seem endemic to cultural analysis (Alvesson, 2011), researchers need to tackle these challenges.

Developing typologies forges progress. Hall (E. T. Hall, 1977; E. Hall & Trager, 1954) famously created a typology for national cultures (*high-context vs. low-context culture*) which has also been applied at the organizational level of analysis. This categorization remains the most widely known communication cultural typology. As a complement, the *competing values framework* describes an organizational culture classification scheme that scholars have adapted to communication research (J. Mayfield et al., in press; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). However, much space remains for motivated researchers to develop organizational communication focused typologies. Such models should emphasize discovery and identification of key communication dimensions in organizational culture and how these facets impact such important organizational and stakeholder outcomes as performance, absenteeism, turnover, engagement, ethical behavior, and work climate.

Researchers may also want to design models which capture how communication influences cultural change over time. *Memetics* (Blute, 2005), *narrative theory*, and *symbolic convergence theory* all give building blocks for such work, describing frameworks where people transmit ideas, adopt more useful/popular ideas, discard less useful/popular ideas, and depicting how these ideas mutate through the transmission process. Examining how these transmissions lead to cultures—and how cultures determine an initiative's acceptance—can give us rich insights about the temporal growth and adaptation of cultures and their communications. These frameworks could prove especially astute for understanding how cultures react and adapt to system shocks that render organizations ineffective in a dynamic environment.

Scholars also need to investigate cultural communication from the standpoint of subcultures and cultural outsiders (Ma, Mayfield, &

Mayfield, 2018; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012b). While we often consider organizational cultures having a monolithic unity, most organizations have subgroup members and outcasts whose voices remain stifled and cannot fully participate in the cultural conversation. Meaningful work will discover how to include such voices in cultural dialogues and evaluate the influences that these isolated speech communities have on organizations. Also important, we will benefit from more critical thinking about the ethics of strong cultures. When do organizations have the right to indoctrinate members into a culture and where do we need to draw boundaries about such activities? Should the cultural party line be fully adopted?

Cross-pollination with theories in other categories from our survey may give fresh insights into these ethical boundaries, help us to better model culture/subculture interactions, and improve our grasp of their intersection with cultural communications. Theories in the *channels and barriers* category can provide innovative knowledge as to the paths that cultural communications travel and what factors block these messages. Congruently, both *organizational structures* and *flows and patterns* contribute theories about the mechanisms through which cultural communications flow—thus giving us new awareness about how managers can influence cultures.

Theory Descriptions: Cultural Characteristics and Influences

Theory Name: Activity Theory (AT, Scandinavian Activity Theory)
Brief Theory Description: Activity Theory is a grand theory initially developed in the USSR (Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1998; Engeström, 2000). It set out a general framework for understanding an individual's mental capabilities. However, the theory also posits that to understand an individual, one must also comprehend the cultural and technological influences on that individual (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999). The theory was refined and elaborated by Scandinavian researchers, and this elaboration is known as Scandinavian Activity Theory (Kaptelinin, 1996; Kuutti, 1996). While the theory does not provide specific testable propositions, it does articulate specific aspects of the socio-technological process that should be examined. These aspects include: objects (physical objects in the system that hold a social or cultural influences); internalization (mental processes);

community (social context); tools (artifacts and concepts used by the individuals); division of labor (status, hierarchy, and specific tasks performed by the individuals); and rules (for guiding and regulating individual behaviors).

Major Publications:

Leontyev, A. N. (1959). *Problems in the development of the mind* (1st ed.). Moscow: Progress Publishers.

Leontyev, A. N. (2009). *The development of the mind: Selected works of Aleksei Nikolaevich Leontyev* (1st ed.). Pacifica, CA: Marxists Internet Archive.

Major Associated Researchers: Aleksei N. Leontyev, Sergei Rubinstein, and Lev Vygotsky

Theory Name: Attraction-Selection-Attrition Framework (ASA)

Brief Theory Description: The ASA framework asserts that organizational behavior fundamentally derives from the individuals in an organization and their interactions—not organizational environment, technologies, or structures (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Wright & Christensen, 2010). In brief, the theory holds that people are attracted to join a given organization based on how well they perceive the organization will match their own needs and interests; individuals are then selected to join an organization based on how well those making selection decisions believe the person will match organizational needs (Denton, 1999; Wright & Christensen, 2010). People will leave or be forced to leave (attrition) when at least one of the parties find that there is no longer a match between mutual needs and attributes.

While not originally a communication theory, this framework has many business communication attributes. The emergence of the organizational framework is based on individual communications which generates and reinforces organizational culture. In turn, culture plays a large role in the attraction-selection-attrition fitting process. Also, ASA provides a focus for examining the impression management process (both from an individual and an organization) to enhance the chances of being selected by an organization for membership and of attracting new members.

Major Publications:

Bretz, R. D., Ash, R. A., & Dreher, G. F. (1989). Do people make the place? An examination of the attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis. *Personnel Psychology, 42*(3), 561–581.

Schneider, B. (1987). The people make the place. *Personnel Psychology*, *40*(3), 437–453.

Schneider, B., Goldstein, H. W., & Smith, D. B. (1995). The ASA framework: An update. *Personnel Psychology*, *48*(4), 747–773.

Major Associated Researcher: R. D. Bretz, Benjamin Schneider

Theory Name: Competing Values Framework (CVF)

Brief Theory Description: CVF is an organizational culture model (Berrio, 2003; Dipadova & Faerman, 1993). The typology was developed from a set of empirical investigations by Quinn and Rohrbaugh on organizational effectiveness, and how such effectiveness is viewed within an organization (Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983; Rohrbaugh, 1981). This cultural model classifies organizations along two axes: stability-flexibility and internal-external focus. These two axes create four different organizational cultures (Al-Khalifa & Aspinwall, 2001; Berrio, 2003): hierarchy (stability with an internal focus), clan (flexibility with an internal focus), market (stability with an external focus), and adhocracy (flexibility with an external focus). As with most cultural typologies, it is expected that the culture is developed and then maintained through extended communication exchanges between organizational members. The theory also posits that communication flows are determined by an organization's cultural type (Quinn, Hildebrandt, Rogers, & Thompson, 1991; Stevens, 1996). Additionally, this theory examines the sense-making role that organizational culture plays for organizational members (Dastmalchian, Lee, & Ng, 2000; Quinn et al., 1991).

Major Publications:

Cameron, K. S., & Quinn, R. E. (2011). *Diagnosing and changing organizational culture: Based on the competing values framework*. John Wiley & Sons.

Hooijberg, R. (1996). A multidirectional approach toward leadership: An extension of the concept of behavioral complexity. *Human Relations, 49*(7), 917–946.

O'Neill, R. M., & Quinn, R. E. (1993). Editors' note: Applications of the competing values framework. *Human Resource Management, 32*(1), 1–7.

Quinn, R. E., & Rohrbaugh, J. (1983). A spatial model of effectiveness criteria: Towards a competing values approach to organizational analysis. *Management Science, 29*(3), 363–377.

Quinn, R. E. (1991). *Beyond rational management: Mastering the paradoxes and competing demands of high performance*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Major Associated Researchers: K. S. Cameron, R. E. Quinn, Priscilla Rogers

Theory Name: Cultural Approach to Organizations

Brief Theory Description: The cultural approach to organizations posits that organizations develop unique cultures based on the interchange and creation of shared meaning among members (Geertz & Pacanowsky, 1988; Griffin, 2006). Additionally, for examining organizational actions, understanding this unique culture is at least as important as is understanding the organization's formal processes (systems). The organizational culture shapes the meaning that organizational members attribute to events (such as pay increases or layoffs) and objects (such as new furniture or corner offices) within the organization.

The culture is formed through the organization's image, climate (employee perceptions of the work environment), and character (Geertz & Pacanowsky, 1988; Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-rujillo, 1983). This culture is transmitted through stories: corporate, personal, and collegial. Corporate stories are generated by managers and generally consist of stories intended to direct member behavior into organizationally acceptable ways. Personal stories are those told by an individual about her or himself—a presentation of the person's role within an organization and relative status or relationship to the listener. Finally, collegial stories consist of those that an individual tells about another person in the organization. These stories can also be used to either define positive or negative behavior or to promote status relationships within an organization.

Major Publications:

Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Pacanowsky, M. E., & O'Donnell Trujillo, N. (1983). Organizational communication as cultural performance. *Communication Monographs, 50*(2), 126–147.

Major Associated Researchers: C. Geertz, M. E. Panowsky, Linda Putnam, Mitch Popper, and Anne Witte

Theory Name: Employee Voice and Silence

Brief Theory Description: Employee voice can be defined as employee messages (usually sent in an upward direction) which express input on

organizationally relevant issues, including—but not limited to—problem identification and suggestions for improvement (Ashford et al., 2009; Brinsfield, Edwards, & Greenberg, 2009). This construct can be informal or formal, the latter occurring through established processes such as employee suggestion programs, union governance, and fraud hot-lines. Constructive exercise of employee voice is viewed by some researchers (notably Van Dyne and LePine) as organizational citizenship behavior, a genre of extra-role performance (Creed, 2003; Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003).

The opposite of employee voice is silence which can be defined as both non-consciously and deliberately refusing to send messages (generally in an upward direction) about organizationally relevant issues, including—but not limited to—problem identification and suggestions for improvement (J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Walker, 2018; Morrison, 2014). Research shows that at times deliberately not sharing salient information can be harmful to key organizational outcomes. On the other hand, constructive employee voice communication has been positively linked by research to desirable multi-level outcomes including work group and organizational performance.

Major Publications:

Detert, J. R., & Burris, E. R. (2007). Leadership behavior and employee voice: Is the door really open? *Academy of Management Journal, 50*(4), 869–884.

Morrison, E. W. (2014). Employee voice and silence. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 1*(1), 173–197.

Whiting, S. W., Podsakoff, P. M., & Pierce, J. R. (2008). Effects of task performance, helping, voice, and organizational loyalty on performance appraisal ratings. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*(1), 125.

Major Associated Researchers: James R. Detert; Elizabeth Morrison, Linn Van Dyne & Jeffrey LePine

Theory Name: High-context vs. Low-context Culture

Brief Theory Description: This theory is a cultural typology that classifies groups as to their routine use of high-context (requiring a cultural understanding to decode a message's full meaning) or low-context (requiring no cultural understanding to decode a message's full meaning) communications (Gudykunst, 1983; Jean-Claude Usunier & Nicolas Roulin, 2010). While it was originally developed as a means to

classify national cultures, it can also be applied to other cultural groups. While cultures are usually discussed as being high *or* low context, it is a better description to say that cultures fall along a spectrum that ranges *from* high *to* low context (Kittler, Rygl, & Mackinnon, 2011; Korac-Kakabadse, Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, & Savery, 2001). Because higher context cultures rely on cultural understanding to provide meaning to the explicit statements within a communication, members of such cultures can create highly nuanced interchanges with relatively brief explicit messages. However, because a cultural awareness is needed, such communications can be difficult or impossible to grasp by individuals without an appropriate cultural initiation. Lower context cultures, in contrast, require more explicit information to be exchanged in communications, but such communications are relatively straightforward to decode by outsiders. There is also a relationship between cultural type and the way cultural members react to outsiders, each other, and violations of cultural rules. At present, investigation is ongoing to discover how such processes arise and influence the culture itself (Chua & Gudykunst, 1987; Kim, Pan, & Park, 1998).

Major Publications:

Hall, E. T. (1977). *Beyond culture*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.

Ward, A.-K., Ravlin, E. C., Klaas, B. S., Ployhart, R. E., & Buchan, N. R. (2016). When do high-context communicators speak up? Exploring contextual communication orientation and employee voice. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 101*(10), 1498–1511.

Major Associated Researchers: Edward T. Hall, Shoji *Nishimura, Anne Nevgi, Seppo Tella*

Theory Name: Memetics (Meme Theory)

Brief Theory Description: Meme theory is a framework for how ideas are communicated, shared beliefs develop, and culture is created (Brodie, 2011; Edmonds, 2002). This theory draws its metaphor from genes and the theory of evolution. A meme is defined as being the smallest idea that can be transmitted from one person to another and then imitated by the person that is exposed to the idea (Blute, 2005; Marsden, 2000). Memetics defines a successful meme as being one that is transmitted more widely and retained longer than other memes. Longer lasting memes then create a culture (Marsden, 1998; Speel, 1995). Memes are said to mutate through transmission or reception errors (when a person does not understand the meme in the way it was originally conceived), or when two or

more memes are combined to create a new meme. These new memes are then subjected to competitive pressures and may become more successful than the original meme(s). A meme may thrive in part by helping individuals who adopt the meme live longer (thus providing the person more time to transmit the meme), making an individual more successful in transmitting the meme, and/or making the person more active in meme transmission (Edmonds, 2002; Price, 1995).

In business communication, the idea of memes has largely been used to examine marketing and public relations operations.

Major Publications:

Blackmore, S. (2000). *The meme machine* (New ed.). Oxford University Press, USA.

Brodie, R. (2011). *Virus of the mind: The new science of the meme* (Reissue ed.). Carlsbad, CA: Hay House.

Dawkins, R. (2006). *The selfish gene* (30th Anniversary ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Lynch, A. (1998). *Thought contagion*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

***Major Associated Researchers**: Susan Blackmore, Richard Brodie, Richard Dawkins, Aaron Lynch*

Theory Name: Narrative Theory

Brief Theory Description: Narratology is a grand theory that examines communications through a lens of stories and folktales (Bal, 2009; Currie, 2010). This theory's underlying premise is that commonly told and repeated stories and story structures are both a reflection of social communications and of the interactions. These messages resonate sufficiently with people to shape their interactions and to provide meaningful metaphors for understanding these exchanges (Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, & Warhol, 2012; Phelan & Rabinowitz, 2008). With narratology, researchers attempt to uncover the narrative structures embedded in an environment, and how these structures influence individual and societal behavior. Such structures can be explicit stories (a rags to riches story of a tech billionaire), or symbolic (associating a beautiful appearance with love and acceptance). Once uncovered, these frameworks can be applied to learn how they inform people's beliefs and actions (Lucaites & Condit, 1985; Phelan, 2007).

In brief, narrative structures have dual purposes, serving as being communications, and also as shaping *how* people communicate with each other. Put another way, two types of narratology have been put forth

(Herman, Manfred, & Marie-Laure, 2010; Liu & László, 2007). One type emphasizes the *story* that is being transmitted through the various structures (independent of *how* it is being communicated). The other type emphasizes the *discourse* of the narrative (or *how* the story is being transmitted).

Major Publications:

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies* (A. Lavers, Trans.). New York, NY: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, R. (1978). Introduction to the structural analysis of narratives. In S. Heath (Trans.), *Image-music-text* (pp. 79–124). New York, NY: Macmillan.

Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as a human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communications Monographs, 51*(1), 1–22.

Fisher, W. R. (1985). The narrative paradigm: An elaboration. *Communications Monographs, 52*(4), 347–367.

Fisher, W. R. (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

Fisher, W. R. (1989). Clarifying the narrative paradigm. *Communications Monographs, 56*(1), 55–58.

Propp, V. (2010). *Morphology of the folktale* (L. A. Wagner, Ed., L. Scott, Trans.) (2nd ed.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

***Major Associated Researchers**: Roland Barthes, James Phelan, David M. Boje, Jonathan Culler.* Daphne A. Jameson, Barbara Czarniawska, and Yiannis Gabriel

Theory Name: Speech Codes Theory

Brief Theory Description: Speech codes theory is used to examine communication differences between separate groups (Covarrubias, 2009; Philipsen & Hart, 2015). Such groups may be based on gender, occupation, societal status, and other cultural attributes. The theory proposes that different communities encode diverse meanings into words and phrases, and interpret these messages in ways that diverge from members in other groups (Lo, 1999; Philipsen et al., 2005). Various communities also develop unique modes and rules of communication. The communication rules can facilitate exchanges within a group while being detrimental to interactions across groups. Such speech codes can similarly act as a means to identify group members, barriers to group entry, and to

protect group members' power and status. Research stemming from this theory has explored how speech codes are developed, transmitted, maintained, and the effect these codes have on speech community members (Covarrubias, 2009; Lo, 1999).

Major Publications:

Hymes, D. H. (1964). Toward ethnographies of communication. *American Anthropologist, 66*(2), 12–25.

Hymes, D. H. (Ed.). (1974). *Studies in the history of linguistics: Traditions and paradigms*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Hymes, D. H. (1986). Models of the interaction of language and social life: Toward a descriptive theory. In S. F. Kiesling & C. B. Paulston (Eds.), *Models of the interaction of language and social life: Toward a descriptive theory*. New York, NY: Wiley.

Philipsen, G., & Albrecht, T. L. (Eds.). (1997). *Developing communication theories*. New York, NY: SUNY Press. University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Donal Carbaugh, Francois Cooren

Theory Name: Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT, Fantasy-Theme Analysis)

Brief Theory Description: SCT is a model of how motives, emotions, and meanings converge within a speech community, and how this synthesis helps to foster group cohesiveness (Bormann, 1985; Bormann, Cragan, & Shield, 2003). A major theme in this theory is that our grasp of reality is communicated through fantasies—simplified messages about reality that resonate with the given speech community. SCT proposes that the convergence process unfolds through five stages (Adams, 2013; Bormann, Cragan, & Shields, 1996). In the first stage (emergence) some novel event requires a group to mutually process and understand it. In the second stage (consciousness-raising) fantasies begin to emerge that have a shared emotional impact among speech community members. In the third stage (consciousness-sustaining) mechanisms arise that reify and sustain the mutually agreed upon fantasies developed in stage 2. In stage 4 (vision-declining) events occur that cannot be explained adequately by the existing fantasies, and that cannot be dealt with by the protective processes developed in stage 3. In stage five (terminus) it is proposed that the mutual fantasies dissipate quickly rather than incrementally (Bormann, Knutson, & Musolf, 1997; Endres, 2016).

Major Publications:

Bormann, E. G. (1972). Fantasy and rhetorical vision: The rhetorical criticism of social reality. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 58*(4), 396–407.

Bormann, E. G. (1982). The symbolic convergence theory of communication: Applications and implications for teachers and consultants. *Journal of Applied Communication Research, 10*(1), 50–61.

Major Associated Researchers: Ernest Bormann, John Cragan, Donald Shields.

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Al-Khalifa, K. N., & Aspinwall, E. M. (2001). Using the competing values framework to investigate the culture of Qatar industries. *Total Quality Management, 12*(4), 417–428. https://doi.org/10.1080/09544120124219.

Alvesson, M. (2011). Organizational culture: Meaning, discourse, and identity. In N. M. Ashkanasy, C. P. M. Wilderom, & M. F. Peterson (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational culture and climate* (pp. 11–28). Sage.

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Bal, M. (2009). *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*. University of Toronto Press.

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Blute, M. (2005). Memetics and evolutionary social science. *Journal of Memetics-Evolutionary Models of Information Transmission, 9*(1), 1–5.

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Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (1996). An expansion of the rhetorical vision component of the symbolic convergence theory: The Cold War paradigm case. *Communications Monographs, 63*(1), 1–28.

Bormann, E. G., Cragan, J. F., & Shields, D. C. (2003). Defending symbolic convergence theory from an imaginary Gunn. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 89*(4), 366–372.

Bormann, E. G., Knutson, R. L., & Musolf, K. (1997). Why do people share fantasies? An empirical investigation of a basic tenet of the symbolic convergence communication theory. *Communication Studies, 48*(3), 254–276.

Bowen, F., & Blackmon, K. (2003). Spirals of silence: The dynamic effects of diversity on organizational voice. *The Journal of Management Studies, 40*(6), 1393–1417.

Bretz, R. D., Ash, R. A., & Dreher, G. F. (1989). Do people make the place? An examination of the attraction-selection-attrition hypothesis. *Personnel Psychology, 42*(3), 561–581. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1744-6570.1989.tb00669.x.

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Brodie, R. (2011). *Virus of the mind: The new science of the meme* (Reissue ed.). Hay House.

Chaiklin, S. E., Hedegaard, M. E., & Jensen, U. J. E. (1998). Activity theory and social practice. *Congress of the International Society for Activity Theory & Cultural Research*. Congress of the International Society for Activity Theory & Cultural Research, Aarhus, Denmark.

Chatman, J. A., Wong, E. M., & Joyce, C. K. (2008). When do people make the place? Considering the interactionist foundations of the attraction-selection-attrition model. In *The people make the place: Dynamic linkages between individuals and organizations* (pp. 63–86). Taylor & Francis Group/Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Chua, E. G., & Gudykunst, W. B. (1987). Conflict resolution styles in low- and high-context cultures. *Communication Research Reports, 4*(1), 32–37.

Corman, S. R., & Scott, C. R. (1994). Perceived networks, activity foci, and observable communication in social collectives. *Communication Theory, 4*(3), 171–190.

Coughlan, P., & Duff, P. A. (1994). Same task, different activities: Analysis of a SLA task from an Activity Theory perspective. *TESL Canada Journal*, *2*, 173–193. https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v17i2.890.

Covarrubias, P. O. (2009). Speech codes theory. *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*, 920–924.

Creed, W. E. D. (2003). Voice lessons: Tempered radicalism and the use of voice and silence. *The Journal of Management Studies, 40*(6), 1503–1536.

Currie, M. (2010). *Postmodern narrative theory*. Palgrave Macmillan.

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CHAPTER 7

Flows and Patterns

There*were graceful curves, reflected images, woody heights, soft distances; and over the whole scene, far and near, the dissolving lights drifted steadily, enriching it, every passing moment, with new marvels of coloring.*
—Life on the Mississippi, Mark Twain.

Chapter Theories

Actor-Network Theory
Contagion Theory
Diffusion of Innovation Theory
Grapevine Communication
Homophily-Proximity Theories
Interpersonal Ties
Rhetorical Sensitivity Model
Social Penetration Theory
Spiral of Silence
Theory of Communication Networks
Uses and Gratification Approach.

Theories in this chapter help us understand recurring communication patterns. While theories in the *channels and barriers* category help us examine the mechanisms by which communication flows, theories in this

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_7

category help us understand re-occurring configurations in communication modes and content (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2013, 2019). Managers need to understand these flows and patterns to reinforce positive communications and disrupt negative communications (Browning, Morris, & Kee, 2011; Hursti, 2011).

Theories in this category help describe why we see certain types of communication emerge. Some of these theories focus on bigger patterns of communication flows such as *actor-network* theory (Latour, 2005), *contagion theory* (Christakis & Fowler, 2013), and the *theory of communication networks* (P. R. Monge & Contractor, 2003). These theories give us models of large-scale communication flows and help us understand how communications can reconfigure communication links. More focused versions of these theories—such as *grapevine communication* (Davis, 1953; Davis & O'Connor, 1977), and *diffusion of innovation theory* (Greenhalgh et al., 2005; Grübler, 1996)—help us understand how people communicate specific types of information across large-scale structures.

Other theories tackle small-scale communication structures and help us understand how individuals develop and maintain communication flows. These theories include *homophily-proximity theories* (P. E. Monge & Contractor, 2003), *interpersonal ties* (Marsden & Gorman, 2001), *rhetorical sensitivity model* (Hart & Burks, 1972), and *social penetration theory* (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Both *spiral of silence* (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003) and *uses and gratification approach* (Blumler, 1979) incorporate otherwise neglected aspects in this category. The uses and gratification approach takes the approach that the message receiver—not sender—makes the active decision about channel success while the sender has a more limited role. This theory brings up an interesting question about the interplay between sender and receiver in setting communication flows and patterns, the role of power in setting communication patterns, and how parties can change roles depending on the communication (Blumler, 1979; Quan-Haase & Young, 2010).

Similarly, the spiral of silence brings up ethical questions related to communication patterns (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Hayes, 2007). This theory models how communication drives out minority (or disenfranchised) opinions, but how organizations benefit long term from having such opinions in an organization (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012, p. 201; Glynn & McLeod, 1984). Researchers have generally treated communication

patterns as neutral and facets that need managerial control (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). However, researchers have done less work to examine how such control can create problems for people participating in the communication patterns (McCurdy, 2010; Neuwirth, Frederick, & Mayo, 2007). In addition to more research on flows and patterns, we also need theorizing that conceptualizes what it means to the people organizations leave out of communication patterns, the rights (and responsibilities) that organizations have in shaping such patterns, and how communication flows and patterns can create winners and losers in organizations (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Kohl, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2005). To date, little work has explicitly tackled such issues through the lens of emergent patterns (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014, 2018d).

For extending theories in this category, researchers may want to look at models in the *organizational structures* section in addition to the aforementioned *channels and barriers* category. By combining elements from these three categories, the researcher will gain a good idea of how messages flow through different communication structures, how these communications shape the structures, and how structures contribute to creating sustained communication patterns (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a, 2017b). As such, researchers will have a wide palette to describe message transmissions.

Theory Descriptions: Flows and Patterns

Theory Name: Actor-Network Theory (ANT)
Brief Theory Description: ANT presents a grand theory or general framework for describing information/communication flows between different parties in a system (Latour, 1996, 1999). As such, the strength of the ANT model does not come from hypotheses or predictions about communication flows, but rather in the general process it provides for analyzing and describing such communication flows. ANT posits that we can examine all communication processes as a set of information flows between actors (entities that can receive, process, record, *or* send messages) through a network of heterogeneous channels (Callon, 1999; Czarniawska & Hernes, 2005).

One of ANT's most intriguing aspects comes from how it defines Actors. The theory asks us to expand our idea of actors to include non-human entities such as telephones, recordings, and scientific journals

(Latour, 2005; Tatnall, 2005). ANT does not confine such entities to simply acting as channels. Instead, it posits that we must consider these actors as having a role in shaping communications on an equal footing with humans. This conception goes beyond Shannon and Weaver's work (which included the possibility of non-human signal senders and receivers) because the mathematical theory of communication assumed that non-human communicators acted as proxies for human communicators. ANT asks us to consider such actors as separate from the humans that use them (Latour, 2005; Shannon & Weaver, 1963).

In addition, ANT proposes that networks have no inherent hierarchy (no central communication flow control). Instead, networks adapt their structures depending on a mix of the communications that flow through them and the actors that participate in the networks (Latour, 1988, 1996). As such, conscious (or at least intelligent) actors can try to enforce a network hierarchy, but the communication may prevent or alter the intended relationships (Contractor & DeChurch, 2014; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Lunce, 2008). For example, a manager may want all formal project communications to go through her desk for approval. However, as a project deadline nears, these communications can become too rapid or frequent to receive such approvals. As such, the network may subvert the formal hierarchy and bypass such approvals to complete necessary steps. Even if these reports pass through the manager's desk, she might not have time to read them, instead simply approving the reports and thus taking herself out of the network for all practical purposes.

The theory also posits that when functioning correctly (aiding the communication flow), people can view the network as a single actor within a larger system. The compliment of this statement is that when a given actor does not contribute to communication flows, then you should examine that actor as a system with faults in its personal network (Latour, 1999, 2011). As such, you can treat a large corporation as a single actor when its communications function correctly, but you should treat a pair of co-workers with communication problems as a system. This last aspect of the theory gives it a multi-level aspect that few other business communication theories possess (Latour, 2005; Law, 2008).

Major Publications:

Latour, B. (1988). *Science in action: How to follow scientists and engineers through society* (Revised ed.). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the social: An introduction to actor-network-theory*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Law, J., & Hassard, J. (Eds.). (1999). *Actor network theory and after* (1st ed.). New York, NY: Wiley-Blackwell.

Major Associated Researchers: Michel Callon, Bruno Latour, and John Law

Theory Name: Contagion Theory

Brief Theory Description: Contagion theory models how people transmit their attitudes and behaviors through communication networks (Behnke, Sawyer, & King, 1994; Coombs & Holladay, 2012). Gustave Le Bon initially examined this phenomenon in the late 1800s (Bon, 1897; Stage, 2013). Early work focused on the transmission of political beliefs, but more recent work has examined the phenomenon in more general terms—especially regarding organizational communication (Parsons, 1978; Sampson, 2012).

Transmission can occur because of affiliation/cohesion between individuals or due to individuals having similar communication patterns (Christakis & Fowler, 2013; Nuttin & Nuttin, 1996). The likelihood of adoption by a group member increases based on such factors as the number of organizational members who have already adopted the attitude or belief, the frequency of exposure to the ideas, and the power differential between the individual and those adopting the attitude/behavior (Christakis & Fowler, 2013; Scherer & Cho, 2003). Current research on the theory often employs social network analysis and longitudinal studies to capture the phenomenon (Cowell-Meyers, 2011; Sampson, 2012).

Several theories overlap with or complement this one including grapevine communication, spiral of silence, and the theory of communication networks. However, this theory remains unique because of its focus on emotional transmissions as well as knowledge transmission. It seems that future work could combine several of these related theories into an overarching framework.

Major Publications:

Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of communication networks* (1st ed.). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: P. E. Monge and N. S. Contractor (modern era); Gustave Le Bon, Robert Park, and Herbert Blumer (early researchers)

Theory Name: Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Diffusion of Innovations, Multi-Step Flow Theory)

Brief Theory Description: This theory describes how new ideas (including decisions about selecting products) propagate through a given culture or communication network (Chandrasekaran & Tellis, 2010; Stansberry, 2012). The theory mostly focuses on the diffusion mechanisms and conditions that influence the spread of an idea. Researchers in this area have examined such elements as the role of early adopters, opinion leaders, and media/information technology (Grübler, 1996; Lyytinen & Damsgaard, 2001). Findings from this theory have resulted in the discovery of an adoption rate that appears robust across many conditions. As such, this theory vies to be one of business communication's few laws.

Communication research on this theory has tended to proceed in one of two ways. The first way is in focusing on the communication aspects of the theory, such as the role of interpersonal communication in spreading innovations (Abrahamson & Rosenkopf, 1997; Fichman & Kemerer, 1999). The second way is to adopt the theory's general framework as a model of how communication (ideas, methods, or structures) spreads within a given community (Rogers, 2003; Valente, 1995).

Researchers on this theory have mainly focused on how business and technologically related ideas spread from one organization to another (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Meade & Islam, 2006). For example, a typical researcher might use this theory to examine how the idea of reality TV shows spread from one television network to another. You could, however, also apply this theory's principles to micro-level transmissions, and to a more flexible pallette of ideas. For example, you could use the theory to examine how the idea to leave a company spreads among the organizational members. Such uses could profitably draw upon grapevine communication and contagion theory findings.

Major Publications:

Rogers, E. M. (1976). New product adoption and diffusion. *Journal of Consumer Research, 2*(4), 290–301.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Free Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Everett M. Rogers and Gabriel Tarde

Theory Name: Grapevine Communication (Communication Pattern Theory, Informal Communication Network)

Brief Theory Description: The grapevine refers to informal communication networks that emerge in organizations (Crampton, Hodge, & Mishra, 1998; Davis, 1953). This information can spread in a serial manner (from person-to-person), from one person to multiple others (a gossip communication network), or via a probability network where message initiators randomly seek recipients (such as when people accidentally meet in a break room). Contrary to general beliefs about grapevine communication, research suggests that grapevines have an accuracy rate of between 75% and 95% (Mishra, 1990; Zaremba, 1988). However, the inaccurate percentage of grapevine transmissions can generate serious organizational problems.

In most cases, the grapevine passes information faster than formal communication networks and can enhance (or counter) official messages with additional data (Crampton et al., 1998; Davis, 1969). As such, organizations need to pay careful attention to grapevine communications and work to ensure a congruence between official and grapevine communications. Most organizational managers do not like grapevine communications since they take communication control out of their hands (Galpin, 1995; Kock, Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton, & De La Garza, 2018).

However, managers should understand why people engage in these networks. Partially, people do so when they have a need to reduce ambiguity. Often organizations do a poor job of explaining *why* a certain event occurs, or even *what* has happened (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018b, 2018c). In such cases, people will often turn to each other to reduce this ambiguity and sense make. In other cases, organizational members have learned not to trust official organizational communications and will turn to peers instead for information. In such cases, managers must work to make structural changes to reduce a grapevine's utility rather than imposing sanctions for members using the network.

Organizations cannot eliminate grapevine communications, but organizations can manage them to augment their benefits (Davis, 1973; Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018). Such positive outcomes include organizational identity, employee motivation, and team formation. Because of all of the preceding pros and cons of grapevine messages, leaders are wise to keep fully aware of them and manage them appropriately.

Modern social networks offer researchers an opportunity to expand this theory. Traditionally, grapevine communication research has focused on networks within an organization. However, as technology has lowered

communication barriers, we see more communication flows between employees, customers, and organizational stakeholders. We would expect that with these changes, grapevines have grown to include far more constituents, but that many or the prior findings will hold for these new connections.

Major Publications:

Davis, K. (1953). *Management communication and the grapevine*. New York, NY: Harvard Business Review.

Davis, K. (1969). Grapevine communication among lower and middle managers. *Personnel Journal, 48*(4), 269–272.

Davis, K. (1973). The care and cultivation of the corporate grapevine. *Management Review, 62*(10), 53–55.

Mishra, J. (1990). Managing the grapevine. *Public Personnel Management, 19*(2), 213–228.

Major Associated Researchers: Jitendra Mishra, Keith Davis

Theory Name: Homophily-Proximity Theories

Brief Theory Description: Best described as a family of communication network theories, this model attempts to explain the development of communication ties between individuals (Chin, Xu, & Wang, 2013; P. E. Monge & Contractor, 2003). The theory defines ties as how much two individuals communicate with each other, and the quality of this communication. In essence, the theory explores why people communicate more with certain people rather than others (Ferber & Pugliese, 2000; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2013).

As its name suggests, the model posits the development and continuance of communication ties comes from two major causes: communicator homophily (similarity) and proximity. The homophily component states that individuals will communicate more frequently and in greater depth with those perceived to have similar characteristics such as values, behaviors, and communication styles. The importance of these characteristics can vary depending on circumstances (Chin et al., 2013; Huang, Shen, & Contractor, 2013). For example, in a sporting event, people may value the characteristic of team affiliation above all others. However, in a workplace setting, this characteristic may play only a small role in homophily and professional background might dominate.

The proximity component asserts that individuals will also form communication ties to those who are physically close. The proximity aspect partly plays its role because people can communicate more easily

with those close to them than those farther away (Brandão, Moro, Lopes, & Oliveira, 2013; Huang et al., 2013). Electronic communication can reduce people's dependence on physical closeness, but—as posited by media naturalness—such technological channels may not act as a complete substitute for physical closeness (Aten & Thomas, 2016; Kock, 2001).

Model research has also examined the long-term effects of the communication network. For example, increased communications between individuals in close proximity can lead to a convergence of values, thus increasing the communicators' homophily. Similarly, cultural isolates can use electronic communication methods to increase communication (virtual) proximity with other like-minded individuals. Researchers have applied the model to better understanding organizational communication networks, both formal and informal.

Major Publications:

Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of communication networks* (1st ed.). Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Peter R. Monge and Noshir S. Contractor

Theory Name: Interpersonal Ties

Brief Theory Description: This theory examines how information flows through interpersonal communication networks (Granovetter, 1977; Marsden & Gorman, 2001). Its originators based the theory on both mathematical reasoning and sociological observations (Granovetter, 1977; Haythornthwaite, 2002). The theory posits the existence of three types of interpersonal communication ties: strong, weak, and absent (de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011; Haythornthwaite, 2002). Strong ties occur with frequent communication interactions and such ties usually exist between friends and close work colleagues. Weak ties occur with infrequent communication interactions. In an organization, such ties usually arise between acquaintances and workers who have greater distances (either physical or hierarchical) between them. Finally, absent ties exist when little or no information flows between people. Such ties occur between strangers.

Sociological observation has shown that people tend to form communication networks in clusters (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll, & Rosson, 2005). As an example, let's take three people in a communication network. In this triad, Alice has strong communication ties with Betty and Cathy. In this case, Betty and Cathy will most

likely have strong communication ties with each other, and only rarely have an absent tie. This phenomenon also extends to larger groups so that most of the people someone has strong communication ties with will also have strong communication ties with each other.

However, as the number of people in the overall group increases, the odds of any given person having a strong tie with the new person decreases (Cardon, 2009, 2015). At some point, a group will reach such a size that the strong (and even weak) tie communication flows between all people will break down. This breakdown comes from inherent limitations people have—no-one has enough time to communicate frequently and in-depth with a large number of people. As such, certain people within two or more groups will act as a communication bridge, with the other group members only having weak or absent ties with other group members.

A non-intuitive aspect of this theory comes from novel information flows. Novel information will more likely come through weak ties rather than strong ties. While people exchange more messages through strong ties, people usually receive redundant information through such ties. Since people in a strong tie group tend to perceive the same information and pass the information along to other people within that group, a group member will likely know the information before receiving it through the network or will hear the information repeated from multiple people (Kavanaugh et al., 2005; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b). For example, when someone leaves a work group, everyone in the communication network will likely know this information first-hand. For the few that do not know this personally, they will only need to hear it once from another member, and communications from other members will not increase the recipient's knowledge.

However, with weak ties, members will not likely know the information or have other strong tie members tell them the information. As a counterpoint example to the last one, if an organization fired a manager for sexual harassment in remote division, people in other parts of the organization may have to find out the situation through weak tie communication networks of acquaintances in a different area.

Information from weak ties tends to provide more novel information and have a more diverse scope. However, people will more likely trust information from strong ties, and in times of stress, individuals will turn more to information from strong ties (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006; de Zúñiga & Valenzuela, 2011). Also, information through strong ties can create an error correcting system since hearing information from multiple

systems can highlight information inconsistencies that alert the recipient to a need for clarification (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Neck, in press; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a).

Major Publications:

Granovetter, M. S. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 1360–1380.

Major Associated Researchers: Mark S. Granovetter

Theory Name: Rhetorical Sensitivity Model

Brief Theory Description: The rhetorical sensitivity model provides a framework for examining how individuals adapt messages to audiences and circumstances (Fulkerson, 1990; Ward, Bluman, & Dauria, 1982). The theory classifies senders along a continuum from *noble selves*—who do not adapt their communications at all—to *rhetorical reflectors*—who completely base their communications on circumstances (Eadie & Powell, 1991; Hart & Burks, 1972). Most people fall somewhere between these two poles. The theory calls such people *rhetorical sensitives*. Rhetorical sensitives maintain their communication goals but adapt the framing of these messages to their audience. The main theoretical proposition of this model is that rhetorical sensitive individuals will be most successful in achieving their communication goals (Dilbeck & McCroskey, 2009; Hart & Burks, 1972). This theory has also been applied to intercultural communications.

Interesting directions for this theory could examine the circumstances under which people adapt their messages, what cues people use to adapt their messages, and how the audience perceives such adaption. For circumstances, researchers might look at the importance with which the sender holds their message and their communication facility. We would expect higher importance and lower facility would both lead to less adaption. We would also like to know how audiences felt about different levels of adaption in a message. Receivers may perceive some adaption as positive (the sender trying to speak to the receiver rather than sending a rote message), but a receiver might perceive too much adaption as pandering and insincere.

Major Publications:

Hart, R. P., & Burks, D. M. (1972). Rhetorical sensitivity and social interaction. *Communications Monographs, 39*(2), 75–91.

Major Associated Researchers: Roderick P. Hart

Theory Name: Social Penetration Theory
Brief Theory Description: Social penetration theory models the role of interpersonal communication in relationship development (Carpenter & Greene, 2015; Tang & Wang, 2012). The theory proposes that as relationships deepen, communication changes from relatively shallow, low self-disclosure messages, to more intimate and high self-disclosure messages (Ayres, 1979; Hammer & Gudykunst, 1987). In this context, message intimacy plays three roles. It acts as a function of the developing relationship, a signal to move to a new intimacy level, and a cause of the change in levels (Carpenter & Greene, 2015; VanLear, 1987).

The theory also posits that relationships move through specific stages that are accompanied and signaled by different forms of communication. The model proposes five stages of relationship intimacy: the orientation stage; exploratory affective stage; affective stage; stable stage; and (potentially) the depenetration stage (Carpenter & Greene, 2015; Gudykunst, Nishida, & Chua, 1987). The orientation stage involves non-intimate communication where people reveal little personal information. In the exploratory affective stage, individuals communicate personal information but about topics that are relatively non-controversial or that involve little personal threat. Up to this point, people have taken few emotional risks with their communications, and the relationship remains fairly superficial (Liu & Gao, 2014; Taylor, 1968).

In the affective stage, people begin to communicate about strongly held personal beliefs. This stage holds the most risk because such communications can lead to negative emotions if the other party does not validate (or attacks) the communications (Baack, Fogliasso, & Harris, 2000; Cudykunst & Nishida, 1983). In the affective stage, arguments and emotional conflict may occur but also initial interpersonal bonding. This stage can lead to stronger personal relationships or may lead either party to decide to de-escalate the relationship (Baack et al., 2000; Gudykunst et al., 1987).

In the stable stage, individuals have revealed most or all of their deep personal beliefs and can reliably predict what the other party will likely communicate and feel in a given situation. At this stage, each party feels trust with the other and can communicate rather freely. Long-term, intimate relationships need to reach this stage in order to exist (Hensley, 1996; VanLear, 1987).

Relationships that break down experience the depenetration stage. Not all relationships reach this stage, and they usually occur because of

some type of rupture in behavioral expectations. In organizations, such a rupture may occur because of the movement of one party to another location or because of negative behaviors from one party. In this stage, individuals cease to communicate about personal thoughts and feelings (Ayres, 1979; Taylor & Altman, 1987).

At all stages, you can have verbal or nonverbal communications. You often see gift-giving signaling entering a new communication stage. Similarly, one party might signal the desire to enter a new stage by offering more intimate and risky information to the other party (Ayres, 1979; Carpenter & Greene, 2015). The other party can signal the desire to advance to the next stage by either supporting this reveal or offering similar personal information. Usually, people will make smaller—though more intimate—initial communications to test the other parties receptiveness. If the other party does not support such communications, then the first party will be more reluctant to make future attempts. However, you will likely see multiple such communication interchanges from both parties before they feel secure enough to advance to a higher stage (Cudykunst & Nishida, 1983; Taylor, 1968).

Major Publications:

Taylor, D. A., & Altman, I. (1975). Self-disclosure as a function of reward-cost outcomes. *Sociometry*, *38*(1), 18–31.

Major Associated Researchers: Irwin Altman and Dalmas Taylor

Theory Name: Spiral of Silence

Brief Theory Description: This theory explores the process by which individuals cease to communicate their opinions in communities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Ho, 2016). The theory describes a cross-level process that functions on an organizational or societal level but has its basis in the individual level. The theory posits that the silencing effect requires three communication group properties. First, two or more opposing opinions must exist within a communication group. Second, members of the communication group must see one opinion as dominant over the other opinion (held by more members or held by members with greater power). Finally, some perceived negative consequence must accompany voicing an opinion contrary to the perceived dominant position. With these circumstances, an individual holding a minority opinion will feel reluctant to voice her or his beliefs. As minority opinion individuals reduce or stop voicing their views, the minority opinion group will believe that fewer individuals hold the opinion than the actual number, and more individuals

holding the minority opinion will fall silent (McCurdy, 2010; Scheufle & Moy, 2000).

The theory proposes two types of people who resist this process: vocal minority and hardcore/nonconformist minority (Noelle-Neumann, 1974; Salmon & Kline, 1983). Someone belongs to the vocal minority when their personal beliefs cause them to continue to speak out despite the possible negative consequences. Hardcore/nonconformist minority consists of individuals who do not value majority acceptance, or have little fear of the negative sanctions that can arise from not holding the majority view (Salmon & Kline, 1983; Scheufle & Moy, 2000).

The theory also posits that organizations need both majority dominance and an outspoken minority voice in order to remain healthy. Organizations need a dominant majority voice for organizational stability. However, organizations also need minority voices to provide different ideas to meet changing circumstances. Culture moderates the spiral of silence effect (Priest, Ten Eyck, & Braman, 2004; Roessing, 2010).

Major Publications:

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1993). *The spiral of silence: Public opinion, our social skin* (2nd ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann.

Theory Name: Theory of Communication Networks (Social Network Theory, Network Theory, and Analysis in Organizations)

Brief Theory Description: This model provides a covering theory that attempts to synthesize the major current existing theories of communication networks (Bollobás, 1968; P. R. Monge & Contractor, 2003). The theory takes a multi-level perspective on explaining how communication networks form, transmit information, and vary in their transmission quality. Initial development of the model used agent-based simulation to determine if the theoretical propositions matched empirical observations.

A major tenet of network analysis theory holds that communication analysis should focus on the *relationships* between individuals rather than the *characteristics* of individuals (Farías, 2014; P. R. Monge and Contractor 2001). The theory proposes that these individual relationships will combine to create social groups, but groups will also influence relationships. A major focus of network analysis theory comes from trying to understand and describe how these mutually influential forces operate. Researchers on this theory have also focused on identifying and examining recurring roles within networks (boundary spanner, isolate, etc.).

Major Publications:

Barnes, J. A. (1954). Class and committees in a Norwegian Island Parish. *Human Relations, 7*(1), 39–58.

Monge, P. R., & Contractor, N. S. (2003). *Theories of communication networks* (1st ed.). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Rogers, E. M., & Kinkaid, D. L. (1980). *Communication networks: Toward a new paradigm for research*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Peter Monge and Noshir Contractor

Theory Name: Uses and Gratification Approach (Uses and Gratification Theory, UGT)

Brief Theory Description: The uses and gratification approach provides a model of mass communication and communications media that focuses on the receiver rather than (as more typically done) the sender (Blumler, 1979; Diddi & LaRose, 2006). From this overarching focus, researchers have developed a few specific propositions (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Palmgreen, 1984):

- The individual chooses if a medium satisfies her or his needs.
- The receiver makes an active rather than passive choice.
- Different media compete for audience members (individuals can only utilize a limited number of communication types).

From these propositions, a major theoretical prediction of UGT is that successful media and mass communications (those consistently sought by individuals) will be the ones that satisfy some need held by a large number of individuals (Ruggiero, 2000; Swanson, 1979). This theory has obvious applications for advertising and public relations organizational communications, but it also has applications for media use in other forms of business communication (LaRose & Eastin, 2004; Ruggiero, 2000).

Major Publications:

de Boer, C., & Brennecke, S. I. (2003). De uses and gratifications benadering. In C. de Boer & S. I. Brennecke (Eds.), *Media en publiek: Theorieën over media-impact* (pp. 97–115). Amsterdam, NL: Boom.

McQuail, D. (2001). With more hindsight: Conceptual problems and some ways forward for media use research. *Communications, 26*(4), 337–350.

Major Associated Researchers: Herta Herzog

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Tang, J.-H., & Wang, C.-C. (2012). Self-disclosure among bloggers: Re-examination of social penetration theory. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 15*(5), 245–250.

Tatnall, A. (2005). Actor-network theory in information systems research. In *Encyclopedia of information science and technology* (1st ed., pp. 42–46).

Taylor, D. A. (1968). The development of interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. *The Journal of Social Psychology, 75*(1), 79–90.

Taylor, D. A., & Altman, I. (1987). Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. In M. E. Roloff & G. R. Miller (Eds.), *Interpersonal processes: New directions in communication research* (pp. 257–277). Sage. http://doi.apa.org/psycinfo/1987-98202-011.

Valente, T. W. (1995). *Network models of the diffusion of innovations*. Hampton Pres.

VanLear, C. A. (1987). The formation of social relationships: A longitudinal study of social penetration. *Human Communication Research, 13*(3), 299–322.

Ward, S. A., Bluman, D. L., & Dauria, A. F. (1982). Rhetorical sensitivity recast: Theoretical assumptions of an informal interpersonal rhetoric. *Communication Quarterly, 30*(3), 189–195.

Zaremba, A. (1988). *More than rumors: Understanding the organizational grapevine* (Opinion Papers). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED296434.

CHAPTER 8

Meaning-Making and Discovery

. . .and hence comes invention; and that wise kind of guess into what is possible which leads to great discovery; discovery sometimes of a vast continent
—Household Education, Harriet Martineau.

Chapter Theories

Attribution Theory
Constructivism
Coordinated Management of Meaning
Ethnomethodology and Ethnography
Expectancy Violations Theory
Face Negotiation
Groupthink
Interaction Analysis
Open Communication and Teamwork
Organizational Identification
Politeness Theory
Sense-Making
Social Information Processing
Symbolic Interactionism.

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_8

Theories in this category take a different approach to their view on communication's purpose. Theories in other categories examine the process by which people and organizations use communication to enhance interactions and effectiveness (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). In contrast, theories in this category examine how we use communication to shape our understanding of the world (Bisel & Arterburn, 2012; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019b). Several major researchers in business communication hold that communication uncovers and even creates the realities we live in (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). Theories from this category fully explore these ideas, and associated researchers have conducted powerful studies to grapple with their implications.

The decision-making theories in the category—such as *Groupthink* (Aldag & Fuller, 1993; Courtright, 1978)—give us insights into how people use communication to find solutions to different business problems. For other theories in this category, communication plays a role in creating and negotiating a self-image—such as with *Face Negotiation* (J. G. Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 1988)—or mutually discover/create an agreed-upon reality, such as with *Sense-Making* (Erbert, 2016; Weick, 1995).

In many ways, theories in this category deal with how communication in business settings shapes who we are as people (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Weick, 1979). This attribute makes this category distinct from the others and offers opportunities to leverage these ideas with theories in other categories. For example, using theories from the organizational structures category with those from this chapter would help us better understand how organizational design influences self-image (Barthes, 1978; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019a). Similarly, researchers might develop multi-level theories that combine those from this chapter with ones from the cultural characteristics and influences chapter. In this way, the field might develop multi-level work that examines similarities about how communication shapes individual personality and organizational cultures (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a).

Attendant with such theories, business communication researchers should also explore the ethical considerations related to these theories. Since these theories shape people's perceptions of themselves and their environment, we need to take special care in exploring the ramifications of using these theories.

Theory Descriptions: Meaning-Making and Discovery

Theory Name: Attribution Theory
Brief Theory Description: Attribution theory provides a framework for examining how people attribute causes to events (Buss, 1978; Försterling & Harrow, 1988). Researchers have developed the theory since the 1920s, and this long development has given the theory a rich and well-founded set of propositions and empirical support. Very succinctly, the theory states that people can attribute the cause of some event to internal reasons (those within the control of an individual) or external reasons (those outside of the control of an individual). Different people may make different attributions for the same action, and the reasons for such attributions vary. However, people tend to make attributions that are more congruent with their personal belief system (Jeong, 2009; Kelley & Michela, 1980). A widely used application of this theory is fundamental attribution theory where an individual is more likely to attribute another person's behavior to internal states rather than external factors (Coombs, 2007; Hewstone, 1983).

For business communication (Laczniak, DeCarlo, & Ramaswami, 2001; Park, Holody, & Zhang, 2012), researchers have focused on how an individual tries to use communication methods to present their own actions in a way that is most likely to generate a favorable attribution from others (internal attributions for positive events and external attributions for negative events). These studies have taken both a normative focus (what usually occurs) and a prescriptive focus (better methods for shaping attributions or eliciting information for better attribution placement).

Major Publications:

Kelley, H. H. (1967). Attribution theory in social psychology. In D. Levine (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation* (Vol. 15, pp. 192–238). Nebraska: University of Nebraska.

Major Associated Researchers: Fritz Heider, Harold Kelley, and Bernard Weiner.

Theory Name: Constructivism
Brief Theory Description: Constructivism focuses on why different individuals make different communication choices, and details an individual (rather than communication interaction) theory (Barkin, 2003; Burleson,

2007). The theory name comes from the central idea of communication *constructs* which are the basic building blocks of communication. Constructs are expected to change over time, generally becoming more complex as an individual develops greater communication skills (Delia, 1977; Delia & O'Keefe, 1979).

Additionally, constructivism makes three assumptions about all communication (Delia, 1977; Liu & Chen, 2010):

- it is intentional;
- it is goal driven;
- negotiations are used to interpret and develop shared meaning.

This theory also posits that people who are more cognitively complex can better understand communication situational needs, craft different messages to achieve desired goals, select the message that is most likely to achieve desired results, and obtain feedback for modifying the message as needed (Knoblauch, 2013; Raskin, 2002). A central premise of this theory is that more cognitively complex individuals can employ a greater range of communication techniques (Huang, 2002; Perkins, 1999).

Major Publications:

Delia, J., O'Keefe, B. J., & O'Keefe, D. J. (1982). The constructivist approach to communication. In F. Dance (Ed.), *Human communication theory*. New York, NY: Harpercollins College Div.

Major Associated Researchers: Jesse Delia

Theory Name: Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM)

Brief Theory Description: This theory posits that people use communication to negotiate a shared worldview and examines how this process occurs (Brenders, 1987; R. A. Rose, 2006). People mostly use this communication process to develop a shared meaning about a given social interaction (Bruss et al., 2005; Montgomery, 2004). It can also act as a feedback loop in order to improve the communication process (Cronen, 1991; Cronen & Pearce, 1978). According to CMM, there are three major processes that occur during any conversation between people: meaning, management, and coordination (Cronen, 1988; Pearce, 1999).

The management process deals with setting, using, and modifying conversational rules that people employ in a given conversation. These rules arise from general social norms as well as those developed between two particular individuals. These rules help people better interpret the

meaning of a given communication. For example, the use of professional titles in a conversation can take on different meanings depending on the set of conversational rules employed in a given dialogue (Cronen, 1991; Fisher-Yoshida, Creede, & Gallegos, 2012).

Meaning refers to how people organize conversational data and information. CMM posits that people arrange meaning in a hierarchy of how abstract the information is. The lowest (and least abstract) level of the hierarchy is the raw content of a conversation and is rarely adequate to communicate the full meaning of a conversation. The highest (and most abstract) level is cultural patterns, which provide a context for the conversational interchange. CMM also posits that higher levels of the hierarchy can subsume lower levels (Cronen, 1988; Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

The final part of CMM is coordination. In this part, people determine how well their actions and communications have created a set of shared meanings. People can either fully achieve shared meaning, partially achieve shared meaning, or fail to achieve a coordinated meaning. In situations where a shared meaning is not fully achieved, individuals can take steps to alter their communication processes to achieve meaning (Cronen & Pearce, 1991; Orbe & Camara, 2010).

Major Publications:

Cronen, V. E. (1994). Coordinated management of meaning: Practical theory for the complexities and contradictions of everyday life. In J. Siegfried (Ed.), *The status of common sense in psychology* (pp. 183–207). Norwood, NJ: Praeger.

Pearce, W. B., & Pearce, K. A. (2000). Extending the theory of the coordinated management of meaning (CMM) through a community dialogue process. *Communication Theory, 10*(4), 405–423.

Major Associated Researchers: W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen

Theory Name: Ethnomethodology and Ethnography

Brief Theory Description: The ethnomethodology and ethnographic (EEA) framework provides both a grand theory of how people create social order and a family of analytic methods for analyzing this creation process (Allard & Anderson, 2005; Garfinkel, 2002). However, the theoretical and methodological aspects of this framework are so intertwined that it is difficult to use one aspect without also employing the other aspect. As a grand theory, there are a few basic premises that guide investigations. In what can be seen as its most basic premise, individuals are viewed as seeking means to create their identities through interactions

with other individuals. A complimentary premise is that societies (a group of two or more individuals with behavioral rules) are forged from these interactions. Additionally, societies are viewed as having mechanisms by which individuals are assigned behavioral roles, rules for member interaction, methods for reinforcing these rules, and mechanisms by which these rules can be altered. Much of these processes occur through various forms of communications, and—at the extreme—can be viewed as being completely enacted through communication means. Another fundamental premise of this framework is that societal rules can only be understood through an internal lens—from the viewpoint and understanding of those within the society. As such, researchers employing this frame try to bring as few preconceived ideas as possible in their analysis of a group, and analysis tends to be more descriptive than hypothesis testing. However, the resulting descriptions are usually used to make inferences about how individuals in a society form their identities (Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015; Garfinkel, 1974).

As an analytical method, researchers examine various artifacts used and routines employed by members of the society. Such artifacts can include conversations, writings, symbolic artifacts, and records of daily routines and activities.

Major Publications:

Agar, M. H. (1996). *The professional stranger: An informal introduction to ethnography* (2nd Revised ed.). San Diego, CA: Emerald Group Publishing.

Garfinkel, H. (1967). *Studies in ethnomethodology* (1st ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

Garfinkel, H. (1974). The origins of the term ethnomethodology. In R. Turner (Ed.), *Ethnomethodology*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books.

Garfinkel, H. (2002). *Ethnomethodology's program: Working out Durkheim's aphorism* (A. W. Rawls, Ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Geertz, C. (1973). Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture. In *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays* (1st ed., pp. 3–30). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Philipsen, G. (1992). *Speaking culturally: Explorations in social communication*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Clifford Geertz, Donal Carbaugh, and Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz

Theory Name: Expectancy Violations Theory (EVT; Nonverbal Expectancy Violations Theory)

Brief Theory Description: Originally developed as a model of human nonverbal behavior (proxemics), the theory examines how violations of expected communication norms influence how the violator is viewed by the other party or parties in the communication interchange (Bevan, Ang, & Fearns, 2014; Floyd, Ramirez, & Burgoon, 2008). The theory posits (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Campo, Cameron, Brossard, & Frazer, 2004) that every communication interchange has a set of norms that derive from societal norms and personal norms (developed by the parties). When one party violates these norms, the second party makes a decision (most often unconsciously) about how favorably the violator is viewed, how to react to the norm violation, and potentially a change in the expected communication norms (Bachman & Guerrero, 2006; Bevan, 2003). This theory posits a contingency model, and how someone will react to the expectation violation is based on the initial evaluation of the violator, if the behavior is viewed more or less positively than the expected communication behavior, and how greatly the violation deviates from expectations (Bevan, 2003; Burgoon, 1992). In general, positive violations will produce more favorable results than negative violations, but negative violations can also produce positive results through such mechanisms as cognitive dissonance (Aronson, 1969; Burgoon & Hubbard, 2005).

Major Publications:

Burgoon, J. K. (1978). A communication model of personal space violations: Explication and an initial test. *Human Communication Research, 4*(2), 129–142.

Burgoon, J. K., & Hale, J. L. (1988). Nonverbal expectancy violations: Model elaboration and application to immediacy behaviors. *Communications Monographs, 55*(1), 58–79.

Burgoon, J. K., & Jones, S. B. (1976). Toward a theory of personal space expectations and their violations. *Human Communication Research, 2*(2), 131–146.

Major Associated Researchers: Judee K. Burgoon

Theory Name: Face Negotiation

Brief Theory Description: Face negotiation is a cross-cultural, contingency theory of how individuals deal with and respond to conflict situations (Heisler & Ellis, 2008; J. G. Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003). The focal construct of the theory is *face*—a person's self-image: a construct that researchers posit to exist in some form for all people regardless of culture (J. G. Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2004b). The theory elaborates on this idea by proposing that conflicts are expected to threaten a person's face, and an individual will act to preserve or restore her or his face (J. Oetzel, Meares, Myers, & Lara, 2003; Ting-Toomey, 2004a). These actions are called *facework*. While this general sequence of events operates similarly across all communications, culture acts as a contingency factor in how the process occurs (Heisler & Ellis, 2008; J. Oetzel et al., 2003). Researchers expect that culture influences what constitutes a threat to face and how people enact facework. Additionally, different cultures place a higher or lower value on face (thus making facework more or less necessary), and in preserving other people's face (potentially necessitating the person who harmed face also working to restore face).

Major Publications:

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. N. Goody (Ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction* (pp. 56–311). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Goffman, E. (1967). *Interaction ritual: Essays in face-to-face behavior*. Chicago, IL: Aldine.

Oetzel, J. G., & Ting-Toomey, S. (2003). Face concerns in interpersonal conflict: A cross-cultural empirical test of the face negotiation theory. *Communication Research*, *30*(6), 599–624.

Oetzel, J. G., Ting-Toomey, S., Yokochi, Y., Masumoto, T., & Takai, J. (2000). A typology of facework behaviors in conflicts with best friends and relative strangers. *Communication Quarterly*, *48*(4), 397–419.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1988). Intercultural conflict styles: A face negotiation theory. In Y. Y. Kim & W. B. Gudykunst (Eds.), *Theories in Intercultural Communication* (pp. 213–238). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (1999). Face and facework. In P. Arredondo, H. E. Cheatham, J. S. Mio, D. Sue, & J. E. Trimble (Eds.), *Key words in multicultural interventions: A dictionary* (pp. 125–127). Westport, CT: Greenwood.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2003). Translating conflict face-negotiation theory into practice. In D. R. Landis, J. M. Bennet, & M. Bennet (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed., pp. 217–248). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2004). The matrix of face: An updated face-negotiation theory. In W. B. Gudykunst (Ed.), *Theorizing about intercultural communication* (1st ed., pp. 71–92). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ting-Toomey, S. (2009). Intercultural conflict competence: Criteria and components. In W. R. Cupach, D. J. Canary, & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *Competence in interpersonal conflict* (2nd ed., pp. 139–162). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press Inc.

Ting-Toomey, S., & Kurogi, A. (1998). Facework competence in intercultural conflict: An updated face-negotiation theory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 22*(2), 187–225.

Major Associated Researchers: Stella Ting-Toomey, John G. Oetzel, Y. Yokochi, T. Masumoto, J. Takai, M. Meares, K. Myers, and E. Lara

Theory Name: Groupthink

Brief Theory Description: Groupthink is a decision-making theory and may be viewed as a model of how poor decision processes (those lacking critical examinations) happen (Baron, 2005; Bénabou, 2013). The theory has a strong communication component to it because certain communication patterns have been found to occur repeatedly in such decision situations (Janis, 1972, 1983). The basic decision-making process fault happens when decision makers accept a solution without critical examination or meaningful attempts to improve this idea (Janis, 1983; Longley & Pruitt, 1980). Usually, someone in the group presents an idea early in the decision-making process, but this characteristic is not a necessary condition. The conditions that lead to groupthink situations include high group cohesiveness, an absence of critical or opposing opinions, and a directive leader that uses her or his influence in making a decision. Groupthink situations may also occur when there is low commitment to a quality decision by group members (Leana, 1985; McCauley, 1989).

Major Publications:

Janis, I. L. (1972). *Victims of groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Janis, I. L. (1983). *Groupthink: Psychological studies of policy decisions and fiascoes*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin.

Janis, I. L. (1989). *Crucial decisions: Leadership in policymaking and crisis management*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Janis, I. L., & Mann, L. (1979). *Decision making: A psychological analysis of conflict, choice, and commitment*. New York, NY: Free Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Irving L. Janis

Theory Name: Interaction Analysis

Brief Theory Description: Interaction analysis is a family of analytical methods and a grand theory, although the assumptions of both aspects would make it difficult to use one without employing the other (Amidon & Hough, 1967; Jordan & Henderson, 1995). In brief, interaction analysis (as a theory) proposes that an individual's self only occurs through interactions with other people and objects (Jordan & Henderson, 1995; Mühlenbrock & Hoppe, 1999). (For simplicity, we will call people and objects entities in this definition.) Interaction analysis attempts to identify communication patterns and interactions with entities in a person's environment. Specifically, interaction analysis examines the interactions people use to identify problems an individual faces, and the ways in which a person attempts to resolves these problems (Flanders, 1966; Gunawardena, Lowe, & Anderson, 1997). While, as a grand theory, interaction analysis does not have specific propositions, it does have a few underlying assumptions as a basis. First is that someone's personality changes in different situations—a person's self depends on the environment, and on social and material interactions. Second, and related to the first assumption, actions and knowledge have a social origin—actions and knowledge do not have intrinsic qualities and one can only understand them within a given environmental context. Third, someone can determine all important information about a person's self and interaction patterns between entities through observation (thus shaping the analytical portion of interaction analysis). Fourth is that social ordering and power relationships emerge as an interactive relationship between entities in an environment—interactions give meaning to various entities and these meanings shape interactions between entities (Amidon & Hough, 1967; Jordan & Henderson, 1995).

As a method, interaction analysis employs many different forms of observational recording methods such as audio, visual, and written records. Also, unlike many other business communication theories, analytical interaction explicitly includes temporal sequencing in the analytical process (Gunawardena et al., 1997; Mühlenbrock & Hoppe, 1999).

Major Publications:

McDermott, R. P., & Roth, D. R. (1978). The social organization of behavior: Interactional approaches. *Annual Review of Anthropology, 7*, 321–345.

Major Associated Researchers: Gail Fairhurst

Theory Name: Open Communication and Teamwork (Concertive Control)

Brief Theory Description: The original conceptualization of concertive control was based on strong group identification within teams (Barker, 1999, 2005). The theory asserts that this high level of cohesiveness leads group members to create strong behavioral rules/norms which aid in participatory decision-making. On the other hand, critics argue that concertive control enforces unproductive conformity to organizational norms (generative discipline).

Tompkins addresses these concerns with the modified theory—open communication and teamwork (Barker, 1999; Larson & Tompkins, 2005). The revised model places increased emphasis on how to minimize the negative aspects and maximize the positive aspects of this phenomenon. For instance, flatter organizational structures are recommended to counteract harmful conformity which may arise via strong group identity and norms. And greater focus is placed on best practices for fostering constructive, democratic, and participatory decision-making processes within supportive organizational designs (Larson & Tompkins, 2005; Wright & Barker, 2000).

Major Publications:

Barker, J. R. (1993). Tightening the iron cage: Concertive control in self-managing teams. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 38*(3), 408–437.

Tompkins, P. K. (2015). *Managing risk and complexity through open communication and teamwork*. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: P. Tomkins, G. Cheney, and J. Barker.

Theory Name: Organizational Identification (OI)

Brief Theory Description: OI is a theory about the causes and outcomes of how strongly a person's self-image is tied to and associated with an organization (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; M. Mayfield, 1994). The more central to a person's self-image is membership in or association with an organization, the stronger is that person's OI (Abrams, Ando, & Hinkle, 1998; Barge & Schlueter, 1988). It is this centrality to a

person's self-image that differentiates OI from other conceptions of organizational commitment (in which a person may have strong affective or even emotional ties to an organization, but does not necessarily influence that person's self-image). OI has been shown to be strongly related to a person's job satisfaction, performance, and other organizationally relevant behaviors (Bartels, Douwes, de Jong, & Pruyn, 2006; Cheney, 1982). For business communication, various organizational communication strategies have been shown to influence a person's OI. OI also influences how a person interprets communications and their communication patterns with others (Cheney, 1983; Cole & Bruch, 2006).

Major Publications:

Cheney, G. (1982). *Organizational identification as process and product: A field study* (Unpublished Masters Thesis). Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN.

Cheney, G. (1983). On the various and changing meanings of organizational membership: A field study of organizational identification. *Communications Monographs, 50*(4), 342–362.

Cheney, G., & Christensen, L. T. (2001). Organizational identity: Linkages between internal and external communication. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 231–261). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Cheney, G., & Tompkins, P. K. (1987). Coming to terms with organizational identification and commitment. *Central States Speech Journal*, *38*(1), 1–15.

O'Reilly, C. A., & Chatman, J. (1986). Organizational commitment and psychological attachment: The effects of compliance, identification, and internalization on prosocial behavior. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *71*(3), 492–499.

Simon, H. A. (2013). *Administrative behavior* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

Tompkins, P. K., & Cheney, G. (1985). Communication and unobtrusive control. In R. McPhee & P. K. Tompkins (Eds.), *Organizational communication: Traditional themes and new directions* (pp. 179–210). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Major Associated Researchers: Mats Alvesson, H. Willmott, J. Bartels, O. Peters, Menno de Jong, A. Pruyn, M. van der Molen, G. E. Kreiner, B. E. Ashforth, S. Harrison, K. Corley, M. R. Edwards, R. Peccei

Theory Name: Politeness Theory
Brief Theory Description: Politeness theory is a model of how an individual acts to help another person preserve her or his face (self and public image). As such, the theory is one of social, communication interactions (Brown, 1990; Brown & Gilman, 1989). The theory posits that all individuals have two forms of face (positive and negative face), and that different politeness tactics are needed to help preserve the other person's different face needs (Eelen, 2014; Fukada & Asato, 2004). Briefly, positive face is the need for affirmation and support from others while negative face is the need to conduct activities and hold beliefs without interference from others. Positive face can be threatened by ignoring or belittling someone. Negative face can be threatened by interference with or attempted control of someone's actions (Arundale, 1999; Spiers, 1998). Researchers in politeness theory have also posited and investigated different strategies that people employ to preserve other's face, when these strategies are more or less effective, and why individuals choose a given strategy in different situations (Mao, 1994; Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Also, an underlying assumption of this theory is that preserving face of others leads to better communication between the participants (Spiers, 1998; Wilson, Kim, & Meischke, 1991).

Major Publications:

Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Goldsmith, D. J. (2013). Brown and Levinson's politeness theory. In B. B. Whaley & W. Samter (Eds.), *Explaining communication: Contemporary theories and exemplars* (pp. 219–236). New York, NY: Routledge.

Major Associated Researchers: C. D. Dunn, H. Spencer-Oatey, Janet Holmes, Louise Mullany

Theory Name: Sense-Making
Brief Theory Description: Sense-making theory is founded on the belief that people in organizations interpret meaning through their perceptions of organizational happening rather than the actual happening (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Weick, 1993). And communication plays a key role in how these perceptions are formed, shared, and developed. Reflection is a central process in this theory (Herrmann, 2007; Balogun & Johnson, 2004). As Karl Weick said about this process, "How can I know what I think until I see what I say?" (Weick, 1995, p. 25).

Three assumptions underscore sense-making theory (Griffith, 1999; Weick, 1995):

(1) Communication practices and structures can be developed which support positive interactions and environments for people.
(2) We can augment our communication capabilities to create and operationalize such systems.
(3) We need communication methodology to pursue these positive visions.

Finally, through largely communicative interaction, we co-create our reality in relationships with others, including among organizational members. These perceptions of reality are always in transformation (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Schabram & Maitlis, 2017).

Major Publications:

Starbuck, W. H., & Milliken, F. J. (1988). Executive perceptual filters: What they notice and how they make sense. In D. C. Hambrick (Ed.), *The executive effect: Concepts and methods for studying top managers* (pp. 35–65). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Major Associated Researchers: K. Weick, L. Pondy, M. R. Louis

Theory Name: Social Information Processing

Brief Theory Description: This theory is presented in two streams that are relevant to business communication (Baldwin, 1992; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). The first conceptualization presented an individual decision-making perspective in organizations which is heavily influenced by the effects of past decisions and social context (past behaviors and the opinions of others). These consequential individual decisions help to shape the job attitudes of organizational members (Crick & Dodge, 1994; Fulk, Steinfield, Schmitz, & Power, 1987).

The second model of social information processing theory (SIPT) captures the relational effects of virtual communication (Fulk et al., 1987; Utz, 2000). Its basic premise is that online relationships, including trust, can develop in virtual reality. The key to nurturing positive virtual rapports is message sender sensitivity to and adoption of culturally accepted communication rules. SIPT is asserted to improve group and cross-cultural team relations as well as group trust.

Major Publications:

Fulk, J., Steinfield, C. W., Schmitz, J., & Power, J. G. (1987). A social information processing model of media use in organizations. *Communication Research*, *14*(5), 529–552.

Herring, S. C. (1996). *Computer-mediated communication: Linguistic, social, and cross-cultural perspectives* (Vol. 39). Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing.

Salancik, G. R., & Pfeffer, J. (1978). A social information processing approach to job attitudes and task design. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 224–253.

Major Associated Researchers: J. Walther, G. Salancik, J. Pfeffer

Theory Name: Symbolic Interactionism (SI)

Brief Theory Description: Symbolic interactionism provides a framework about how individuals interpret reality (Benzies & Allen, 2001; Blumer, 1986). While affirming the existence of an objective, external reality, symbolic interactionists posit that how people *interpret* and *react* to reality is governed by social interactions with others (Blumer, 1962; Charon, 1979). In brief, the SI framework posits that an individual's worldview is composed of objects in their environment. An object is composed of some element that exists independently of the individual (such as a hammer, grocery store, worker's union, or capitalism) and the meaning that the individual imparts to that element. When a person encounters a new element, that individual will seek and use social cues to create a mental object that can be fit into her or his existing worldview (Denzin, 2008; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). In addition to using social cues for this interpretation, the person will also filter the element through her or his own experiences to create a personal meaning for the object. Additionally, the inclusion of the new object may necessitate changing other objects in the person's worldview. Finally, a person's new interpretation of an object may be fed back into a larger communication group, thus necessitating a new interpretation of the element by other or new members of the group (Kuhn, 1964; P. Rock, 2016).

Major Publications:

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CHAPTER 9

Motivation and Persuasion

I think I shall certainly persuade you; so that, when you have heard, not even you yourself will say anything against it.
—The Clouds, Aristophanes
(trans. William James Hickie)

Chapter Theories

Agenda-Setting Theory
Cognitive Dissonance
Communication Accommodation Theory
Dialogic Public Relations Theory
Dramaturgical Theory
Elaboration Likelihood Model
Framing in Organizations
Impression Management
Interpersonal Deception Theory
Motivating Language Theory
Regulatory Focus Theory
Rhetorical Theory
Social Influence Theory
Social Judgment Theory
Theory of Reasoned Action.

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_9

Academics and managers alike are intrigued by how communication motivates and persuades people (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014). The theories in this category address these interests from multifaceted perspectives including from an organizational level of analysis—*Agenda-Setting Theory* (Ghanem, 1997; Wu & Coleman, 2009)—how people construct messages to convince others—*Rhetorical Theory* (Black, 1988; Cyphert, 2010)—how people shape communication to present a desired image to others—*Impression Management* (Adame & Bisel, 2019; Bromley, 1993)—and from a leader's (and ultimately a peer's) capability to influence linguistically—*Motivating Language Theory* (Hanke, 2020; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019a; J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Neck, in press; Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006).

Within this category of motivation and persuasion, rhetorical theory draws from the oldest documented scholarship in business communication (Anderson, 1999; Black, 1978; Floyd-Lapp, 2014). In fact, the rhetoric literature is so vast and has such a long history that it constitutes its own discipline. We can also argue that the purposes behind this entire category (communicating to transform or reinforce others' viewpoints and to move them toward desired actions) serve as a springboard for most other theories identified in our survey (Black, 1978; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). Simply put, most business communication theories entail some form of motivation or persuasion (Cialdini, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1981; Conger, 1998; J. Mayfield, 1993; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018). This commonality opens the door to cross-fertilize theory building between motivation/persuasion and other survey categories (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a, 2017b).

Case in point, we can apply the theories from the *channels and barriers* category to learn how various persuasion methods operate through different channels. Such investigations become essential as we see an increase in virtual and distributed workplaces (Marlow, Lacerenza, & Salas, 2017; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 1995, 2019b). Similarly, we expect that a partnership between motivation and persuasion theories and those from the *cultural characteristics* and *organizational structures* category would uncover compelling insights for business communication scholars. At present, there is limited but high-quality research on motivation and persuasion which incorporates structural factors such as organizational design or cultural exercises of power. Among some stellar examples are an investigation by Barrett, Thomas, and Hocevar (1995) on constructive discourse and critical theory work by Alvesson (2013). By placing a

lens on conjoined theorizing, we upgrade our knowledge base as well as the merits of individual theories.

These studies also point to another shortcoming regarding theories in this category. For the most part, research on these theories has not sufficiently delved into the ethical responsibility that comes with applying communication to enhance motivation and persuasion (Bisel & Adame, 2019; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 1995; Thorpe & Roper, 2019). Ethically reliable organizations (ERO) and the mum effect (defining the encouragement of silence) are commendable exceptions (Bisel, 2017; Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley, 2012) along with Dulek and Campbell's (2015) exploration of ambiguity in strategic messages. Dialogic public relations, which are covered in this chapter, also incorporate ethical principles into its theoretical framework (Kent & Taylor, 2002). We sincerely hope such role model scholarship will entice other researchers to follow suit through combining persuasion/motivation theories with the emergent communication theories of responsible management (Carroll et al., 2020; Seeger & Ulmer, 2003) which are examined in Chapter 12.

Theory Descriptions: Motivation and Persuasion

Theory Name: Agenda-Setting Theory
Brief Theory Description: Agenda-setting theory was originally developed to examine how media outlets can influence voters' political views. The initial major study disclosed a strong and positive relationship between the political issues that media outlets emphasized and those which voters considered most important. This theory has been extensively studied and found to be broadly robust in multiple settings and cultures (although the relationship between media messages and issue salience has been found to be weaker in non-Western nations).

The theory's principles have been applied to organizational communications (such as corporate PR and advertising) with similar inquiries via agendas set by news organizations. Also, work has been done in interpersonal communications which found that agendas can flow through such communication channels in similar ways to how they flow through mass communications networks.

Major Publications:

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly, 36*(2), 176–187.

McCombs, M. E., Shaw, D. L., & Weaver, D. H. (2014). New directions in agenda-setting theory and research. *Mass Communication and Society, 17*(6), 781–802. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2014.964871.

Major Associated Researchers: Max McCombs, Donald Shaw, and D. H. Weaver

Theory Name: Cognitive Dissonance

Brief Theory Description: Cognitive dissonance is a psychological theory that examines the effects on an individual of holding a set of contradictory beliefs/values or performing some action that is contradictory with her or his belief system. The theory predicts that the individual will try to reduce this dissonance by either changing their beliefs or actions. The theory also states that an individual will tend to make the change that requires the least effort to reduce the perceived conflict. Such changes often result in the person distancing her or himself from the original set of beliefs/actions and developing a stronger set of beliefs in the view that is retained. Key moderators include the importance of the belief, what rewards are presented for making (or resisting) the change, and the level of perceived choice the person has about making the change.

For business communication, this theory has frequently been used in persuasion or social engineering studies. The principles derived from this theory can be used to develop communications that will reduce or induce cognitive dissonance about some subject or action and then guide the person to adopt the desired beliefs.

Major Publications:

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Berkowitz, L. (1965). Cognitive dissonance and communication preferences. *Human Relations, 18*(4), 361–372. https://doi.org/10.1177/001872676501800405.

Major Associated Researchers: Leon Festinger, L. Berkowitz

Theory Name: Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT)

Brief Theory Description: CAT is a model of how and why individuals adjust their communications (verbal and nonverbal) during interactions with other people. The specific focus of CAT is on how a person makes adjustments designed to either emphasize or minimize social differences between themselves and whomever the person is communicating with.

The reasons for such adjustments are varied and include persuasion, impression management, and creating or reinforcing power hierarchies. While CAT has largely been examined in contexts outside of business settings, this theory can be applied to better understand impression management in organizations as a source of organizational conflicts, cultural expectations, and power differentials.

Major Publications:

Giles, H., Coupland, J., & Coupland, N. (Eds.). (2010). *Contexts of accommodation: Developments in applied sociolinguistics* (Reissue edition). Cambridge, Paris: Cambridge University Press.

Giles, H. (2016). *Communication accommodation theory: Negotiating personal relationships and social identities across contexts*. Cambridge University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Howard Giles, N. Coupland, and C. Galois

Theory Name: Dialogic Public Relations Theory

Brief Theory Description: This theory examines how public relations can create channels, methods, and procedures for an exchange of ideas and opinions (a dialogue) between a given entity (such as a company) and the public. The theory proposes not only a model of how public relations' dialogues operate but also includes an ethical component about honorable ways in which organizations should conduct their public relations. This ethical dimension is both normative (organizations should undertake public relations campaigns that benefit the public as well as the organization) and a statement of which public relations methods are most likely to achieve an organization's goals.

Dialogic public relations theory has five key features and five principles. The features include a *recognition of mutuality* (that any public relations campaign must be interactive with the public), *propinquity* (that there is an element of spontaneity in public interactions), *empathy* (an organization must be supportive of the public's needs and interests), *risk* (in engaging with the public on its own terms), and *commitment* (to creating a true dialogue with the public). The five principles consist of a dialogic loop (in which the public may present queries to and receive responses from the organization), usefulness of information (information presented to the public should be of value to everyone), generation of return visits (the campaign should generate a desire in the public to seek more information from the organization), ease of use (any dialogue should be easy

to understand by the public), and conservation (communications should provide only the essential information).

Major Publications:

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (1998). Building dialogic relationships through the world wide web. *Public Relations Review, 24*(3), 321–334.

Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review, 28*(1), 21–37.

Major Associated Researchers: Michael L. Kent, Maureen Taylor, and R. Pearson

Theory Name: Dramaturgical Theory

Brief Theory Description: Erving Goffman developed and presented this theory. Dramaturgical theory focuses on how individuals modify communication to present themselves to others in various situations. The terms and many of the concepts embedded in this theory were adapted from theatrical settings, hence its name. The major premise of this theory is that an individual has a desired self (a presentation of the person) that he or she wants other people to accept. This desired self changes depending on who is being presented to (the other actors in the scene), the situation at hand (the scene the actors are in), and—potentially—observers who are not directly involved in the communication exchange (the audience). The manners in which people want to present themselves are based on cultural influences, perceived group expectations, and personal goals and histories. Depending on communication interchanges within a group (feedback), individuals can adjust their presentations to better convey their desired selves. Such feedback can also lead to a change in the desired presented self as well. The overall goal of such interactions is acceptance of the presented self by the other actors.

Major Publications:

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Buzzanell, P. M., Ellingson, L., Silvio, C., Pasch, V., Dale, B., Mauro, G., … Martin, C. (1997). Leadership processes in alternative organizations: Invitational and dramaturgical leadership. *Communication Studies, 48*(4), 285–310. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510979709368509.

Major Associated Researchers: Erving Goffman, David M. Boje, Patrice Buzzanell, and Richard Bauman

Theory Name: Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM)

Brief Theory Description: ELM is a persuasion theory that examines different methods of processing stimuli, why these separate ways are adopted, and the attitudinal outcomes of using distinct stimuli processing methods. Specifically, ELM proposes that there are two major routes by which people can be persuaded: a central or peripheral route. The central route involves evaluation of persuasive messages using more logical and cognitive resources. It is expected that attitudinal and behavioral changes made from persuasive arguments using this route will be relatively enduring and difficult to change. Persuasive messages channeled through the peripheral route are evaluated through more affective criteria, such as the attractiveness of the message sender and emotional impact of the message. The central route is expected to be employed by a receiver when a person has the motivation and ability to thoroughly evaluate a message. The peripheral route prevails when a person does not have the motivation or ability to evaluate a message. Time is often also a factor in the selection of a route; when time is short, people will evaluate messages using the peripheral route. This theory has been applied in such areas as advertising, healthcare communication, change management, and e-commerce.
Major Publications:

Cacioppo, J. T., & Petty, R. E. (1984). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Consumer Research, 11*(1), 673–675.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1984). Source factors and the elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. *Advances in Consumer Research, 11*(1), 668–672.

Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1986). The elaboration likelihood model of persuasion. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 19). Orlando, FL: Academic Press.
Major Associated Researchers: Richard E. Petty and John Cacioppo

Theory Name: Framing in Organizations (Framing)
Brief Theory Description: Framing shares similar goals with agenda-setting theory. The theory of framing examines methods that individuals or organizations use to shape what others think about a topic. The core of the theory proposes that a particular topic can be presented in certain ways to elicit targeted emotions and chains of reasoning. Examples of how these presentations can be accomplished include using an emotional appeal, presenting the position first in a debate, contrasting desirable results of adopting the targeted position against undesirable results from adopting other positions, or starting from an extreme position so that

other positions must be described in terms of the extreme position. The theory has incorporated many ideas from other persuasion theories, rhetoric, sociology, and behavioral economics. An additional characteristic of the theory is that it proposes that individuals and organizations use communication not just to transmit meaning, but to also create it.

Major Publications:

Deetz, S. A., Tracy, S. J., & Simpson, J. L. (2000). *Leading organizations through transition: Communication and cultural change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fairhurst, G. T., & Sarr, R. A. (1996). *The art of framing: Managing the language of leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of Communication, 50*(2), 93–109.

Major Associated Researchers: Gail Fairhurst, S. A. Deetz, R. A. Sarr

Theory Name: Impression Management

Brief Theory Description: The impression management framework is used to study how an individual influences perceptions about someone or something. While the theory pertains to any influence attempt, it is most commonly associated with self-presentations—how others view the individual attempting the influence. Impression tactics can be calculated or unconscious, but require a set of preconditions in order to be enacted. The first is a set of preconditions: concern about others' attitudes toward a focal object (thing or event), awareness that others will make judgments about the focal object, and a belief that these judgments can be influenced in the desired direction. When these preconditions are met, the person can attempt to guide another person's opinions through persuasive communications, shaping information transmissions, and controlling social interactions and processes. Successful impression management tactics are dependent on social and cultural norms, as well as the personal relationships between the individual attempting the impression management and the recipients of the attempt. Studies of impression management tend to focus on interpersonal communications or mass communications (such as organizational publicity campaigns).

Major Publications:

Goffman, E. (1956). Embarrassment and social organization. *American Journal of Sociology, 62*(3), 264–271.

Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Gardner, W. L., & Martinko, M. J. (1988). Impression management in organizations. *Journal of Management, 14*(2), 321–338.

Major Associated Researchers: Erving Goffman, W. L. Gardner, M. L. Martinko, and Liad Uziel

Theory Name: Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT)

Brief Theory Description: IDT is a model of what communication patterns are used and what affective processes are engaged during a deceptive communication. The theory has eighteen testable propositions about cognitions and behaviors of senders and receivers in relationship to deceptive communications. A major proposition is that involvement in deceptive communications requires greater effort than non-deceptive communications through such actions as strategic selection of messages and attempted control of the communication flow. Another proposition is that most individuals have difficulty in spotting deceptions, and the ability to spot social deception is based on the receiver's social awareness. However, once a person recognizes a deceptive practice, that individual is more likely to accurately perceive that particular behavior as being a deception in the future.

Major Publications:

Buller, D. B., & Burgoon, J. K. (1996). Interpersonal deception theory. *Communication Theory, 6*(3), 203–242.

Buller, D. B., Burgoon, J. K., Buslig, A., & Roiger, J. (1996). Testing interpersonal deception theory: The language of interpersonal deception. *Communication Theory, 6*(3), 268–289.

Major Associated Researchers: David B. Buller and Judee K. Burgoon

Theory Name: Motivating Language Theory (MLT)

Brief Theory Description: This theory offers a framework to elicit follower motivation through leader-to-subordinate communications which then translates into desirable organizational and employee outcomes. Initial studies focused on leader-to-follower oral communication, but other research infers that MLT can be extended to written messages and can occur in dialogues. The theory captures leader language in three categories: direction giving, empathetic, and meaning-making. Direction giving language (*the hands)* dispels ambiguity and clarifies tasks, rewards, and goals. Empathetic language (*the heart)* involves the emotional aspects of work—it cultivates emotional

bonds between a leader and follower and conveys emotional support for the follower. Meaning-making language (*the spirit*) transmits cultural norms, values, and vision, and aligns a follower's personal values with those of the organization. Motivating language theory is based on four assumptions: all three language dimensions must be accessed for optimal outcomes; leader actions must be congruent with communications (behavioral integrity); motivating language encompasses most leader-to-follower speech communications; and follower interpretation must accurately perceive the intended message.

Recently, MLT has been extended to multiple levels of analysis and beyond the domain of leadership. Peer motivating language, (PML), demonstrates that similar behaviors, attitudes, and results can happen between work colleagues. Motivating language theory is most commonly measured through a follower completed scale, but has also been evaluated through qualitative means such as discourse analysis. Motivating language has been tested across multiple nations, work settings, and through experimental design. These studies support the theory's premises and show motivating language to be significantly linked to improved employee and organizational welfare.

Major Publications:

Hanke, D. (2020). *Can employees motivate themselves? The link between peer motivating language and employee outcomes* (Unpublished Dissertation). Texas A&M International University.

Holmes, W. T., & Parker, M. A. (2017). Empirically testing behavioral integrity and credibility as antecedents for the effective implementation of motivating language. *International Journal of Business Communication, 54*(1), 70–82. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416675450.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2018). *Motivating language theory: Effective leader talk in the workplace*. Springer.

Sharbrough, W. C., Simmons, S. A., & Cantrill, D. A. (2006). Motivating language in industry: Its impact on job satisfaction and perceived supervisor effectiveness. *Journal of Business Communication, 43*(4), 322–343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943606291712.

Sullivan, J. (1988). Three roles of language in motivation theory. *Academy of Management Review, 13*(1), 104–115.

Major Associated Researchers: Jacqueline Mayfield, Milton Mayfield, Jerimiah Sullivan, William T. Holmes, and William Sharbrough.

Theory Name: Regulatory Focus Theory (RFT)
Brief Theory Description: Regulatory focus theory is a dual model of individual motivation and related behaviors. The basic premise is that individuals will seek pleasurable experiences and avoid painful ones. Achieving these goals can be accomplished through (regulatory) focus on either promotion or prevention. Promotion focused motivation will lead to prioritizing more positive goal attainment behaviors. Prevention focused motivation favors actions that will reduce the chance of failure, namely, cautiousness about not obtaining the desired goal. The theory posits that people have a general preference for one of the two types of focus.

For business communication applications, this theory has been used to better understand the persuasion process. Studies have shown that using promotion or prevention frames can increase the persuasiveness of a message. Additionally, studies using the RFT model have underscored how nonverbal communication operates in conveying meaning and influence.

Major Publications:

Higgins, E. T. (1997). Beyond pleasure and pain. *American Psychologist*, *52*(12), 1280–1300.

Higgins, E. T. (2011). *Beyond pleasure and pain: How motivation works*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Kirmani, A., & Zhu, R. (2007). Vigilant against manipulation: The effect of regulatory focus on the use of persuasion knowledge. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *44*(4), 688–701.

Major Associated Researchers: E. Tory Higgins, A. Kirmani

Theory Name: Rhetorical Theory
Brief Theory Description: Rhetorical theory is an examination of how individuals (consciously or unconsciously) attempt to persuade others to take a desired action or to accept a belief system. Aristotle is credited as the founder of the study of rhetoric, and he articulated many of its practical implications, including the need to consider the attributes of the audience when creating/delivering a persuasive message. Similarly, classical rhetoric is mainly focused on identifying and understanding different persuasive methods and strategies, along with the situational factors that can influence the success of these strategies. More recent work in this mode of rhetorical analysis has incorporated neurological, psychological/sociological, and behavioral economic principles into determining such strategies.

The modern view of rhetorical theory (that has been developed starting in the twentieth century) has also been re-framed to include non-speech transmission channels (such as written text) and extended to examine how rhetoric is applied to develop shared meaning and cultural understanding among people.

Major Publications:

Black, E. (1978). *Rhetorical criticism: A study in method*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.

Black, E. (1988). Secrecy and disclosure as rhetorical forms. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 74*(2), 133–150.

Burke, K. (1966). *Language as symbolic action: Essays on life, literature, and method*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Burke, K. (1968). *Counter-statement*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Burke, K. (1969). *A grammar of motives*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Burke, K. (1969). *A rhetoric of motives*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Ihlen, O., & Heath, R. L. (2018). *The handbook of organizational rhetoric and communication*. Wiley.

Perelman, C., & Olbrechts-Tyteca, L. (1969). *The new rhetoric: A treatise on argumentation* (J. Wilkinson & P. Weaver, Trans.). Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press.

Toulmin, S. E. (2003). *The uses of argument*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: John A. A. Sillince, R. Suddaby, R. L. Heath, and George Cheney

Theory Name: Social Influence Theory

Brief Theory Description: Social influence theory provides a model of how groups or individuals influence a person's emotions, opinions, attitudes, and behaviors. There are three influence categories: compliance (appearing to agree with someone else's belief, but actually retaining personal beliefs); identification (a shared mindset based on influence from a respected other); and internalization (conforming to an influence both externally and internally). Influence is expected to occur through two major methods: normative social influence and informational social influence. Normative social influence is driven by a person's need for

inclusion, and informational social influence is driven by a person's need to be right. For business communication, this theory has been adopted to observe persuasion processes, more recently through communication networks. It also has been integrated into leader communication and associated motivation research as well as in advertising and public relations messaging.

Major Publications:

Deutsch, M., & Gerard, H. B. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgment. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 51*(3), 629.

Friedkin, N. E., & Johnsen, E. C. (2011). *Social influence network theory: A sociological examination of small group dynamics* (Vol. 33). Cambridge University Press.

Kelman, H. C. (1958). Compliance, identification, and internalization: Three processes of attitude change. *Journal of Conflict Resolution, 2*(1), 51–60.

Major Associated Researchers: Herbert Kelman, Morton Deutsch, N. E. Friedkin, E. C. Johnson, and Harold Gerard

Theory Name: Social Judgment Theory (SJT)

Brief Theory Description: SJT is a model of how individual beliefs and attitudes can be altered. This theory places communication as a focal point of its operations in that attitudes are changed through a communication process. As a result, SJT has vital relevance for persuasive communication. The theory's basic framework begins with the assumption that every person has a set of attitudes about the elements that constitute her or his environment. When a person encounters a novel idea, that concept is compared to the individuals' current attitude set. The new idea is then evaluated, and the person makes a decision about its acceptance, non-commitment (indifference), or rejection. SJT asserts that attitudes will experience maximum change when a novel idea is both highly distinct from the person's established belief system yet still falls within that individual's acceptance or non-commitment zone.

SJT also posits that novel ideas are evaluated in contrast to other attitudes that a person holds. Therefore, an attitude (and the person's acceptance-rejection zone) can only be fully comprehended through knowledge of that person's full complement of attitudes on related ideas. Going further, the theory includes the new idea's potential to induce a

person's attitudinal shift in a negative direction. In such situations, the person views the new idea defensively and as a threat to her or his current attitudinal direction. As a consequence, the individual's attitude will shift away from the advocated position.

Major Publications:

Cooksey, R. W. (1996). The methodology of social judgement theory. *Thinking & Reasoning, 2*(2–3), 141–174.

Sherif, M., & Hovland, C. I. (1980). *Social judgment: Assimilation and contrast effects in communication and attitude change*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Carolyn Sherif, Muzafer Sherif, and Carl Hovland

Theory Name: Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

Brief Theory Description: TRA is a persuasive communication model that specifies how people make choices about what actions to take. The theory focuses on the mechanisms that lead to behaviors—specifically how the attitudes toward a behavior and the intentions of undertaking the action lead to an individual's deeds. The theory posits (and empirical findings give support to this proposition) that a person's intention to perform a behavior is the single strongest predictor of that person actually doing it. The theory also asserts that behavioral intentions are determined by the person's attitudes toward a given behavior, and by the person's perceived subjective norms about the behavior. When attitudes and subjective norms are positive about the behavior, a person will form an intention to enact it. When attitudes and subjective norms are negative, a person will form intentions to *not* undertake the behavior. Both attitudes and subjective norms can vary in intensity about a behavior. When there are multiple possible behaviors that can be chosen, the behavior with the strongest overall positive attitudes and perceived norms will be selected.

Persuasive communication can effect both of these intention factors. Communication strategies and tactics can be directed to alter a behavioral attitude—such as convincing an individual that exerting more effort at work should be viewed in a positive light. Persuasive communication messages can also be used to modify a person's perceived norms. One such example is found when advertisers use mass media to promote the idea that most people are engaging in an activity, and therefore, the related subjective norm should be positive.

Major Publications:

Ajzen, I., Heilbroner, R. L., Fishbein, M., & Thurow, L. C. (1980). *Understanding attitudes and predicting social behaviour*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall PTR.

Ajzen, I., & Madden, T. J. (1986). Prediction of goal-directed behavior: Attitudes, intentions, and perceived behavioral control. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 22*(5), 453–474.

Fishbein, M., & Ajzen, I. (2011). *Predicting and changing behavior: The reasoned action approach*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Major Associated Researchers: *Icek Ajzen and Martin Fishbein*.

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Alvesson, M. (2013). *Communication, power and organization* (Vol. 72). Walter de Gruyter.

Anderson, R. D. (1999). *Ancient rhetorical theory and Paul* (Vol. 18). College Prowler, Inc.

Barrett, F. J., Thomas, G. F., & Hocevar, S. P. (1995). The central role of discourse in large-scale change: A social construction perspective. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 31*(3), 352–372.

Bisel, R. S. (2017). *Organizational moral learning: A communication approach*. Routledge.

Bisel, R. S., & Adame, E. A. (2019). Encouraging upward ethical dissent in organizations: The role of deference to embodied expertise. *Management Communication Quarterly, 33*(2), 139–159.

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Black, E. (1988). Secrecy and disclosure as rhetorical forms. *Quarterly Journal of Speech, 74*(2), 133–150.

Bromley, D. B. (1993). *Reputation, image and impression management*. Wiley.

Carroll, A. B., Adler, N. J., Mintzberg, H., Cooren, F., Suddaby, R., Freeman, R. E., & Laasch, O. (2020). What "are" responsible management? A conceptual

potluck. In *The research handbook of responsible management* (pp. 56–72). Edward Elgar Publishing.
Cialdini, R. B., Petty, R. E., & Cacioppo, J. T. (1981). Attitude and attitude change. *Annual Review of Psychology, 32*(1), 357–404. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.32.020181.002041.
Conger, J. A. (1998). The necessary art of persuasion. *Harvard Business Review, 76*(3), 84–97.
Cyphert, D. (2010). The rhetorical analysis of business speech: Unresolved questions. *The Journal of Business Communication (1973), 47*(3), 346–368. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943610370577.
Dulek, R. E., & Campbell, K. S. (2015). On the dark side of strategic communication. *International Journal of Business Communication, 52*(1), 122–142.
Floyd-Lapp, C. (2014). Aristotle's rhetoric: The power of words and the continued relevance of persuasion. *Young Historians Conference*, Portland State University.
Ghanem, S. (1997). Filling in the tapestry: The second level of agenda setting. In *Communication and democracy: Exploring the intellectual frontiers in agenda-setting theory*, pp. 3–14.
Hanke, D. (2020). *Can employees motivate themselves? The link between peer motivating language and employee outcomes* (Unpublished Dissertation). Texas A&M International University.
Kent, M. L., & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a dialogic theory of public relations. *Public Relations Review, 28*(1), 21–37. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(02)00108-X.
Ma, Q. K., Mayfield, M., & Mayfield, J. (2018). Keep them on-board! How organizations can develop employee embeddedness to increase employee retention. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal, 32*(4), 5–9. https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-11-2017-0094.
Marlow, S. L., Lacerenza, C. N., & Salas, E. (2017). Communication in virtual teams: A conceptual framework and research agenda. *Human Resource Management Review, 27*(4), 575–589.
Mayfield, J. (1993). *The role of motivating language in leader-member exchange* (Unpublished Dissertation). University of Alabama.
Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (1995). Learning the language of leadership: A proposed agenda for leader training. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies, 2*(1), 132–136. https://doi.org/10.1177/107179199500200111.
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Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2018). *Motivating language theory: Effective leader talk in the workplace*. Springer.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2019a). The diffusion process of strategic motivating language: An examination of the internal organizational environment and emergent properties. *International Journal of Business Communication*, *56*(3), 366–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416629093.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2019b). A commentary on "the call center agent's performance paradox: A mixed-methods study of discourse strategies and paradox resolution." *Academy of Management Discoveries, 5*(2), 205–206. https://doi.org/10.5465/amd.2018.0096.

Mayfield, J., Mayfield, M., & Neck, C. P. (in press). Speaking to the self: How motivating language links with self-leadership. *International Journal of Business Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488417731861.

Mayfield, M., & Mayfield, J. (2012). Effective performance feedback for learning in organizations and organizational learning. *Development and Learning in Organizations, 26*(1), 15–18. https://doi.org/10.1108/14777281211189128.

Mayfield, M., & Mayfield, J. (2017a). Leader talk and the creative spark: A research note on how leader motivating language use influences follower creative environment perceptions. *International Journal of Business Communication, 54*(2), 210–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416687057.

Mayfield, M., & Mayfield, J. (2017b). "What's past is prologue": A look at past leadership communication research with a view toward the future. *International Journal of Business Communication, 54*(2), 107–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416687050.

Seeger, M. W., & Ulmer, R. R. (2003). Explaining Enron: Communication and responsible leadership. *Management Communication Quarterly, 17*(1), 58–84.

Sharbrough, W. C., Simmons, S. A., & Cantrill, D. A. (2006). Motivating language in industry: Its impact on job satisfaction and perceived supervisor effectiveness. *Journal of Business Communication, 43*(4), 322–343. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943606291712.

Thorpe, A. S., & Roper, S. (2019). The ethics of gamification in a marketing context. *Journal of Business Ethics, 155*(2), 597–609.

Wu, H. D., & Coleman, R. (2009). Advancing agenda-setting theory: The comparative strength and new contingent conditions of the two levels of agenda-setting effects. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 86*(4), 775–789.

CHAPTER 10

Organizational Structures

That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
—Kublah Khan, Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Chapter Theories

Adaptive Structuration Theory
Enactment Theory
Organizational Information Theory
Social Constructionism
Social Context of Communication
Structuration Theory

Theories in this category examine how organizations shape communications and how communications shape organizational structures. Most of these theories look at the processes as mutually influential—communication patterns create and shape structures which then influence communication patterns. However, each of these theories takes a different approach to the process and provides multiple insights into this area. Social constructionism offers a good start for understanding the basic ideas behind theories in the category (Allen, 2005; Baïada-hirèche, Pasquero, & Chanlat, 2011).

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_10

However, this category holds the smallest number of theories. This scarcity indicates a need in business communication to develop more theories for this area (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014, 2018). In addition, researchers may want to expand the methods by which we examine these phenomena (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). Currently, most research on this topic has employed qualitative and (to a lesser extent) quantitative methods. However, the topic acts as an intersection between two different levels—organizational and individual. As such, researchers may find it useful to employ less frequently used methods. Qualitative comparative analysis could help discover structural regularities with its fusion of qualitative and quantitative methods. Similarly, researcher could develop new theories or expand current ones by using simulation methods such as agent-based models (Macy & Willer, 2002; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019) or system dynamics models (Forrester & Senge, 1980; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2013) that employ feedback loops.

Theories in this category can pair well with theories from most other categories and lend a depth to all of them in understanding how structures influence communication behaviors. In this way, the theories bring in a perspective on what communication aspects individuals do and do not have control over. Such explorations can also bring up interesting ethical perspectives since most current ethical views of communication assume an individual responsibility and largely ignore institutional roles.

Theory Descriptions: Organizational Structures

Theory Name: Adaptive Structuration Theory (AST)

Brief Theory Description: Adaptive structuration theory (AST) examines how individuals and groups view and interact with information and communication technologies in an organization (G. DeSanctis & Poole, 1991, 1994). This theory examines how information technologies create communication flow networks, and how individual and groups use these networks for communication (Chin, Gopal, & Salisbury, 1997; Furumo & Melcher, 2006). The theory posits that communication flows emerge over time as an interaction of the information technologies and the individuals that use the technologies. Users create systems by developing structures of rules and resources for technology use. These systems and structures become self-reinforcing over time and will be relatively stable

until a new external force (such as the introduction of new communication technologies) disturbs the structure's equilibrium (DeSanctis & Poole, 1994; Kanten, Kanten, & Gurlek, 2015).

Major Publications:

DeSanctis, G., & Poole, M. S. (1994). Capturing the complexity in advanced technology use: Adaptive structuration theory. *Organization Science*, *5*(2), 121–147.

Major Associated Researchers: Gerardine Desanctis and Marshal Scott Poole

Theory Name: Enactment Theory

Brief Theory Description: Enactment theory sets out a model of how people form and re-form organizations through a process of negotiations and rule refinements (Berger, 1972; Marcus & Anderson, 2010). The theory posits that individuals enact this process by first developing rules for interactions, and these rules lead to a level of interpersonal stability. Once groups have achieved this stability, then they develop behavioral rules (Ellis, Shockley, & Henry, 2011; Kalbfleisch, 2007). The process provides people with a set of defined—or scripted—behaviors that they can rely on for most behaviors and interactions within the organization (Kossek, Lautsch, & Eaton, 2005; Peters, Snowden, Schlemmer, & Webb, 2008). The theory also posits that people in organizations will base most of their behaviors on these scripts, and people will only alter their scripts in the face of new and disruptive elements from external sources (such as the emergence of a new competitor). When there is such a disruption, people must negotiate new behavioral expectations (Jennings & Greenwood, 2003; Kossek et al., 2005). While some of these rule enactments will take place at a formal level, most will occur through informal processes (Peters et al., 2008; Silberstang & Hazy, 2008).

This theory can be seen as a communication network theory, and as such, has many business communication applications. Also, much research has been done on the communication processes that occur to negotiate and achieve the stabilizing rules used to build organizational structures. The theory has usually been examined through qualitative means, specifically discourse analysis.

Major Publications:

Putnam, L. L. (1989). Negotiation and organizing: Two levels of analysis within the Weickian model. *Communication Studies*, *40*(4), 249–257.

Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Major Associated Researchers: Karl Weick and E. M. Eisenberg

Theory Name: Organizational Information Theory

Brief Theory Description: This theory has two main propositions: The first is that organizations are process driven (rather than structurally driven), and the second is that communication processes are developed and driven by needs and desires to reduce message uncertainty and equivalence (Lord, Foti, & de Vader, 1984; Niederman, Briggs, de Vreede, & Kolfschoten, 2008). The model also posits that as organizations become more complex, communication exchanges will become more uncertain, and therefore necessitate greater regulations for communication processes (Lord et al., 1984; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012). The model posits that there are three stages in reducing equivocality (Lord et al., 1984; Niederman et al., 2008). The first stage is enactment where individuals try out different communication methods and procedures for processing needed organizational information. The second stage is selection in which organizational decision makers decide how to obtain and process outstanding needed information. In the third and final stage—retention—organizational decision makers decide which information is useful and should be collected in the future through appropriate communication methods.

Major Publications:

Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 628–652.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations* (1st ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Weick, K. E., & Ashford, S. J. (2001). Learning in organizations. In F. M. Jablin & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of organizational communication: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 704–731). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Major Associated Researchers: Karl Weick and Brenda Dervin

Theory Name: Social Constructionism (Social Construction of Reality)

Brief Theory Description: This theory provides a model of the structures through which organizational and societal roles develop and become

stronger (Benford & Hunt, 1992; Burr, 2015). The theory's basic premise proposes that as people interact, role expectations will develop for different individuals (Epstein, 1998; Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018). Over time, these expectations will become solidified and exist outside of the original individual—they will shift from being an expectation of an individual to an expectation of a type of role. When new individuals enter the group, others will expect these individuals to conform to a given role (Rust, 1993; Young & Collin, 2004). Such processes occur in support of and as a result of individuals jointly operating to develop an understanding of reality. Three of the foundational theoretical assumptions are that (Burr, 2015; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010):

1. People create models or representations of the world in order to better process events that happen to them.
2. A group of people jointly create these models.
3. This joint creation occurs through communication processes.

Research on this theory has focused on how these roles develop, are maintained, develop or change over time, and the effects of such roles and processes. From a business communication perspective, studies have focused on the role of communication in these processes as well as examining the process as a type of nonverbal communication (Hackley, 1998; Parker, 1998).

Major Publications:

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (2011). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. New York, NY: Open Road Media.

Searle, J. R. (2010). *The construction of social reality*. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster.

Major Associated Researchers: Loizos Heracleous, John Shotter, Kenneth Gergen, John Searle, P. L. Berger

Theory Name: Social Context of Communication (Social Context Cues)

Brief Theory Description: This framework examines the role of social context cues in interpersonal communication (Henningsen, Braz, & Davies, 2008; Wheeless, 1975). Theory researchers have proposed that social cues trigger communication norms. Without such cues, an individual remains unclear on the meaning of a given message (thus increasing stress, and reducing inhibitions about expressing feelings). The framework posit three categories of social context cues: geographical, organizational,

and situational. Geographical cues arise from a particular location—norms that shape how an individual communicates in different types of locations. Organizational cues arise from status differential due to organizational hierarchy separation between individuals and organizational communication role expectations. Situational cues are any cues dependent on the communication interchange at a given moment and can include dress, status differential, nonverbal feedback, and social communication expectations (Henningsen et al., 2008; Fox & Irwin, 1998).

The framework posits that social context cues provide individuals with strong norms on how to communicate and that removing these cues has a profound effect on interpersonal communications. As social cues are reduced, a person's communications tend to become more self-focused (as compared to other-focused), less differentiated, and less controlled. This framework was initially applied to electronic communications, specifically e-mail, and provided an explanation for the *flaming* behavior that was seen in such communications (Collins, 1992; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986). However, societies can develop social norms around a new communication medium that will act as behavioral guides. For example, there are norms (social context cues) related to physically written communications that inhibit many of the negative behaviors exhibited in early e-mail communications (J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kohl, 2005; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986).

Major Publications:

Kiesler, S., & Sproull, L. (1992). Group decision making and communication technology. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *52*(1), 96–123.

Major Associated Researchers: Sara Kiesler and Lee Sproull

Theory Name: Structuration Theory (Structurational Theory)

Brief Theory Description: Structuration theory posits that human behaviors and structures reciprocally influence each other (Bryant & Jary, 2014; Canary & Tarin, 2017). In other words, human activities and behaviors shape organizational structures, and organizational structures channel and direct human behaviors. Structure is defined as rules and resources (Boland, 1996; Jones & Karsten, 2008). Rules are organizational norms that organizational members must follow (although members can change these rules over time). Resources are divided into authoritative and allocative. Authoritative resources are those based on the management of individual actions to achieve outcomes—decisions about

how people will engage in work activities. Allocative resources derive from the distribution of physical goods and materials (Macintosh & Scapens, 1990; Pozzebon & Pinsonneault, 2005). Communication processes are used in the development of this cycle, and the structures can be viewed as a form of nonverbal communication (Canary & Tarin, 2017; Pagel & Westerfelhaus, in press).

Major Publications:

Giddens, A. (1986). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Anthony Giddens

References

Allen, B. J. (2005). Social constructionism. In S. May & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *Engaging organizational communication theory and research: Multiple perspectives* (pp. 35–53). Sage.

Baïada-hirèche, L., Pasquero, J., & Chanlat, J. (2011). Managerial responsibility as negotiated order: A social construction perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics, 101,* 17–31. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-011-1172-7.

Benford, R. D., & Hunt, S. A. (1992). Dramaturgy and social movements: The social construction and communication of power. *Sociological Inquiry, 62*(1), 36–55.

Berger, C. R. (1972). Toward a role enactment theory of persuasion. *Communications Monographs, 39*(4), 260–276.

Boland, R. J. (1996). Why shared meanings have no place in structuration theory: A reply to Scapens and Macintosh. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 21*(7), 691–697.

Bryant, C., & Jary, D. (2014). *Giddens' theory of structuration: A critical appreciation. Routledge*. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315822556.

Burr, V. (2015). *Social constructionism*. Routledge.

Canary, H. E., & Tarin, C. A. (2017). Structuration theory. In *The international encyclopedia of organizational communication* (pp. 1–15). Wiley.

Chin, W. W., Gopal, A., & Salisbury, W. D. (1997). Advancing the theory of adaptive structuration: The development of a scale to measure faithfulness of appropriation. *Information Systems Research, 8*(4), 342–367. https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.8.4.342.

Collins, M. (1992). *Flaming: The relationship between social context cues and uninhibited verbal behavior in computer-mediated communication*. http://www.emoderators.com/papers/flames.html.

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of Business Communication, 45(4), 483–502. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021943608319390.

DeSanctis, G., & Poole, M. S. (1991). *The hidden complexity in advanced technology use: Adaptive structuration theory* (Unpublished Manuscript). University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

DeSanctis, G., & Poole, M. S. (1994). Capturing the complexity in advanced technology use: Adaptive structuration theory. *Organization Science, 5*(2), 121–147. https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.5.2.121.

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Epstein, S. (1998). Gay politics, ethnic identity: The limits of social constructionism. In P. M. Nardi & B. E. Schneider (Eds.), *Social perspectives in lesbian and gay studies: A reader* (pp. 134–159). Routledge.

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Forrester, J. W., & Senge, P. M. (1980). Tests for building confidence in system dynamics models. In A. A. Legasto Jr, J. W. Forrester, & J. W. Lyneis (Eds.), *System dynamics* (pp. 209–228). North-Holland.

Fox, C. R., & Irwin, J. R. (1998). The role of context in the communication of uncertain beliefs. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 20*(1), 57–70. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15324834basp2001_6.

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performance. *Procedia Economics and Finance, Complete* (23), 1358–1366. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)00523-7.

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Macy, M. W., & Willer, R. (2002). From factors to actors: Computational sociology and agent-based modeling. *Annual Review of Sociology, 28*(1), 143–166. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141117.

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Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2013). Developing your organization with models and simulations. *Development and Learning in Organizations, 27*(5), 11–14. https://doi.org/10.1108/DLO-04-2013-0010.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2014). Step by step to better performance: Organizational-citizenship behavior can transform employees and the workplace. *Human Resource Management International Digest, 22*(4), 36–39. https://doi.org/10.1108/HRMID-07-2014-0087.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2018). *Motivating language theory: Effective leader talk in the workplace*. Springer.

Mayfield, J., & Mayfield, M. (2019). The diffusion process of strategic motivating language: An examination of the internal organizational environment and emergent properties. *International Journal of Business Communication, 56*(3), 366–391. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416629093.

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Mayfield, M., & Mayfield, J. (2017). Leader talk and the creative spark: A research note on how leader motivating language use influences follower creative environment perceptions. *International Journal of Business Communication, 54*(2), 210–225. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488416687057.

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Pagel, S., & Westerfelhaus, R. (in press). "The leopard does not change its spots": Structuration theory and the process of managerial decision-making regarding popular management theories. *International Journal of Business Communication*. https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488419829890.

Parker, I. (1998). *Social constructionism, discourse and realism*. Sage.

Peters, J., Snowden, K., Schlemmer, F., & Webb, B. (2008). The managing director and the development of dynamic capabilities: An application of enactment theory. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis, 16*(1–2), 109–137.

Pozzebon, M., & Pinsonneault, A. (2005). Challenges in conducting empirical work using structuration theory: Learning from IT research. *Organization Studies, 26*(9), 1353–1376. https://doi.org/10.1177/0170840605054621.

Rust, P. C. (1993). "Coming out" in the age of social constructionism: Sexual identity formation among lesbian and bisexual women. *Gender & Society, 7*(1), 50–77.

Silberstang, J., & Hazy, J. K. (2008). Toward a micro-enactment theory of leadership. *The Innovation Journal—Public Sector Innovation Journal*, *13*(3), article 5.

Sproull, L., & Kiesler, S. (1986). Reducing social context cues: Electronic mail in organizational communication. *Management Science, 32*(11), 1492–1512.

Wheeless, L. R. (1975). An investigation of receiver apprehension and social context dimensions of communication apprehension. *Communication Education, 24*(3), 261–268.

Young, R. A., & Collin, A. (2004). Introduction: Constructivism and social constructionism in the career field. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *64*(3), 373–388.

CHAPTER 11

Reasons and Representations

Ah child! ah child! I cannot say
A word more. You conceive
The reason now, why just to-day
—A Tale Of Villafranca, Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Chapter Theories

Conversation Analysis
Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations
Dialogic Theory
Discourse Analysis
English for Specific Purposes
Functional Perspective on Group Decision-Making
Interpretive School of Communication, The
Semantic Network
Speech Acts Theory
Strategic Messaging

Most theories in the other categories remain neutral about the purpose behind business communication research (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014, 2019). Theories in this category bring the issue of what we should examine to the forefront. Some of these theories—such as Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations (Cronen, 1988;

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_11

Fuchs & Mosco, 2012)—answer this question by highlighting ethical issues, others—such as conversation analysis (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Hammersley, 2003)—focus on what communication factors and methods researchers should use, and some—such as semantic network (Doerfel, 1998; Rice & Danowski, 1993)—provide general modeling guidance for representing communication interchanges. The strategic messaging model (Fielden, Gibbons, & Dulek, 2003; Fielden & Dulek, 1990) combines all of these perspectives and describes an entire communication system for achieving organizational results.

The field of business communication needs such theories (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). They provide us with a mirror that tells us how we believe business communication operates as a whole, and what we should focus on (Argenti, 2017; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017). As such, it would advance the field if researchers were to more consciously develop such theories. We believe that having such purposefully developed models can help our field to develop a clearer identity—to make a statement about what we should examine and what truly constitutes business communication (Kuhn, 1996; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018).

Also, such theories hold the possibility of developing a general theory on business communication—or at least such a theory for major areas of business communication (Almaney, 1974; Benoit & Pfau, 2004). Our field needs theories that address specific topics (such as listed in our prior chapters), but we also need theories that can unite broad types of phenomenon. We need audacious thinkers who can set out models of how many different business communications operate together. We have seen in areas such as biology how a theory such as Darwin's theory of evolution provided a uniting model for how to explain many disparate observations, and how this uniting model led to rapid advancement in a multitude of areas across the field. We urge researchers in our field to search for similar models that can move us forward as well.

Theory Descriptions: Reasons and Representations

Theory Name: Conversation Analysis (CA)
Brief Theory Description: CA arose from interpersonal communication explorations (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990; Ten Have, 2007). However, CA has developed beyond this origin and now focuses on all forms of social interactions and embraces both verbal and nonverbal conduct in

everyday and business life situations (Mandelbaum, 2008; Ten Have, 2007). CA acts as a grand theory of what *should* be examined in communication interactions, and *how* to perform these examinations through a specific set of analytical methods (Heritage & Turner, 2008; Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). Conversation analysis has three foundational assumptions: that people can understand communications by examining only the interactions of conversational participants (you do not need to reference a larger environment), communicants use conversational interactions to make sense of the other participant(s) interactions and contributions, and that negotiating turn taking (who gets to speak and when) is the irreducible component of all conversations (Markee, 2000; Psathas, 1995).

Conversation analysis has a central purpose of trying to understand patterns in conversational interactions (Korobov, 2001; Lavin-Loucks, 2005). CA proposes that such patterns have four components. *Turn taking* acts as the foundational component, and it encapsulates when and who speaks within a conversation. As such, it provides an insight into the power dynamics of a conversation. *Sequence organization* captures the ordering of actions in a communication interchange. For how people deal with problems in a communication interchange, researchers use the term *repair organization*. Finally, people use *action organization* to achieve goals (Psathas, 1995; Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2003). As for methodology, CA relies only on oral interchanges—it does not include any written or other visual forms of communication (Schiffrin et al., 2003; Ten Have, 2007).

Major Publications:

Sacks, H. (1995). *Lectures on Conversation* (G. Jefferson & E. A. Schegloff, Ed.). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Sacks, H., Schegloff, E. A., & Jefferson, G. (1974). A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation. *Language*, *50*(4), 696–735.

Schegloff, E. A., Jefferson, G., & Sacks, H. (1977). The preference for self-correction in the organization of repair in conversation. *Language*, *53*(2), 361–382.

Schegloff, E. A. (2007). *Sequence organization in interaction: A primer in conversation analysis* (1st ed., Vol. 1). Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Jonathan Clifton and Susan Speers

Theory Name: Critical Theory of Communication Approach to Organizations

Basic Theory Description: The critical theory of communication approach to organizations can best be classified as a grand theory or general approach to research communication (Campos, 2007; Deetz, May, & Mumby, 2005). The main focus of this theory is that business communication research has a role in balancing the interests of organizations and humans that are associated with these organizations. The major proponent of this theory—Stanley Deetz—asserts that organizations must be viewed as political entities: not just rational economic institutions (S. Deetz, 2007; S. A. Deetz, 1992). Additionally, this theory proposes that corporations have become the dominant force in today's society, and that researchers need to examine this role critically.

Deetz also proposed that improved communication can help rectify the imbalance between individual and corporate power as well as improve corporate decision-making and performance (S. Deetz, 2007; S. A. Deetz, 2003). Another tenet of this theory is that business communications are not neutral, and are used to exert and maintain power structures. As part of this theoretical aspect, managers within an organization are expected to use communication to establish and enhance their power and personal interests—even if these actions are contrary to the benefits of the organizational members and stakeholders, organizational owners, or the organization as a whole (Brannen et al., 2014; Hasian & Delgado, 1998). Additionally, language in general (and corporate communications in specific) does not just represent reality but can help create new ideas and reality.

Major Publications:

Alvesson, M., & Willmot, H. (Eds.). (1992). *Critical management studies*. London: Sage.

Alvesson, M., & Willmot, H. (Eds.). (2003). *Studying management critically*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Alvesson, M., Willmot, H., & Bridgman, T. (Eds.). (2009). *The Oxford handbook of critical management studies* (1st ed.). Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press.

Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Deetz, S. (2003). Corporate governance, communication, and getting social values into the decisional chain. *Management Communication Quarterly*, *16*(4), 606–611.

Deetz, S. (2008). Engagement as co-generative theorizing. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *36*(3), 289–297.

Major Associated Researchers: Dennis K. Mumby, Mats Alvesson, George Cheney, Karen Ashcraft, and Patrice Buzzanell

Theory Name: Dialogic Theory (Theory of Dialogic Communication, Dialogical Theory of Communication)

Brief Theory Description: Dialogic theory comes from literary theory and presents a grand theory of how we interpret organizational communications (Kent, 2017; Kent & Taylor, 2002). This theory proposes that we interpret all communication based on our situations and personal contexts (Kent & Lane, 2017; Kent & Taylor, 2002). It holds that we cannot understand a given communication in isolation, but that we must examine it in the context of previous communications and cultural norms (Bentley, 2012; White, 2008). The theory also proposes that even when the form of a communication remains fixed, people will reinterpret it in the light of new communications or cultural changes (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; McAllister, 2013). For example, customers may have accepted certain advertising mascots such as Aunt Jemima or Uncle Ben when introduced, but with cultural changes people have come to see these mascots as unacceptable and possibly racist. The mascots did not change, but our view of them has.

However, Bakhtin also noted that communications have a greater or lesser degree of dialogic interaction (Bakhtin, 2010; Hall, Vitanova, & Marchenkova, 2004). Instructions for assembling furniture are unlikely to greatly change meaning over time, while the meaning of a television commercial can have a vastly different meaning within a few years.

Major Publications:

Bakhtin, M. M. (2010). *The dialogic imagination: Four essays* (M. Holquist, Ed., and C. Emerson, Trans.) (Reprint Edition). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Eliot, T. S. (1920). *The Sacred Wood* (1st ed.). London, England: Methuen & Co.

Major Associated Researchers: Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva

Theory Name: Discourse Analysis (DA; Discourse Studies)

Brief Theory Description: DA can be viewed as either a grand theory or as a family of analytical methods used to analyze vocal, written, sign language use, or any significant communication event (Brown, Gillian, & Yule, 1983; Chouliaraki, 2008). However, the two perspectives are tightly interwoven in that most DA theoretical views are examined through standard DA analysis methods, and it would be difficult to apply a discourse analysis method without also adopting some of DA's theoretical assumptions and viewpoints (Gee, 2004; Hammersley, 2003). We can also contrast DA with most traditional linguistic study frameworks in that it includes semiotic events that lie outside of formal sentence structures. As such, DA is more inclusive and examines other naturally occurring event elements such as turn talking, interruptions, and tone or intonation (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). While many topics have been explored using the DA lens, they all share a communality in that researchers view language and language use as a social interaction and requires an understanding of the social context within which the discourse is embedded (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Gee, 2004).

Major Publications:

Harris, Z. S. (1952a). Discourse analysis. *Language*, *28*(1), 1–30.

Harris, Z. S. (1952b). Discourse analysis: A sample text. *Language*, *28*(4), 474–494.

Harris, Z. S. (1954). Distributional structure. *Word*, *10*(2–3), 146–162.

Harris, Z. S. (1963). *Discourse analysis reprints*. The Hague: Mouton.

Harris, Z. S. (1970). Culture and style in extended discourse. In *Papers in structural and transformational linguistics* (pp. 373–379). Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer.

Harris, Z. S. (1982). Discourse and sublanguage. In R. Kittredge & J. Lehrberger (Eds.), *Sublanguage* (pp. 231–236). New York, NY: De Gruyter.

Schiffrin, D., Tannen, D., & Hamilton, H. E. (Eds.). (2003). *The handbook of discourse analysis* (1st ed.). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. E., & Schiffrin, D. (Eds.). (2015). *The handbook of discourse analysis* (2nd ed.). Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Stubbs, M. (1983). *Discourse analysis: The sociolinguistic analysis of natural language*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Major Associated Researchers: Mats Alvesson, Dan Karreman, Norman Fairclough, Jonathan Clifton, Francesca Bargiella-Chiappini,

V.K. Bhatia, Winnie Cheng, Christopher Candlin, Srikant Sarangi, Gail Fairhurst, Linda Putnam, Hiro Tanaka, David Grant, Clifford Oswick, Cynthia Hardy, Janet Holmes, Louise Mullany, Maria Stubbe, and Rick Iedema

Theory Name: English for Specific Purposes (ESP)

Brief Theory Description: ESP presents a pedagogical theory teaching English in a given—usually technical—sphere of language use (Belcher, 2009a; Bloor, 1998). Most research focuses on how to teach English use in business settings (Belcher, 2009b; Coffey, 1984). While the theory does not have generally accepted propositions, there are a loose set of assumptions that guide the practice of ESP (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Johns, 2012). These assumptions are as follows:

- No one set of teaching methods is superior in all situations.
- The teaching method should be specific to the skills that the learner needs (such as reading technical manuals).
- Teaching methods should be designed based on the relevant discipline to be taught.
- Methods should take into account the age and work experience of the learner.
- Methods should take into account the individual's learning stage.
- Methods should build upon the learner's existing English knowledge.

Major Publications:

Dudley-Evans, T. (1997). An overview of ESP in the 1990s. In *The Japan Conference on English for Specific Purposes Proceedings* (pp. 5–11). Aizuwakamatsu City, Fukushima, Japan.

Dudley-Evans, T., & St. John, M. J. (1998). *Developments in English for specific purposes: A multi-disciplinary approach*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A. (1987). *English for specific purposes* (13th ed.). Cambridge Cambridgeshire: Cambridge University Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Leena Louhiala-Salminen. Jane Lockwood, Julio Gimenez, and Catherine Nickerson

Theory Name: Functional Perspective on Group Decision-Making

Brief Theory Description: This theory models group decision-making processes and implicitly and explicitly incorporates group communication processes (Gouran, Hirokawa, Julian, & Leatham, 1993; Hirokawa, 1988). Based on theoretical propositions, there are four activities that can improve group decision-making: (1) goal setting; (2) problem analysis; (3) alternative identification; (4) positive and negative characteristics evaluation. The theory states that groups need all four activities to achieve quality group decisions.

The theory also proposes that groups use three communication styles in decision-making situations (Hirokawa & Poole, 1986; Orlitzky & Hirokawa, 2001). The first is proactive-interaction: calling attention or focus to one of the four decision-making functions. The second is disruptive-interaction: detracting from or preventing a group using one or more of the four functions, thus impeding achievement of the group's goals. The final style is counteractive-interaction: a refocusing of the group—either to bring a group's focus back to its original goals or on new (but desirable) group goals. Groups can mix these styles within a given decision-making process.

Major Publications:

Hirokawa, R. Y., & Poole, M. S. (1986). *Communication and group decision-making*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Orlitzky, M., & Hirokawa, R. Y. (2001). To err is human, to correct for it divine: A meta-analysis of research testing the functional theory of group decision-making effectiveness. *Small Group Research*, *32*(3), 313–341.

Major Associated Researchers: Randy Y. Hirokawa and Dennis Gouran

Theory Name: Interpretive School of Communication, The

Brief Theory Description: The Interpretive School of Communication is a grand theory, or a paradigm for approaching communication research (S. A. Deetz, 1982; Putnam, 1983). Its goals embrace the attainment of a more naturalistic understanding of communication processes and interactions, gaining new insights which have been at times bounded by *normal science*. Such a mindset seeks discovery of what actually *is*—without the guidance of previously imposed hypotheses.

More specifically, less importance is given to theoretical and empirical constraints when conducting organizational investigations. Instead, interpretive researchers may well use ethnographic or naturalistic methods to achieve more subjective understanding of how the focal communication

actors interact. For example, an interpretive study's goals might include deep organizational culture perceptions that are derived from indwelling and/or discourse analyses. Of note, this school is relatively new and still emerging.

Major Publications:
Putnam, L. L. (1983). Communication and organizations: An interpretive perspective. In L. L. Putnam & M. Pacanowsky (Eds.), *Communication and organizations* (pp. 31–45). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
Major Associated Researchers: L. Putnam, M. Pacanowsky, G. Cheney, P. Tompkins

Theory Name: Semantic Network (Frame Network)
Brief Theory Description: This theory works as a general analysis framework with a major premise that you can represent knowledge as a network of linkages between concepts (Carley & Kaufer, 1993; Duda, Hart, Nilsson, & Sutherland, 1977). Within a network (Schultz, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Utz, & Van Atteveldt, 2012; Scott, 2005), a node represents a concept (such as *cat*), and an edge—shown graphically as a line or arrow—represents how a concept relates (such as *is*) to another concept (such as *furry*). Researchers have used semantic networks to capture relationships between words and also communication relationships (Navigli & Ponzetto, 2012; Shapiro & Rapaport, 1987).

The semantic network model is mostly used as a modeling or analysis method; however, it does provide a powerful grand theory for how we should represent information communications what we should represent.

Major Publications:
Simmons, R. F. (1963). Synthetic language behavior. *Data Processing Management*, *5*(12), 11–18.

Quillian, M. R. (1963). *A notation for representing conceptual information: An application to semantics and mechanical English paraphrasing* (No. SP-1395). Santa Monica, CA: Systems Development Corp.

Quillian, M. R. (1967). Word concepts: A theory and simulation of some basic semantic capabilities. *Behavioral Science*, *12*(5), 410–430.
Major Associated Researchers: Charles S. Peirce, Richard H. Richens, Robert F. Simmons and M. Ross Quillian

Theory: Speech Acts Theory
Brief Theory Description: Speech acts theory examines the functions played by different communication elements, the effects of these different

elements, situational moderators of these effects, and how individuals select and incorporate the elements into their communications (Petrey, 1990; Searle, 1985). At the heart of the theory lies a typology of the different communication elements. This typology consists of three different categories of speech acts: locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary (Cohen & Perrault, 1979; Searle, 1985). The category of locutionary acts includes what is said (including linguistic and non-linguistic utterances), and its surface meaning. An illocutionary act of speech is the desired meaning and social construction of the utterance. John Searle classified illocutionary speech acts as assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declaratives (Petrey, 1990; Searle, 1985). According to Austin, there are—in some cases—a further perlocutionary act, which relates to all speech acts that change another person's intentions or understanding of something (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1985). These acts are considered to be the functional or performative elements of any communication. Additionally, most communications will combine more than one act simultaneously.

Major Publications:

Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Searle, J. R. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole & J. L. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and semantics: Speech Acts* (Vol. 3, pp. 59–82). Boston, MA: Academic Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Kent Bach, Friedrich Christoph Doerge, Geo Siegwar, Birgit Erler, Robert Maximilian de Gaynesford, Malmivuori Outi, John Searle, John Austin

Theory Name: Strategic Messaging (Bottom Lining)

Brief Theory Description: This theory presents a contingency model of how message senders should arrange information in communications to increase the chances of achieving their purpose while reducing the chances of negative consequences from the message (Fielden & Dulek, 1984; Fielden et al., 2003). The model also presents an organizational communication typology. The typology captures what elements a message sender needs to consider in developing their message's structure.

The typology facets are message sensitivity (non-emotional message, positive emotional eliciting message, or negative emotion eliciting

message), audience type (internal or external to the sender's organization), power relationship between sender and receiver (superior, peer, or subordinate), and types of communication relationships between sender and receiver (positive, neutral, or negative). According to the theory, you can classify all messages based on this typology. Once you have classified the message, you can then determine an optimal (for achieving results) structure for arranging information in a communication. The theory also provides propositions for how a sender can re-conceptualize a message in order to change its typology categorization (e.g. changing a negative message to a positive one). The theory creators have mainly presented their ideas through books and examined them through field applications. However, there have been academic tests that demonstrated organizational culture's role in the process (Suchan & Dulek, 1988, 1990). Finally, while not explicit, the theory implicitly calls for an examination of the sender's worldview—positing that more a humble approach to communication will lead to a better understanding of the receiver (Dulek, 2020; Suchan & Dulek, 1998).

Major Publications:

Dulek, R. E., Hilton, C. B., & Campbell, K. S. (2003). *Strategic messaging: The key to effective communication in the world of 21st century organizations*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education.

Fielden, J. S., & Dulek, R. E. (1990). *Principles of business communication*. New York: Macmillan.

Fielden, J. S., Gibbons, J. D., & Dulek, R. E. (2003). *Throw me the bottom line …: I'm drowning in e-mail!* West Lafayette, IN: Pioneer River Press.

Major Associated Researchers: Ronald E. Dulek, John S. Fielden, Chad Hilton, Kim Sydow Campbell, and Jean Dickinson Gibbons

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CHAPTER 12

Emerging and Noteworthy Theories

I like adventures, and I'm going to find some.
—Louisa May Alcott

This chapter discusses more recent, emerging theories in business communication and a few deserving ones which our survey process may have overlooked. We did not rank these worthy scholarly contributions using our survey criteria. We felt that doing so would give an unfair and negative impression of them due to their relative newness and/or lack of widespread recognition. Instead, we will present these models along with an overview of their general properties and impact on the discipline of business communication.

Equally important, we humbly admit that these theories are not all inclusive. In selecting theories for this chapter, we used expert opinion, chose those ideas which advance the entire field of business communication, and perhaps most significantly, picked those models that transcend research silos. This last consideration—research silos—describes how ideas in distinct specialties in our field can remain isolated, circulating with only a limited number of community members. In short, while we all belong to the same field, we are capable of conducting scholarship as if we exist in different ones. To thrive, business communication needs to increase the flow of ideas between our different silos—our field needs to enrich its networks of theory communication and adaptation.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_12

The theories in this chapter show promise in creating such better connections between silos: in demonstrating convergent scholarship. To highlight the potential of these theories, we first look at new theories that have sprung from the ones which we identified through our survey. These innovations showcase how our field has begun to extend models so that they can better cross ideological and methodological boundaries that often confine researchers. Next, we look at theories that are path-breaking perspectives by incorporating mental models which are external to our field. These theories infuse business communication research by integrating other disciplines into our scholarship.

As you should see with the theories in this chapter, two major silos in our field arise from the discursive and psychological views of business communication. Discursive research strategies are often inductive (aspiring to discover a truth through inquiry) with qualitative methodologies which seek to identify how meaning is created via communication (Fairhurst, 2008; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Walker, 2014, 2014). In comparison, psychological research strategies tend to be more deductive (aspiring to conduct inquiry based on a certain truth) with quantitative methodologies which seek to capture generalizable communication impacts on organizational outcomes (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; Walker, 2014). You will often find such a gap linked to a study which is anchored in one specific discipline. For example, an organizational communication or linguistics scholar may adopt a discursive lens which is theoretically confined to their discipline whereas a management or information systems scholar might select a psychological approach which is theoretically restricted to business literature. In all fairness to researchers, academic publication processes often do exert pressure for such narrow scopes. And more importantly, both perspectives offer valuable contributions to our field.

Yet at times we need a combination of discursive and psychological approaches to reach the heart of vital research questions. Fortunately, a number of scholars and some academic journals have evolved to transcend the research silos which pose a risk of fragmenting the field of business communication and impeding its progress toward becoming a mature science (Kuhn, 1996; Miner, 2003). Certain business communication theories are replete with multi-disciplinary theoretical foundations, research questions, and methodologies. We have already presented examples of these contributions in this book. Now we apply this framework for showcasing some exciting new directions in this chapter.

To discuss the emerging and noteworthy business communication theories, we will first cover recent, meaningful extensions of existing theories which we previously described in this book. Then, we move on to present other innovations, including some of the noteworthy theories which our survey did not capture. Before we start, special thanks go out to our expert multi-disciplinary panel who guided us in the selection process: Drs. Ryan Bisel (University of Oklahoma), Rita Men (University of Florida), and Jef Naidoo (University of Alabama). These scholars represent such diverse communication specialties as business administration, information systems, organizational communication, and public relations. In all, their input and knowledge have been invaluable resources for this chapter.

Evolution of Core Theories

To begin, we describe how certain core theories have branched out and evolved into new ones. These theories include structurational divergence theory, language divergence and meaning convergence theory, communication theory of resilience, and social network theory.

Structurational Divergence Theory: This theory arises from Giddens' (1991) structuration theory, which our survey has classified as a core theory. As a quick recap, structuration theory contends that humans and structures interact to influence each other via communication. Both people and their environments exert agency which is communicated to shape each other (Bryant & Jary, 2014; Pagel & Westerfelhaus, in press).

Structurational divergence theory (SDT) occurs when two organizational structures are incompatible and intersect to communicate an energy-draining human experience (SD Nexus) that results in a negative outcome (SD Cycle) (Malterud & Nicotera, in press; Nicotera et al., 2015). An apt example of this communication phenomenon happens with organizational role conflict and ambiguity (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970). An employee may receive conflicting or unclear messages about performance expectations such as when healthcare professionals must balance their patient attentiveness with documentation requirements. These inconsistent demands (structural roles) can generate role conflict and ambiguity which subsequently lower job satisfaction, create burnout, and raise turnover among nurses (Nicotera et al., 2015).

Importantly, structurational divergence theory spans disciplinary boundaries with conceptual foundations in both organizational communication and organizational behavior.

Language Convergence and Meaning Divergence: This theory is rooted in sense-making, another core theory which our survey identified. To refresh, sense-making theory captures the human tendency and motivation to extract meaning from our environments. People enact the sense-making processes (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Weick, 1993, 2007) through communication, and these processes have seven attributes: social (we interact with our surroundings and others), retrospective (we glean meaning from retroactive reflection), cues which we perceive, identity (we anchor sense-making in ourselves), enactment (behaviors), ongoing, and plausible (our known—and dynamic—environment bounds how we interpret meaning). Congruently, sense-making accents how organizational participants reach agreed meaning.

The theory of language convergence and meaning divergence (LC/MD) elaborates and extends sense-making. This recent theory incorporates elements of sense-making along with another related and notable business communication theory, symbolic convergence (Bormann, 1982, 1985), to investigate purported shared meanings that organizational members forge with common language. LC/MD extends our field of business communication knowledge by focusing a lens on *the illusion of shared meaning in organizational language*. In other words, commonly agreed-upon terms can diverge in their actual interpretations by different people (Dougherty, Kramer, Klatzke, & Rogers, 2009; Dougherty & Goldstein Hode, 2016; Dixon & Dougherty, 2009). This perspective advances sense-making theory by looking at underlying disagreements within communication even where buy-in has been assumed. A good example of LC/MD is found with the wording and discourse of sexual harassment policy. Specifically, the perception of *flirting* has a wide range of variance (Dougherty & Goldstein Hode, 2016). LC/MD also moves business communication theory forward by integrating the disciplines of organizational communication, organizational behavior, and social psychology.

Communication Theory of Resilience: Sense-making provides a similar key foundation for the communication theory of resilience (Buzzanell, 2018; Buzzanell & Houston, 2018). This latter theory has links to and yet is distinct from the psychological theory of

resilience (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) which addresses how individuals overcome and even thrive from personal setbacks and challenges, including in the workplace. In comparison, the communication theory of resilience discursively investigates how people collectively interpret, come to terms with, and manage disruptive events. Unlike its psychological counterpart, communication resilience is more systematic involving multiple actors who influence each other. Dealing with the challenges posed by maternity leave is an appropriate example of organizational resilience in the business communication field, where multi-level factors come into play (Liu & Buzzanell, 2004).

Five communication processes are involved with organizational communication resilience (Buzzanell, 2010). These factors co-create a new normal sense of reality after a destabilizing event, bolstering *identity anchors*—self-descriptions that emerge through discourse among speech communication members, leveraging communication systems, *reframing*—repositioning the situational perspective, and accenting positive feelings while deemphasizing negative ones. This rich theoretical palette advances business communication theory through grafting psychological, organizational communication, and systems constructs to probe deeply into what it really means to *bounce back* after challenges in organizations.

Social Network Theory: Social network theory (Shumate & Contractor, 2013) is closely linked to another one of our survey's core theories, actor network theory (ANT) (Latour, 2011). In brief, ANT proposes that all communication interactively flows between actors (entities that can receive, process, record, *or* send messages) within a network of heterogeneous channels. Actors can also be non-human (such as a scientific journal), and the networks are conceived as having no inherent hierarchy (no central communication flow control).

Social network theory expands and advances ANT by more extensively probing into the types of communicative influences that occur within these networks and by delving into what actually constitutes a network (Contractor & DeChurch, 2014; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019). Case in point, for many years business communication scholars have frequently based their research on *the romance of leadership*, the aura of leadership as a hierarchical communication flow that is rooted in a single individual (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016, 2017). Social network theory confronts this assumption by viewing leadership as a communicative, shared role which is contingent on network members' behaviors and perceptions. Just as

important, social network theory investigates the outcomes of actor influences (frequently through discourse) within a given social network. For instance, the relationships between leader member exchange and innovation have been recently examined through a social network framework (Wang and (Frank), Fang, Y., Qureshi, & Janssen, 2015).

These business communication knowledge inroads are particularly relevant in the rapidly changing and complex environments of contemporary organizations. Moreover, social network theory spans disciplinary silos by drawing from sociology, communication, information systems, and management research streams (Dinh et al., 2014; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Granovetter, 1977).

Evolution of Major Theory

Our discussion continues by looking at a more recent business communication theory that is linked to what our survey classified as major. The selected theory is the moral mum effect.

The Moral Mum Effect: The moral mum effect (Bisel & Adame, 2019; Zanin, Bisel, & Adame, 2016) is rooted in both voice and silence and the spiral of silence, theories which our survey classified as major and notable, respectively. To review, voice and silence capture an organizational member's willingness to *speak up or remain silent* about important work issues, responses which strongly impact key employee and organizational outcomes (Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison, 2014; Van Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003). Its corollary, the spiral of silence, is reinforcing behavior that results when group members remain silent because they fear ostracism-even rejection-for speaking out against normative opinion (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003; Csikszentmihalyi, 2012). Of note, a third related theory, organizational dissent theory (Kassing, Piemonte, Goman, & Mitchell, 2012), eluded classification in our survey, but is nonetheless significant and linked to the moral mum effect. Simply put, organizational dissent theory identifies the reasons for and the behaviors of employees who choose to express disagreement about work issues with higher ups.

The moral mum effect extends and enriches these theories through highlighting communicative, ethical behaviors. Scholars within this research stream have discovered that supervisors, and culture can influence members' ethical actions through messages. With an original twist, the moral mum effect demonstrates how organizational communication

can move members toward ethically responsible choices. For example, followers are more likely to express dissent about immoral work policies and feel less anxiety about doing so when leaders openly discuss and voice support for ethical choices in the workplace (Adame & Bisel, 2019; Bisel & Adame, 2019; Zanin et al., 2016). Finally, another emergent theory, ethically reliable organizations (Bisel, 2017; Vogus, Rothman, Sutcliffe, & Weick, 2014), intersects with the moral mum effect and will be covered later in this chapter.

Why does the moral mum effect matter in advancing business communication theory? First, the moral mum effect directly addresses the growing concern about ethically responsible organizational behavior through a communicative perspective. Going further, the moral mum effect embraces multiple disciplines (organizational communication, management, psychology, and others) in both theoretical foundations and research methodology. Lastly, this theory progresses our business communication knowledge through building on important conceptual precedents.

Evolution of Focused Theory

Compelling new insights have been contributed to business communication from researchers who have transformed dialogic theory, which our survey classified as focused. These advancements, mainly initiated by public relations scholars, reconfigure communication in organizations of the twenty-first century and will be discussed next as the dialogic theory of communication and digital dialogic communication theories.

Dialogic and Digital Dialogic Theories of Communication: The theories of dialogic communication and digital dialogic communication are closely associated with dialogic theory in our survey's focused ranking. Keep in mind that dialogic theory (McClellan, 1989) began as a literary theory that incorporated mutual engagement of all involved parties. Building from this idea of communicative equality, the dialogic theory of communication has moved forward to include digital communications with digital dialogic theory and through prioritizing the relational quality of interactions with stakeholders (Kent, 2017; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). Symmetry of communications between involved parties is a central tenet of the dialogic and digital dialogic theories of communication and will be discussed later in this chapter with symmetrical communication, an emergent theory (Men, 2014a).

The primary elements of the dialogic and digital dialogic theories of communication rest on the presence of an interactive feedback loop between stakeholders (internal and external) and include five factors. These are *propinquity* (communication is dynamic and spontaneous), *risk* due to the vulnerability elicited by inclusive messages, *commitment* by engaged parties to respectful communications, *empathy* or the motivation to understand and accept other viewpoints, and *mutuality* or the belief that democratic dialog with stakeholders is a prioritized goal and in the organization's best interest (Kent, 2017; Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

The dialogic and digital dialogic theories of communication are highly impactful to business communication scholarship and practice. Nor should application of these theories be restricted to public relations research. In fact, both theories interweave knowledge and methodologies from various disciplines including rhetoric, organizational communication, information systems, and management among others. In addition, the principles of the dialogic and digital dialogic theories of communication can be applied in diverse settings including leadership interactions with knowledge/empowered workers and in Web-based environments.

Innovative and Noteworthy Theoretical Contributions

This chapter section discusses mostly recent theories that are transformative to the field of business communication. Transformative refers to an idea that is novel and modifies a stakeholder's worldview. Again, we admit that some deserving theories have been omitted from this group despite our rigorous efforts. Achieving consensus in a multi-disciplinary area is not an easy task even with the wealth of valuable input gathered from the survey and through the expert opinion seeking steps. Hopefully, readers will send us feedback so that we can update our list since we view it as an ongoing process. We begin by presenting the theories of excellence, symmetrical communication, authenticity in communication.

Theories of Excellence, Symmetrical Communication, and Authenticity in Communication: These three theories were initially grounded in the discipline of public relations, but their relevance has expanded to the entire field of business communication and beyond as the next few paragraphs will point out. Excellence theory (Grunig, 1992a; Grunig & Grunig, 2008) serves as a springboard for symmetrical communication

and authenticity in communication. Excellence theory grows the role of the public relations professional to become a vital communications linking pin, embedded in stakeholder strategy (Freeman & McVea, 2001; McVea & Freeman, 2005). A stakeholder strategic perspective is democratic and inclusive, giving voice and participation to all key involved parties (both internal and external constituents). Relatedly, excellence theory seeks two-way (symmetrical—replacing command and control models) communication exchanges between stakeholders that reflect equality and include the voices of traditionally marginalized groups such as women, people of color, ethnic or religious minorities, the disabled, etc. In other words, excellence theory in communication practice embraces diversity (Grunig & Dozier, 2009).

There are other important attributes of excellence theory. It is goal oriented (driven by outcomes that capture organizational and employee well-being) and adopts the philosophy that communication which is in the stakeholders' best interests becomes an organizational priority. For example, discriminatory communication can produce lower public engagement and costly lawsuits. Moreover, excellence theory places high weight on ethical communication, including honesty and transparency (Grunig & Dozier, 2009; Grunig & Grunig, 2008). Even though excellence theory was originally targeted for public relations professionals, it has migrated into other disciplines including management, especially with LMX theory. In this framework, excellence has been incorporated as reaching out to better engage millennial employees (Graen & Schiemann, 2013).

A major dimension of excellence theory is symmetrical communication (Men, 2014a; Men & Sung, in press). This theory examines internal employee communications and advocates for equality and consideration in such exchanges, in contrast to the pervasive top-down approach which is often practiced by managers. In essence, symmetrical communication is employee centered, egalitarian, and transparent-promoting high performance and well-being (Grunig, 1992b; Men, 2014a). And symmetrical communication has been supported as strengthening employee attitudes of trust, organizational identification, and commitment—all which link to critical outcomes including performance and relationships with external stakeholders (Men, 2014a). A more recent stream of symmetrical communication inquiry delves into leadership behaviors which nurture, align with, and integrate it into strategic management and organizational

culture (Men, 2014b; Men & Sung, in press; Yue, Men, & Ferguson, in press).

Another key element of excellence theory is authentic communication. Authentic communication is closely associated with authentic leadership in organizational behavior (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Shen & Kim, 2012; Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, & Peterson, 2008). Such leaders are characterized by honest interpersonal relations, self-awareness, objective self-evaluation and review of information, and loyalty to personal values and beliefs (Shen & Kim, 2012). (Needless to say, authentic leadership is rated on a spectrum rather than as an absolute state.) Business communication interprets these factors as strategic messages of fairness, inclusion, mutual respect, and learning from mistakes which are diffused throughout an entire enterprise (Molleda & Jain, 2013; Shen & Kim, 2012). In one application, authentic communication theory has been supported as a mediator between symmetrical communication and resultant high caliber relationships within an organization (Shen & Kim, 2012).

All three communication theories, excellence, symmetrical, and authentic, are very relevant to solidifying business communication as a discipline. These emerging perspectives respond to shifts in the business environment where organizations seek collaborative and empowered employees. Furthermore, these schools of thought build disciplinary bridges with foundations in psychology, organizational communication, strategy, organizational behavior, and certainly public relations. Plus, researchers in these streams have adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods. Moreover, excellence, symmetrical, and authentic communication are results oriented, based on the commendable vision that organizations thrive when their people flourish. Finally, ethical communication is integral to this vision and will be the focal point of our next theory, ethically reliable organizations (ERO) (Adame & Bisel, 2019; Bisel & Adame, 2019).

Ethically Reliable Organizations: The theory of ethically reliable organizations (ERO) matters to business communication because of its looming relevance to contemporary organizations. We are challenged regularly by media stories which disclose unethical and illegal activities on the part of organizations. In response, scholars in the EROs research community investigate these phenomena within a discursive scope. For a clearer exposition, we invite you to visit the origins and facets of EROs.

Ethically reliable organizations (Bisel, 2017; Husted, 1993) refine the moral mum effect by presenting positive alternatives for expression and are grounded in high reliability organizational (HRO) theory (Vogus et al., 2014; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2015). This theory describes organizations which deliver consistently superb performance even when managing crises, such as firefighters and medical emergency room teams. (Note that an enterprise doesn't *have* to be faced with life and death circumstances to become an HRO). An HRO is distinguished by the following attributes: continuous organizational learning, vigilance for risks and failures, a culture that prioritizes safety, transparent and egalitarian dissemination of information, rapid and synchronized responses to unprecedented events, and open investigation of organizational failures (Vogus et al., 2014).

HROs have been extended to ERO which display a culture of high ethical standards, a firm commitment to interpersonal empathy and respect, an elevated status for moral learning, leader encouragement of upward dissent and listening to one's heart in ethical decision-making, and a resistance to the oversimplification of moral reasoning in organizations (Adame & Bisel, 2019; Bisel & Adame, 2019). As this description suggests, many of these behaviors are communicative and the field of business communication has adapted ERO theory for scholarly investigation and practice. For example, a recent study supported the influence of supervisor-follower ethical discourse on moral decision-making and associated anxiety about resistance to an unethical request (Bisel & Adame, 2019).

ERO theory progresses the field of business communication in multiple ways. First, it is multi-disciplinary with major tenets rooted in organizational communication, management, and business ethics theories. Second, ERO theory incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as experimental design. Third, ERO is pragmatic and manifests actionable paths to implementation. Finally, ERO mirrors the changing nature of organizational landscapes where ethical communication and employee well-being are gaining refreshing importance. In a similar vein, another very new business communication theory, the theory of respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), addresses how leaders communicate in the best interests of followers, and is featured next.

Theory of Respectful Inquiry: The theory of respectful inquiry refers to leader initiated linguistics which encourage intrinsic motivation in followers' perceptions/reactions. Van Quaquebeke and Felps defined

respectful inquiry as a "multidimensional construct of asking questions in an open way and subsequently listening intently" (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018, p. 8). From these conversational episodes, leaders elicit follower motivation. In turn, this motivation translates into meaningful outcomes such as higher retention, job satisfaction, and performance (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Note that the term *respectful* plays a crucial role in this theory, and this aspect of the theory underlines how leaders' communicative actions can be perceived by followers as being treated with dignity. These perceptions allow leaders to develop rewarding and genuine communication relationships with their followers as a result. When leaders forge such communication relationships, the theory posits that follower motivation occurs by fulfilling their inherent needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness—the core elements of self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). In this sense, respectful inquiry proposes a much more follower centered framework than traditional command and control models of leader communication.

Respectful inquiry also factors in the antecedents of the leader's own needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must first be met in order to practice this construct well. Moreover, the leader's situational influences of time pressure, cognitive load, and physical distance temper the resonance of respectful inquiry exchanges. For example, adequate time, a reasonable cognitive load, and physical proximity may help a leader to ask the right questions, listen effectively, and have a genuine openness to a follower's questions. Ironically, the motivational impact of respectful inquiry is expected to be stronger when any of these three elements are weak. Additional contextual moderators have been theorized such as degrees of organizational control, leader power differential, and subordinate intrinsic motivational needs saturation. Furthermore, history matters. In other words, respectful inquiry is expected to be more motivational when the leader and follower share a positive relationship track record.

To date, this theory awaits formal testing, but it holds much promise. The reasons for business communication researchers to further investigate respectful inquiry are compelling. The founding scholars envision that future refinements can expand the level of analysis to peers, groups, and organizations. Besides, respectful inquiry is truly multi-disciplinary—drawing from organizational communication, psychology, and organizational behavior literature. Going further, respectful inquiry provides

an opportunity to apply innovative methodologies that integrate experimental designs. And importantly, this theory is quite pragmatic since it explicitly demonstrates the *how* of communicative motivation which results in improved organizational and employee outcomes (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018). Continuing our discussion of new business communication theories which embed concern for employee well-being, we move next into communication research on microaggressions.

Communication Studies of Microaggressions: The theory of microaggressions originated in psychology (Sue et al., 2007) and is not new, but relevant business communication research is starting to emerge in this stream. Microaggressions have been defined as "subtle snubs, slights, and insults directed toward minorities, as well as to women and other historically stigmatized groups, that implicitly communicate or at least engender hostility" (Lilienfeld, 2017, p. 139). Such behaviors often leave the targeted person anxious and unsure about the microaggressor's true intent. For instance, a female faculty member may wonder whether a male colleague refers to all professors as "he" because he is uninformed or discriminating. Although microaggressions can be unintentional, the ultimate outcome is perceived exclusion by a member of the marginalized group. Microaggression targets can range from nationality, religion, disability, race, gender identification, age, political beliefs to others. Basically any organizational member with characteristics that do not align with a culture's prevailing norms is a candidate for microaggression.

Examples of business communication microaggressions theory scholarship include two recent articles. The first one used critical sensemaking to explore how immigrant employees psychologically process microaggressive messages at work (Shenoy-Packer, 2015). The second study investigated the often murky territory between political correctness (communication hypersensitivity about inclusiveness) and microaggressions. More precisely, it asked questions about how microaggressions are perceived by organizational members and how these perceptions influence group decision-making outcomes (Henningsen & Henningsen, 2017).

Communication research about microaggression is transformative to the field of business communication for multiple reasons. Above all, it responds to the admirable vision of nurturing inclusive organizations. Research informs us that such contexts are desirable for producing employee, organizational, ethical, and societal well-being (Dutton & Spreitzer, 2014; Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Grant, 2013). The probability

of building interpersonal acceptance into organizational behaviors will be reduced if we are unable to articulate, confront, and deter communicative microaggression at work.

Similarly, communication studies of microagression fit well with our boundary-spanning criterion for selecting new theories. These theoretical advances were initiated in the discipline of psychology. Yet more recently, business communication researchers have extended the construct of microaggression by showing how it is explicitly articulated through both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Next, we visit the transformative qualities of our final entry in this chapter, communication studies in responsible management.

Communication Studies in Responsible Management: CSR and Crisis Communication

The concept of responsible management synthesizes multiple perspectives about ethical organizational behaviors encompassing leadership, societal stewardship, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and crisis management (Carroll, 1991; Carroll et al., 2020). Although responsible management formally began in such areas as strategy, business ethics, and organizational behavior, there are deep roots in organizational communication research, including the critical discourse and the interpretive schools (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Putnam & Mumby, 2013). Importantly, organizational communication has a tradition of critically examining managerial values and moral behaviors. Two germane, new research streams in business communication are corporate social responsibility (CSR) and crisis communications.

CSR Communication: CSR communication is defined in this book as "a communicative practice, which corporations [organizations] undertake to integrate social, environmental, ethical, human rights and consumer concerns into their business operations and core strategy in close collaboration with their stakeholders" (Ellerup Nielsen & Thomsen, 2018, p. 492). The major goals of CSR communication are management of organizational image, perceptions, identification, and accountability/legitimacy regarding internal and external stakeholders which translate into favorable affective and behavioral outcomes (Crane & Glozer, 2016; Heath, Saffer, & Waymer, 2017).

Insightful progress is being forged with CSR communication research. New studies have examined the real-world implications of CSR communication practices. For example, scholars are posing questions about the challenges faced by small and medium enterprises when implementing CSR communications (Morsing & Spence, 2019) and about relevant interactions with social media (Heath et al., 2017). Plus these inroads include investigations from non-corporate stakeholders' perspectives (Chung & Lee, in press; Kim & Rim, in press). We also believe this stream of research in business communication is transformative because of its pertinence to modern society, multi-disciplinary foundations, and its adoption of diverse methodological tools, such as discourse analysis, quantitative surveys, and experimental designs. Going further, CSR communications scholarship can be found in a wide span of disciplines including public relations, management, business ethics, organizational communication, strategy, and others.

Crisis Communication: Another type of emergent, significant business communication research in responsible management is crisis communication. This topic hits home for many of us. Even as we write this book, the entire world and consequently most organizations are deeply challenged by an unprecedented crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond this grim reality, we have all witnessed an ongoing series of riveting organizational events such as the Wells Fargo debacle, Pennsylvania State University's sex scandal, and Volkswagen's emissions cover-up in the new millennium. Information about these occurrences spreads at warp speed in virtually connected media too.

So it is not surprising that organizational communication about crises has experienced much recent theoretical development with major implications for practice. We merely offer a thumbnail sketch of certain prominent crisis communication perspectives here, but hope that it will inspire further exploration on your part. Let's begin with a working definition of crisis communication. We adopt the one put forth by Coombs (2007, p. 164). "A crisis is a sudden and unexpected event that threatens to disrupt an organization's operations and poses both a financial and a reputational threat. Crises can harm stakeholders physically, emotionally and/or financially. A wide array of stakeholders are adversely affected by a crisis including community members, employees, customers, suppliers and stockholders."

Although crisis communication theory is still evolving, we turn to Marsen's (2020) overview to highlight some focal points. First, there are

several variations in crisis communication's research parameters. The crises in which communications are investigated can be termed as preventable or not preventable, and can be categorized as organizationally external, internal, or both. Further categorizations include identifications of performance, moral, attack, or disaster crises. In addition, investigative boundaries range from communications that manage, prepare for, and prevent organizational crises (Coombs, 2007, 2010, 2015; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005; K. M. Hearit, 1995; Marsen, 2020; Morris & Goldsworthy, 2008).

Marsen's (2020) synthesis guides our discussion of four leading crisis communication theories, starting with i*mage repair theory* (IRT) *(Benoit,* 1997, 2018*)*. This theory incorporates rhetorical apologia (K. M. Hearit, 1995) and targets organizational image preservation/enhancement as the prime objective of crisis communication. IRT puts forth five potential organizational crisis response strategies: (1) Denial and its counterpart, mortification (acceptance of total blame), (2) Placing the responsibility for the crisis on others or on accidental causes, (3) Reframing the crisis to reduce its perceived gravity, (4) Refusing to assume responsibility, and (5) Engaging in damage reparations, including prevention of similar future crises. An astute example of image repair theory in action can be found in a case study about the London Whale crisis (K. M. Hearit & Hearit, in press).

IRT approaches crises from a managerial viewpoint. In contrast, *situational crisis communication theory* (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007, 2015) asserts that an organization should crisis communicate with a strategy that reflects its appropriate level of responsibility. Reputational mending with stakeholders is paramount. And such reparations must equal the public's attributions. SCCT reconfigures IRT's five organizational crisis communication strategies into four "postures": denial, diminishment, rebuilding, and bolstering (Coombs, 2014; Marsen, 2020).

Comparatively, *discourse renewal theory* (DRT) is more forward oriented than IRT and SCCT. Discourse renewal theory focuses on crisis communication strategies that construct a more positive future organizational vision and identification (Marsen, 2020; Seeger & Ulmer, 2003; Ulmer, Sellnow, & Seeger, 2017). DRT attempts to reposition a crisis as a future opportunity. Lastly, *rhetorical arena theory* contends that organizational reputation can improve after a crisis occurs by incorporating the voices of diverse stakeholders in crisis communication (Johansen & Frandsen, 2005; Marsen, 2020; Raupp, 2019).

In closing, crisis communication theory is transformative to the field of business communication because it is multi-disciplinary, multi-methodological, and speaks to the world of managerial practice. The foundations of crisis communication theory derive from rhetoric, public relations, organizational communication, management, and organizational behavior among others. Furthermore, methodological approaches include discourse analysis, quantitative surveys, and experimental designs. Finally, new crisis communication research questions continually arise as a result of our dynamic and complex organizational environment.

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CHAPTER 13

Theory Traditions and Influences

The choice of soaps has considerable influence in promoting and maintaining this desideratum.
—The Ladies' Book of Useful Information, Anonymous

Now that we have presented the fundamental and emerging theories in business communication, we take a look at where the theories we have identified came from. This chapter will help the reader to better understand the roles that various roots in the field of business communication play in shaping our comprehension of how business communication operates. Appreciation of where theories originate guides researchers to more keenly grasp the utilities and boundaries of these frameworks.

Every scholarly field has its own culture—one that shapes what questions it examines and what answers it will accept (Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Kuhn, 1996). Similarly, theories in a respective domain must align with these cultural norms in order for them to gain acceptance. When we employ a theory, knowledge about its background will help us to decide how these cultural norms can influence what we investigate. For example, motivating language theory (MLT) arose in the management discipline (J. Mayfield, 1993; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Sullivan, 1988). Until recently MLT has had a strong management orientation with a leader focus (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012, 2017a), and examined leader communication as more of a one-way process without much attention to the recipient or the recipient's

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_13

environment (Kock, Mayfield, Mayfield, Sexton, & De La Garza, 2018; J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Neck, in press). This theoretical orientation fits in with the management field's view of communication where researchers will more likely hold the romantic view of leadership (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b; Meindl et al., 1985) and takes a psychological, even a hypodermic needle, approach to communication where leaders can craft messages without distortion (King, 1989; Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018). Only more recently have investigators begun extending this theory to include dialogue and feedback loops (Holmes & Parker, 2017; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016a), environmental factors (Gutierrez-Wirsching, Mayfield, Mayfield, & Wang, 2015; Madlock & Sexton, 2015), the attributes of message recipients (Fan, Chen, Wang, & Chen, 2014; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2016b), and reconfigured MLT as a peer rather than leader centered phenomenon (Hanke, 2020).

As this example hopefully shows, a theory's origins can have a profound effect on what lens it opens unto the world. While we can reshape these theories to give us different perspectives, we must become conscious of their initial framing and take effort in updating them. Such evolution takes time and is certainly possible, but it begins with our awareness of initial roots and limitations (Fort, 1975; Kuhn, 1996).

This chapter also underscores an important purpose in the overall book because we recognize that its readers can come from very diverse backgrounds and orientations to business communication research. For these reasons, we want to affirm the value of these multiple traditions while demonstrating that incorporating such diversity can enrich a scholar's research. Thus, in this chapter we will look at the general perspectives investigators have taken when developing the theories we have included in this book.

Each of these traditions gives researchers a worldview—that is, these cultural features are not just methodological tools. Instead, they provide strong insights into how communication essentially operates and what it entails. While we doubt that many scholars exclusively believe in one best way, most will have a default vision of how communication really happens and what it means.

Early Modern Traditions

One far reaching, modern theoretical tradition in business communication was forged by a president of AT&T, Chester Barnard. In his seminal book, *The Functions of the Executive (1968)*, Barnard placed communication strategies and skills as the nuclei of management. Yet perhaps the most seminal roots of business communication theory building were created by W. C. Redding.

Redding's vision for our field was twofold: rational (with an emphasis on technical expertise and logic) and exploratory (encouraging communication research to discover meaning) (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999; Redding, 1985, 1992). Redding's philosophy, like Barnard's, asserted that organizations are constructed through communication. Just as significant, Redding's main objective was to improve the world through better organizational communication with a broader span of scholarly focus, which involved employees and organizational stakeholders in addition to management (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999; Redding, 1985). A synthesis of Redding's viewpoints was elegantly distilled by Buzzanell and Stohl (1999) as the following. (1) The field of business/organizational communication moves forward through empiricism. (2) Messages are the principle units of communication. (3) Scholars in our field need to be critical—in fact to question everything including axioms, values, and established versions of reality. And (4), business communication scholars need to be mindful of their field's history and traditions.

Both Barnard's and Redding's works laid the cornerstones for the field of business communication that we know today. Next, we present an overview of more contemporary traditions in business communication theories, beginning with the discursive and psychological perspectives.

Discursive and Psychological Perspectives

The contemporary traditions that may have the most powerful influences on how we develop business communication theory arise from the discursive-psychological perspectives (Fairhurst, 2001; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Flick, 2009; Lynham, 2002). These boundaries refer to the pivotally different ways that researchers perceive *how* we should examine the world. While we doubt that few researchers hold a view that purely comes from one viewpoint of this duality, most investigators will have a distinct preference as to how we can best comprehend

our universe. For those who favor the discursive stance, the benefits of complexity and emergence dominate (Charmaz & Smith, 2003; Hale, Dulek, & Hale, 2005). For those who prefer the psychological view, the advantages of replication and precision reign (Osborne, 2007; Wolf, 1986). We will try to do justice to both perspectives in the remainder of this section with a brief overview of how they each guide and add value to business communication theories.

Case in point, the discursive perspective has rich and complex attributes. And we believe its major impetus comes from a motivation to capture meaning through a holistic approach. With this viewpoint, business communication comes from a fundamentally emergent space (Cassell & Symon, 2004; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Hastings & Payne, 2013; Keyton, 2017). This school of thought includes the belief that attempts to strictly quantify and parcel communication into discrete data points will overlook the compelling reasons for what makes business communication occur and how it should be interpreted.

Going further, certain discursively oriented researchers have proposed that to grasp the complexities of human interactions, scholars need to actively immerse themselves in the discovery process. This school of thought does not simply rely on mathematical models to inform the researcher about communication events and artifacts (Denzin, 2004; Hale et al., 2005). Ethnomethodology and Ethnography (Agar, 1996; Carbaugh & Boromisza-Habashi, 2015) give good examples of how this subjective approach has impacted theory. Both discursive specialties assert that researchers need to cultivate deep understanding of the unique environment and culture that surround a given phenomenon. Relatedly, the cultural approach to organizations (C. Geertz & Pacanowsky, 1988; Griffin, 2006), the interpretive school of communication (Deetz, 1982; Clifford Geertz, 1973), and (to a lesser extent) social constructionism (B. J. Allen, 2005; Burr, 2015) adopt immersive mental models about how we should examine reality.

Some discursively oriented business communication theories contend that we need a holistic view of phenomena, but with a sharper focus on individual characteristics and interactions. These theories include conversation analysis (Boden, 1991; Goodwin & Heritage, 1990), discourse analysis (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; G. Brown, Gillian, & Yule, 1983), content analysis (Gaur & Kumar, 2018; Linda L. Putnam, 1982)—which can be either quantitative or qualitative, and sense-making (Dutton, Ashford, Lawrence, & Miner-Rubino, 2002; Erbert, 2016). As with the

preceding discursive theories, these frameworks have an integral assumption that we must engage and grapple with the multiple attributes of our subjects in order to understand them. Likewise, these more individually oriented theories request our acceptance that the intricacies of business communication are co-created from human and environmental encounters. Plus, these interchanges serve as the pivotal building blocks of what should intrigue us most as investigators.

These interactions lead us to the next major characteristic of the discursive approach: emergence. Discursive scholarship—whether explicitly or implicitly—proposes that business communications have a fundamental, non-linear nature. Technically, we can call this property chaos where minor changes in initial system dynamics will lead to profoundly different outcomes, and that all parts of the system mutually influence each other (C. Brown, 1995; Levy, 1994). Networks with such non-linear and dynamic systems do not easily lend themselves to traditional mathematically based analytic methods (Fitzgerald, 2002; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019). Furthermore, when we overlay the complexity of human behavior, we clearly recognize the value gleaned from the more organic nature of qualitative research. Congruently, additional discursively oriented theories have incorporated these ideas including dramaturgical theory (Brissett & Edgley, 2005; Gronbeck, 1980), enactment theory (Berger, 1972; Kalbfleisch, 2007), and narrative theory (Bal, 2009; Herman, Phelan, Rabinowitz, Richardson, & Warhol, 2012).

In comparison, the psychological perspective contends that we can more accurately define a phenomenon by examining its discrete parts. Consequently, we can apply this knowledge to construct a model of the whole and to measure important outcomes. Scholars in this vein believe that gains in precision, tangible outcomes/applications, and generalizability outweigh any loss we have from not taking an emergent approach (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014; Miner, 2003).

The psychological perspective contributes to business communication theory by drawing from two resources. First, such theories tend to be more quantitative or systems oriented. As a result, these same models can more easily capture phenomena through reduction of ambiguity and enhanced precision. Theories such as motivating language (Hanke, 2020; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Sharbrough, Simmons, & Cantrill, 2006; Sullivan, 1988), information theory (Akaike, 1998; Shannon & Weaver, 1963), and the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, 1979; Madden, Ellen, & Ajzen, 1992) have relatively well-defined constructs

that researchers can employ in different settings. This clarity encourages investigators to refine, extend, and compare research findings. In this way, scholars examine discrepancies (or similarities) across different environmental settings, and subsequently grow confidence that findings do not arise from different interpretations of concept meaning. Also, similarities across contexts make results more generalizable.

This acuity ties in with the psychological perspective's second major benefit—the reliance on mathematical or systems methodologies to identify relevant organizational and stakeholder outcomes. Some scholars denote statistical analysis or systems flowcharts as the key factors of psychological research. We respectfully disagree. Instead we believe quantitative and systems analyses have a main characteristic of breaking down events into smaller segments, and then examining those pieces. Then, psychological investigators can rebuild the segments and employ quantitative or systems tools to ascertain results. While discursive researchers do apply methods to examine the reliability, validity, and generalizability of their analyses, psychological researchers often have an advantage in these efforts through accessing more sophisticated tools. On the other hand, discursive scholars have created more inroads into uncovering organizational communicative meaning and synergies than have researchers with a psychological perspective.

Hopefully, our brief overview of the discursive and psychological approaches has given you an understanding of our field's two major philosophical schools. Other traditions within business communication theory draw from disciplinary fields of research rather than from overarching worldviews. The following sections will present these areas in alphabetical order.

Business Disciplines

It's no surprise that business and organizations supply the contextual foundations for business communication research and theory building. Of note, the term "organizations" also refers to not-for-profit entities including educational institutions, churches, governments, healthcare services, and political groups. It is ironic; however, that relatively few of the business communication theories identified in this book have direct roots in business disciplines (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Holmes, 2016). Rather, business disciplines cast more influence on how we examine theory settings, moderators, and effects.

The relative dearth of communication theory generation from business disciplines is unexpected since organizations exist largely because of communication (Fielden & Dulek, 1990; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 1995). Most work experiences are co-created with communication (Fairhurst, 2001; Gronn, 1983; Keyton, 2017; Tengblad, 2006). Still, many theories from business disciplines have traditionally relegated communication as an implicit rather than an explicit dimension of the business world. However, a few business theories purposefully frame communication behaviors in the foreground. Some clear examples include media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1984; Lengel & Daft, 1989), LMX (Graen & Cashman, 1975; Omilion-Hodges & Baker, 2017), employee voice and silence (Dyne, Ang, & Botero, 2003; Milliken, Morrison, & Hewlin, 2003; Morrison, 2014), strategic messaging (Dulek, Hilton, & Campbell, 2003), the theory of respectful inquiry (Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018), and motivating language theory (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018; Sullivan, 1988).

Apart from these preceding and a few other theories, organizational communication behaviors are most often inferred in business theory building. For instance, while business communication researchers frequently use the Attraction-Selection-Attrition theory (Butler, Bateman, Gray, & Diamant, 2014; Denton, 1999), the model's communication variables are largely presumed rather than explored as major components. Along the same lines, cornerstone management theories such as organizational justice (Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2013), path goal theory (House, 1971; Miner, 2005), and the jobs characteristics model (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Miner, 2007; Wallgren & Hanse, 2007) address business communication as inherent.

Similarly, business theories tend to incorporate restricted mental models of communication. Perhaps in part due to Barnard's early influence, a great deal of business research in communication takes a managerial perspective compared to an organizational member's viewpoint, often creating a power differential. In other words, many business theories and associated communication scholarship advance outcomes relevant to management (such as shareholder wealth and increased productivity) rather than applications that improve quality of work life (such as increased job security or workplace happiness). Moving forward, business researchers should consider developing more organizational communication theories which are also distinguished by shared power and genuine concern for stakeholder well-being.

Communication/Composition/Linguistics/Rhetoric

Drawing from our theory research, communication, composition, linguistics, and rhetoric form the heart of our field. This core foundation comes from the sources of theory building/extension activity and the backgrounds of community members. The majority of scholars in our field received formal training in these disciplines. Understandably, their educational experiences have shaped the way they examine the world through a communication lens. Due to many overlaps in scholarly preparation and research scopes, we have grouped these multiple fields into a single category here, just as we did with business disciplines.

In sum, business communication theory is strongly rooted in organizational communication, writing, linguistics, and rhetoric. Their mutual influences have greatly refined our body of knowledge. To name a few examples, where would business communication theory be without the interpretive school (organizational communication) (Larson & Tompkins, 2005; L. L. Putnam, 1983), communication apprehension and competence (communication, composition, and rhetoric) (Beatty, McCroskey, & Heisel, 1998; Daly, 1991), persuasion (composition and rhetoric) (Ihlen & Heath, 2018; Perloff, 2020), and speech acts (linguistics) (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969)? Moreover, one distinguishing trait about business communication theories that are grounded in these disciplines is a process orientation rather than a search for outcomes (more commonly found with theories we have adopted from business scholarship). This penchant is not trivial because these disciplines prioritize meaning and sense-making, awareness which must be gained in order to truly grasp organizational environments. Another characteristic of these disciplines is greater respect and attention afforded to ethical practices in comparison with the business disciplines. This laudable trait was reinforced by Redding's philosophy, which ranked communication integrity very highly (Redding, 1996).

In contrast to theories that arise from business disciplines, theories that arise from communication/composition/linguistics/rhetoric—such as communication competence (R. R. Allen & Brown, 1976; Beamer, 1992), genderlect theory (Carolyn Peluso Atkins EdD, 1995; Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2016), and the spiral of silence (Csikszentmihalyi, 2012; Glynn, Hayes, & Shanahan, 1997)—tend to democratize the welfare of organizational members and stakeholders rather than favoring management. This shift in focus helps give the field of business communication a

greater equilibrium than what we usually find in the business disciplines. There is, however; a companion risk. At times, theories originating from communication/composition/linguistics/rhetoric are incorporated into studies which highlight description and in-depth analyses, but stop short of giving constructive guidelines for situational improvement.

As we continue incorporating these core theories into business communication research, we advocate more alignment between their descriptive framing and translation into ethical/tangible organizational enrichment. Ideally, the entire field of business communication can combine democratic, meaning rich orientations to intersect with the business disciplines' focus on situational improvement. With more interdisciplinary convergence, business communication can better fulfill its potential to champion the well-being of all organizational stakeholders.

Information Systems

Information systems has a curious, symbiotic relationship with business communication research. Similar to other business communication disciplines, information systems explores the transmission of messages. Yet these transmissions are unique, often in complimentary ways. Most theories that business communication has adopted from information systems—such as Shannon and Weaver's information theories (Krippendorff, 2009; Shannon & Weaver, 1963) and memetics (Blute, 2005; Chesterman, 2000)—have accented the process of transmissions and downplayed the human element. While some theories have diverged from this trend—such as media richness (Armengol, Fernandez, Simo, & Sallan, 2017; Daft & Lengel, 1986) and media naturalness (Blau & Caspi, 2010; Kock, 2002)—we believe that crafting less human-centered theories offers a distinct strength to our field.

This added value lies in a broader, more diverse research scope. As previously discussed, certain business communication disciplines embrace a laudable, humanistic approach (Victor, 2006; Du-Babcock & Chan, in press). But at the same time, this bent can cause us to lose sight of the technological nature of our communications. Information systems and their inherent environmental impact shape our messages, especially since engaging with artificial intelligence (Naidoo & Dulek, 2018) and virtual work (Naidoo & Dulek, 2017) are the new normal for many organizational participants. Thus we applaud and encourage business communication theory development and extension which factors in more

information systems scholarship. This effort will produce better, more expansive models that reflect how technology influences the human aspects of communications that we hold dear.

Psychology/Sociology/Anthropology

Business communication has readily adopted many theories from the fields of psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Psychological models such as activity theory (Chaiklin, Hedegaard, & Jensen, 1998; Engeström, 2000) and attribution theory (Anderson, 1974; Buss, 1978) have augmented business communication through explaining how human cognition intersects with communication. Drawing from these and related psychological theories, our field has refined its methods for examining communication at the individual and dyadic levels of analysis (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Markham, 2010).

In complimentary ways, the business communication theories which have been adopted from sociology and anthropology contribute frameworks for better examining group, organizational, and even societal communications. As a result, our levels of research analyses have become broader and multiplex. For example, we have incorporated such frameworks as actor-network theory (Callon, 1999; Latour, 1996) to grow our knowledge of how organizational cultures include non-human artifacts, contagion theory to grasp how information flows through social networks (Behnke, Sawyer, & King, 1994; Sampson, 2012), and multiple ethnographic approaches to reach holistic inferences about organizational cultures.

Through accessing these traditions, business communication scholarship is making impressive progress. Theories from psychology, sociology, and anthropology infuse our field with the complex layers of how communication actually unfolds in organizations. The psychological theories have given us superb insights into individual and dyadic cognitive processes where messages are formed, constructed, conveyed, received, and interpreted. Likewise, sociological and anthropological theories have offered a deeper comprehension of how feedback loops occur within group and organizational level communications. We encourage business communication scholars to further advance these theories by integrating them across multiple levels of analysis.

Public Relations and Mass Communication

While the public relations and mass communications areas have many similarities with research in business disciplines, we believe they deserve distinct consideration due to a combination of logistics and worldviews. Public relations often finds itself located outside of business schools, and mass communication is frequently integrated into schools of communication. As for worldviews, these areas offer innovations which move business communication theory forward by embracing internal and external constituents. Three good examples are advances that public relations has contributed through symmetrical, crisis, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) communication research and theory building (Coombs, 2015; Kim & Rim, in press; Men & Sung, in press).

Traditionally, business communication relied on public relations and mass communication theories to explain and predict how organizations communicate with groups of individuals outside of the organization. This relevance has fostered such theories as Dialogic Public Relations Theory (Bentley, 2012; Kent & Taylor, 2002), Source Credibility (Bochner & Insko, 1966; Hovland & Weiss, 1951), and Uses and Gratifications Approach (Diddi & LaRose, 2006; Elliott, 1974), which all give business communication mental models that capture how to influence stakeholders that are external to the organization (consumers, public interest groups, the general public, stockholders, government, society, and others).

Yet public relations and mass communications extend business communication theoretical content internally as well as in other ways. Key public relations theories such as symmetrical communications, situational crisis communication theory, and excellence theory echo W. C. Redding's emphasis on integrity, ethics, and democratic dialogues (Buzzanell & Stohl, 1999; Coombs, 2014; Grunig & Dozier, 2009; Redding, 1996). For all these reasons, business communication could draw more deeply from public relations and mass communications to better address contemporary research questions.

Conclusion

We acknowledge that this overview of business communication theory's traditions could be much more entailed. However, we respectfully defer this step for colleagues since it goes beyond the overall scope of this

book. We also admit that this chapter is not all inclusive. Other disciplines such as marketing, political science, and neuroscience—to name a few—have significantly influenced business communication theory. Still we hope that this chapter motivates our community members toward integrating these rich scholarship traditions into their research agendas. The diverse theoretical roots of business communication actually share major commonalities despite our unique dimensions.

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CHAPTER 14

Why We Need Business Communication Theories

Here a star, and there a star,
Some lose their way.
Here a mist, and there a mist,
Afterwards — day!
—Renunciation, Emily Dickinson

We need theories to advance our understanding of business communication. Theories give us a framework for observations where we can—collectively—agree upon meaning and use this understanding to advance our knowledge of a phenomenon. By itself, a collection of observations will not give us an understanding of the world (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Erickson, Weber, & Segovia, 2011). Knowledge only arises from recognizing patterns in our observations, and such recognition must come from deciding some observations do not matter.

From this perspective, we can view the use of theory like sculpting a statue from marble. The beauty of sculpture comes from removing parts of the original stone to create something people (no matter how abstract the art) can recognize as a statue. We can only make art by removing what we find irrelevant.

However, what we expect from sculptures, many people resist in research. People may resist the use of theory because they believe that with enough observations, we can understand the world, no matter how chaotic and contradictory those observations may be (Sutton & Staw,

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_14

1995; Weick, 1995). Others resist theory because of the (sometimes legitimate) belief that those who create a theory use it to reinforce existing power structures (Fuchs & Mosco, 2012; Willmott, 1994). Or people may resist the use of theory because they believe that it does not offer insights into actual behaviors (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012).

In this chapter, we hope to address these concerns and lay out our argument for why we need to understand and develop theories, and why we should work toward a common core of theories to support our field. We will also give our thoughts on the limits of existing theory and when the field should develop a new theory.

Theory and Observation—Companions in Understanding

In any process we use to understand the world, we will struggle between collecting observations and making theories about the world (Fort, 1975; Kuhn, 1996). This struggle arises from the trade-offs between details (observations) and simplicity (theory). If we try to examine too many details, then we will struggle to make any statement about how the world operates (Sutton & Staw, 1995; Weick, 1995). When we err on the side of too much simplicity, our model will only give us only a superficial knowledge of the world and will not give us the understanding of the events we need (Alvesson & Kärreman, 2007; Lloyd, Boer, & Voelpel, 2017). We create better theories when they capture enough of the real world to guide our view of reality and help us make predictions about it. In this way, theory helps us narrow our view of reality enough that we can process the information, but not so much that we become hobbled by the blinders that a theory has put on us (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019a; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017).

The central conflict between observation and theory may make it seem like theory and observation must remain antagonistic. However, we hold that this seeming antagonism comes from the struggle that we as researchers feel when trying to develop a theory—that we wrestle with our limitations rather than observe a conflict between observations and theory. Instead of theory and observation acting as antagonists, they each bolster the other. At its simplest, we need observations to test our theories—to see if our understanding of the world matches what occurs (J.

Mayfield & Mayfield, 2013; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017). In a complementary fashion, theory helps us screen out irrelevant observations that can confuse us about *how* things work. Theory gives us a perspective where we can make sense of what we observe (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Ruben & Gigliotti, 2017).

An example of the interaction between theory and observation comes from the research area of spectrum analysis or spectroscopy. In the 1800s, chemistry saw a breakthrough when Robert Bunsen and colleagues began to systematically observe how light refracted through vaporized elements (Kay & Marple, 1981; *The Origin of the Bunsen Burner | Journal of Chemical Education*, n.d.). While similar studies had occurred before, such observations lacked a robust theoretical lens that allowed people to organize these observations into a coherent framework. Bunsen's work lead to the idea of spectrum analysis, and spectrum analysis gave us an understanding of how we could examine the compositions of different materials by breaking down their component parts. This work by Bunsen, in turn, gave chemists the tools and theory they needed to examine a wide range of materials and understand their composition at a fundamental level. These observations then broadened theoretical understanding and opened the path for new discoveries.

This example highlights how, when fields are young, they tend to rely on observations. Prior to Bunsen's work, chemistry relied more on the observations of how materials reacted in different situations. Such observations proved useful in particular circumstances but did not give researchers a broader understanding of how changes in those specific circumstances would alter the chemical reactions. For example, chemists might have an idea of how two chemicals would react at sea level, but be surprised at their reactions at higher or lower air pressures. Once researchers developed fundamental theories of chemical composition, the field could advance faster by creating and testing specific models and how variations in circumstances would lead to different outcomes (Dubin, 1978; Kuhn, 1996).

As we look across fields, we see a regular pattern with theories. Theories emerge as a field matures, and, thus, theories can provide a gauge of a field's advancement. However, members of a field tend to resist the change from an observation focus to a theory focus. Such resistance seems natural because the change from observation to theory disrupts the field and threatens to remove existing power structures (Anderson & Brion, 2014; Kuhn, 1996). Increased theory use can also collapse different areas

in a field into one as covering theories (theories that account for multiple phenomena) appear (Feferman, 1977; Reggia & Peng, 1987).

Such resistance seems more natural in applied fields—such as business communication—since we want to provide practical solutions to real problems. Many people in such areas see theory as too far removed from actual practice (Almaney, 1974; Lloyd et al., 2017). However, merely collecting observations will rarely lead to the advice we can give beyond the situations where we made the observations. Also, as the number of observations increases, we simultaneously drown in these observations and lose sight of them because we cannot build upon them.

To wrap up this section, we will end with a quote that sums up the need for theory. It describes the situation we find ourselves in when we lack theoretical a structure:

> … they worship facts. And in return, the facts hit them like hailstones. Life is just one damned fact after another. They turn to collecting facts; laying them down – making "Outlines" of every real and fancied fact in the universe, until "truth" becomes an endless succession of stepping-stones that have a way of disappearing into the bog as soon as they are passed over …. (Plowman, 1932)

We hope that the field of business communication has moved beyond this situation, and moves toward more uniting structures. In the remainder of this chapter, we will discuss concrete ways in which theory advances our field.

How Theory Advances Scientific Progress

We can most obviously see theory's role in advancing scientific progress for business communication. This advancement largely comes from the increased ease theory gives to researchers in developing new studies—theory provides a path out of the data jungle (Klein, Dansereau, & Hall, 1994; Kuhn, 1996). With each new study, researchers face the issue of how to actually test their new idea. Anyone who has created a model from scratch understands the hard work necessary to do so (M. Mayfield, 1994; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018c). However—as this book has hopefully shown—theories exist for almost every topic that you can use to frame your idea (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019b; Miner, 2003). By using

existing theory, researchers can leverage the ideas and the work of others to more rapidly craft their own.

Using existing theory also allows researchers to build on each others' work (Argenti, 2017, p. 201; van Leunen, 1992). By using theory, our field becomes more collaborative and cumulative. When researchers use the same framework (theory) to examine different events, they can learn from each other and refine how they interpret reality. One researcher may find flaws in a theory and make proposals to improve the theory—even giving suggestions about how to test out these extensions. Other researchers can then undertake these tests or develop counter-arguments for why the extensions do not improve the original theory. In some situations, researchers may make arguments—using such tools as a meta- or mega-analysis (Boedhoe et al., 2019; Cooper, 2016)—that certain lines of inquiry about a theory have reached a logical conclusion and we need to pursue new directions rather than continue with existing ones. In all of these cases, the researchers have collaborated to improve our understanding of business communication. They have engaged in the ideal of good research by testing each other's ideas in a way that brings us nearer to the truth (Popper, 2002; Sebastian Chitpin & Chitpin, 2017).

Theory greatly aids these collaborations, and we stop just short of saying that such collaborations could not exist without the building blocks of theory. Theory gives us a common framework to discuss something. Without such a framework, we will remain unsure if we mean the same things in our discussions. While strong conceptual definitions can give us some of the same surety, concepts only provide part of the language we need to collaborate and make scientific advancements (Borg & Shye, 1995; Price, 1997).

Through such collaborations, theory provides a mechanism that fosters work between researchers who never have or will never meet. By working with the same theory, researchers can essentially work on a distributed research project that spans space and time (M. Mayfield, 2009; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018b). In addition, such collaboration means that no one researcher has to undertake all of the steps necessary to fully test a theory and its generalizability (Cronbach, Rajaratnam, & Gleser, 1963; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a). Instead, each researcher only needs to tackle testing a limited part of at theory, thus reducing the work necessary to advance the field (Colquitt & Zapata-Phelan, 2007; Orlitzky & Hirokawa, 2001).

When researchers use theory, then peers will find the task of giving feedback on how to improve a study easier (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammers, & Vaara, 2015; Delbridge & Fiss, 2013). Any research project presents readers with a complex and difficult document; to provide the best feedback, someone must understand many diverse aspects such as how the study builds upon previous work, the logic of the study's arguments, and the methods by which the study tests this logic. Most research that advances a field will prove complex and thus difficult for peers to give useful feedback on. When researchers use a clear theoretical frame, reviewers can focus on important aspects and see if everything fits into a whole. In addition, the theoretical framework helps the researcher and reviewer evaluate the work's importance and utility.

Similarly, by focusing on theory development and testing rather than data gathering, we can more easily see where a theory falls shorts and update the theory when necessary or develop new theories when an existing one fails to capture the reality we are interested in (Cooper, 2016; DeVellis, 2003). As a field, we have an idea of what phenomenon interests us; however, without theories it can be difficult to see if we have done a good job of addressing these phenomena. Theories give us the ability to see where we have answered questions, and where we need more investigation (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019a; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012).

How Theory Can Create a Stronger Business Communication Community

In addition to improving academic research, having a common set of theories can also create a stronger community among business communication researchers—the theories can give us a sense of belonging to something larger than ourselves. Furthermore, research has shown that sharing a common set of ideas (or theories) helps unite a (loose) community of researchers (Kuhn, 1996; Reagans & McEvily, 2003).

While such cohesion develops in many ways, a powerful mechanism for this process arises from having a set of shared goals (Bradley & Campbell, 2016; Chen & Tjosvold, 2012). When people share a set of goals, they begin to see one another as part of the same group, have commonalities, and set aside differences to achieve their mutual goals. Theories can provide shared goals by highlighting important—mutually agreed-upon—outcomes and methods for examining these outcomes. In this way, by

participating in a dialogue about what theories we hold essential, business communication researchers signal what is important to us (Grabo, Spisak, & van Vugt, 2017; Scott-Phillips, 2008).

Perhaps counterintuitively, such a signaling process about what we hold important also encourages a greater diversity of voices within the field. By its nature, the quality of any research study has a level of ambiguity (Belcher, Rasmussen, Kemshaw, & Zornes, 2016; Hug, Ochsner, & Daniel, 2013). People often use proxies, such as the reputation of the researcher's institution, mentor, or prior work to fill in this ambiguity (Donovan, 2011; Koenig, 1983). When we use such proxies, then we privilege those who already hold power and diminish the voices from those excluded from these structures (Allen, 2005; Willmott, 1994). However, as theoretical frameworks become more widely agreed up, the ambiguity about what criteria we should use in assessing research should decrease. This decreased ambiguity allows those who do not hold a privileged position to have their voices heard based on their research quality. Researchers in elite research centers will still have more resources to conduct quality research. However, those lacking such resources will have a lower barrier to cross by not facing a bias against *where* they do their research (Du-Babcock & Chan, in press; Kennamer, 1990).

Theories also give us a common language. We discussed the scientific advantages of having a shared language in the last section, but a common language improves the community's strength as a cohesive group (Ana & Parodi, 1998; Lo, 1999). By considering theory as part of a field's language, increasing the use of this shared language will help members develop greater cohesion.

A shared set of theories can also help us to see how different areas/theories link together to mutually reinforce the field (Allen, 2005; Arundale, 1999). They can help us to see how the work of people who focus on different areas of business communication—such as written and leadership communication—fit together. Theories can help show us if areas that we thought were separate have commonalities. They also help us see if distinct areas link together to create a more robust understanding of a bigger phenomenon. Through such linkages, we can better understand how our different work can act together and how we can better coalesce as a field of study.

How Theory Advances Practice

The use of theory also holds promise for advancing the applied side of business communication and the research side. One way that the use of theory can enhance practice is by providing a consistent language that we can use to communicate our work to people in business (Kankaanranta & Planken, 2010; Lo, 1999). While not the only issue, researchers often have difficulty articulating their ideas to the business world because of the jargon they use—we use language that managers do not understand or do not feel comfortable with. While theory does not automatically remove this jargon (and will likely introduce new terms into the discussion), that can provide us with consistent terms that we can then work with (Fielden & Dulek, 1990; Miner, 2005).

Having such consistent terms will provide us with a core set of terminology that we can then teach to the business community or translate into terms the community regularly uses. If we look at economics, we can see how the consistent use of such terms as supply, demand, and satisficing have entered the business world's common lexicon. These words provide a way for economic researchers to communicate with people who make decisions in many business settings (Augier, 2005; Boumans, 2005). Similarly, human resources researchers often translate their findings into such commonly used business terms as return on investment since they have a clear idea of what theoretical terms match the language used in businesses (Cascio, 1993, 2000).

Theories also provide us with a toolbox we can use when helping organizations. They allow us to see if the field has already investigated a given business problem and tailor this research to provide directions for the business. These tools become especially powerful when we face what appears to be a new business phenomenon. Without theory, we would have to start from scratch to try and find ways to offer advice. However, if we can find an existing theoretical lens to examine the problem, we can proceed on firmer ground. For example, with the rise of new social media, we would like to know if such theories as agenda-setting (Berger, 2001; Carroll & McCombs, 2003) can give us insights into how these channels shape public opinion. Building on an existing theory helps us address an issue more quickly, and lets us proceed from what we know works. As we use theories more often, we will build up studies in different situations, so we can more likely apply our findings to more varied situations (Bass & Bass, 2008; Buzzanell & Houston, 2018).

How Theory Advances Teaching in the Field

Having a common set of theories also helps us advance how we teach business communication in our classrooms. While some texts (and more instructors) already incorporate theory into the curriculum, we believe that the teaching in the field can improve by incorporating more theory into the classroom design—especially in entry-level courses (Luke, 2003; J. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kohl, 2005). We also believe that such a shift will help those teaching the classes and the students by increasing the flexibility and ease of delivery of these classes.

Moving to a more theory-based approach for teaching business communication holds a major promise of improved classroom instruction. When we use well-developed theory as the basis for our classroom instruction, we have a greater assurance that how we teach provides our students with the best information possible (Kohl, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2004; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Lunce, 2008). We have personal experience in this from when we attended a symposium with the major introductory management textbook authors. During this symposium, one of the attendants asked the authors why they continued to include Maslow's hierarchy of needs in their texts when its tenets had either been mainly superseded by better theories or disproved. The authors essentially said that they continued to include the theory (and thus take space that they could better use otherwise) because the other authors continued to have it in their texts. We then saw that the authors attending the symposium dropped the theory in their next edition, and the other textbook authors followed suit over the next few years. By discussing what theories represented the field's best frameworks, the authors collaboratively decided how to improve their pedagogy, and influenced other authors in their thinking. By periodically assessing how we can best use our field's research knowledge, we can better serve our students (Blackman, 2006; M. Mayfield, Mayfield, & Kohl, 2005).

Similarly, we have seen that after Miner published his list of major organizational behavior theories (Miner, 2003), organizational behavior textbook authors have moved to focus more on these theories. In this way, the texts can present ideas that the field has spent a great deal of effort testing for accuracy and utility. In turn, the students can gain a better knowledge of the field and have more space in a text that focuses on how they can use that information rather than devoted to outdated beliefs.

In addition to allowing us to provide better information, incorporating theory into our instructional delivery will also give us greater adaptability. When we base our pedagogy on theory, we can use those theories to explain changes in the communication environment instead of creating new ideas for each alteration. This facet should also improve the quality of instructional delivery and the quality of the instructor's work life. If the instructional basis remains stable (by relying on a set of theories across multiple text editions), then instructors will have fewer new items to learn with each new class. This reduced cognitive workload will free the instructor to concentrate on how best to develop a learning environment around those ideas and reduce the stress associated with constantly changing classroom parameters.

Similarly, as more business communication texts incorporate the same (or substantially the same) theories, instructors can move between these instructional resources with greater ease. If books cover similar theories, instructors can focus more on the presentation quality than the completeness of topic quality. It will also allow instructors to develop materials around theories rather than text topics. In this way, instructors can devote their energies to refining exercises instead of creating new ones every time they change textbooks.

We admit that this advantage for instructors has disadvantages for some authors since it reduces text lock-in that arises from the difficulty of changing to a different author's book. However, we believe that a shift to more theory-based books would have overall benefits to the field, and would even provide benefits to authors who wanted to write more theory-based texts.

Building textbooks around a core set of theories can help authors write better texts faster. Authors can more quickly develop how they will layout a textbook by building them around theories and will not have to take the time previously used in chasing new business communication trends. Instead, the authors can refine previous theory explanations and search current business events for examples to show how these theories operate in a business setting. Also, authors can better develop their textbooks since theories, and the theoretical principles, tend to remain stable over time.

Finally, basing business communication classes on an established theory set helps provide a developmental process for creating an entire business communication program. The theory set allows us to have a clearer view of what individual courses should include and how different courses

should operate together. In this way, having a robust set of theories allows us to see how we can develop entire programs in business communication. Foundational courses can present the basics of the field and cover most major theories. For higher-level classes, instructors can develop them around specific theory areas such as leadership communication.

How Theory Can Advance the Field

We have discussed a bit about how increased use of theory can directly improve the field of business communication. In addition, increased use of theory can also enhance the field's standing among other academic areas. First, greater use of theory will help the field's perceived quality with other academics. Strong theory improves the perceived rigor of a field by other, related fields (Abbott, 2014; Kuhn, 1996) because it signals a commitment to scientific principles. Additionally, greater use of theory allows for clear advancement in the field, thus indicating how a field becomes more rigorous over time.

We stated our next point earlier, but we want to revisit it in the context of how theory can increase the perception of the field by others. Common theories help develop better research. It creates a feedback system where we can better identify stronger work (those that advance the field in a way that others can build upon the work). It can also reduce duplication in research, focusing on theoretical development and advancement rather than just a cataloging of facts. These improvements to our field's research should, in turn, increase the notice our work receives from areas outside of our own.

As more researchers outside of business communication use work from the field, they should view the field as more credible (Bretz, Ash, & Dreher, 1989; Hart & Nisbet, 2012). Also, increased reliance on theories should enable researchers outside of the field to incorporate findings made in business communication into their advances.

Finally, a clear set of theories can create a strong, credible, and distinct identity. In academics, we recognize a field by its research and theories. As the field of business communication becomes more self-aware of what theories we use regularly, it can better present itself as a defined field within academia. By adopting a set of theories, we decide what our field is and what it is not.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have laid out our argument for why the field of business communication needs a robust, recognized set of theories. In brief, such theories will help the field advance in its research, its pedagogy, in working with organizations, as a community, and in the respect it receives from other areas. We hope that our arguments have convinced you about the utility of moving our field to a more theory-based discipline.

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CHAPTER 15

Conclusion and Future Development

The sky is the daily bread of the eyes.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The preceding chapter shows why theory development and refinement are so vital to the business communication community. Theory significantly impacts research, learning, and practice. In a grander sense, well-constructed theory heightens the identity and impact a field has. Too often, people treat communicative behaviors in organizations implicitly instead of explicitly, and do not award communication fair credit for their significant influence on the well-being and key outcomes of organizational stakeholders (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b; Men & Sung, in press). In many organizational investigations, communication remains the unstated *elephant in the room* with vague recommended interventions such as encouraging *openness and clear directions* in company speak. Nothing could be further from this distorted image (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018b; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017a). We know that communication constructs most work experiences and results, and that such constructions occur through multiple organizational layers, cognitive screens, and peer interactions (Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Gronn, 1983; Hanke, 2020; Tengblad, 2006).

These observations are reasons why advances in theory make a big difference (Ma, Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2018; M. Mayfield & Mayfield,

M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-57741-4_15

2012a). Establishing strong theory spurs insightful research that showcases the scientific rigor, relevance, and applications of business communication to practice as well as to other scholarly disciplines (Mayfield, Mayfield, & Neck, in press; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017b). This book contributes toward this goal through canvassing expert opinion and literature to consolidate, categorize, and share a body of business communication theory. The fruits of our effort can be accessed for future theory building and research, classroom learning, and practice.

The road to this catalog has been challenging. We humbly acknowledge that we have missed some important theoretical works despite our diligence and resolve. We were simply unable to gather feedback from all relevant scholars and to review all germane literature. Another challenge translated into a significant aspiration, an additional contribution of this book. Simply put, we encountered many research silos which dot the landscape of a multi-disciplinary field. These silos refer to the discipline specific preferences for literature, methodology, and inquiry foci which understandably occur. Good examples of these divisions are the psychological and discursive schools of business communication research. The psychological lens (most often used in management, information systems, and other business disciplines) highlights goal-oriented investigations which can benefit organizational and employee outcomes. Psychological inquiry often operates by deductive (inferential reasoning based on stated law), quantitative methodology which seeks broad generalizability (Fairhurst, 2001; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2017; Walker & Aritz, 2014). In comparison, the discursive lens is more fluid and emphasizes how organizational communication constructs reality through emergent messages. Discursive inquiry is often more inductive (gathering evidence to uncover truth[s]) and closely linked with organizational communication, linguistics, writing, and rhetorical scholars. Frequently, the discursive lens embraces qualitative methods such as discourse analysis, content analysis, and ethnography to explore how meaning occurs through communication (Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst & Connaughton, 2013; Keyton, 2017; Keyton et al., 2013).

Disciplinary culture is not the only reason for our field's research silos. Publication policies, especially those of scholarly journals, and academic reward systems reinforce these divisions. Many journals will not publish interdisciplinary scholarship which can sometimes draw unfavorable reactions during academic evaluation for career decisions such as tenure and promotion. To boot, there is a third major silo, ethnocentrism

(J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012; Mayfield, Mayfield, & Genestre, 2001; Mayfield, Mayfield, Genestre, & Marcu, 2000). Even though we live in a global, networked world, business communication theories tend to have a focus on the USA—despite the fact that many organizational communication behaviors vary according to national culture (Ang et al., 2007; Babcock & Du-Babcock, 2001; Gelfand, Erez, & Aycan, 2007; Hofstede, 2001). Just think about how employee silence may have divergent meanings in China compared to the USA (M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2014; Robbins & Hunsaker, 2012).

So how do these silos create the opportunity which we noted earlier? The answer is convergence for a richer, more mature field. Intersection and blending of these silos through theory creation and evolution is one of the main discoveries made in writing this book. Diversity adds value to our field. Some investigations need to be inductive while others are best designed deductively or as a combination of the two depending on the nature of the questions asked. A commendable example of such a combination happens in *The Call Center Agent's Performance Paradox: A Mixed Methods Study of Discourse Strategies and Paradox Resolution* (Clark, Tan, Murfett, Rogers, & Ang, 2019; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019b). Similarly, certain studies add more value in a single nation setting (not confined to the USA) while others add more insights in a cross-national comparison. There is still more work to be done toward convergence which we will discuss next along with other aspirations.

Aspirations

We put forth some aspirations here which can synthesize the field of business communication theory and promote its recognition as a mature, unique field of scholarship. Let's begin with an overarching aspiration: Communication has a purpose to enhance our life experiences, including at work (Breton, 1997; M. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2012b, 2016). Then let's look at what scholars can do to make life at work better and grow the field of business communication to garner the considerable respect it deserves. The encouraging truth is that we have already seen researchers move the field forward in recent theoretical refinements and innovations within this book, especially those discussed in Chapter 12. These creative researchers have drawn from a cross-disciplinary literature base and multiple methodologies to adapt theory which reflects a dynamic workplace. In short, these thought leaders have transcended disciplinary

silos. For example, ERO, symmetrical communication, and peer motivating language achieve these purposes (Bisel & Adame, 2019; Hanke, 2020; Men & Sung, in press). In addition, scholars have crafted theories such as Business English as a Lingua Franca (BELF) (Du-Babcock & Tanaka, 2017; Takino, in press) to address the inequalities presented by an English dominated world business environment.

Duly noted, we need to keep forging this path. Certainly the COVID-19 crisis and global climate change have informed us to build flexible theories which can incorporate rapid changes in organizations, embodied by crisis communication (Coombs, 2014; Marsen, 2020) and corporate social responsibility messages (Heath, Saffer, & Waymer, 2017; Jaworska, 2018). Along these same lines, since communication has a purpose to truly make lives better, we should also welcome more stakeholder inclusive business communication theories, such as the Theory of Communication Resilience and the Theory of Respectful Inquiry (Buzzanell, 2018; Van Quaquebeke & Felps, 2018).

We turn to another aspiration: solidifying the field of business communication theory through construct clarification, investigations at multiple levels of analysis, and broader generalizability. We have shown this step can be accomplished via theoretical evolution (digital dialogic theory) and Communications Network Theories (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Latour, 1996). Moreover, leading business communication journals such as the *International Journal of Business Communication* and *Management Communication Quarterly* now publish more studies by international authors and/or in global settings. We should applaud this trend and we hope to see it expand.

The next aspiration is to continue the field's focus on utility in practice (Cascio, 2000; J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2019a). We use the term utility in a stakeholder context, not just for organizational owners or managers (J. Mayfield & Mayfield, 2018a). Stakeholders are *all* the major participants in the organizational environment, including employees, society, customers, suppliers, retailers, government, in addition to owners and managers (Carroll et al., 2020). Stakeholder utility is championed by communication theories of responsible management (Coombs, 2014; Heath, 2011). Congruently, business communication theory builders can highlight how owners and managers benefit from shared power and nurturing the well-being of other stakeholders in the tradition of symmetrical communication (Men & Stacks, 2014; Yue, Men, & Ferguson, in press).

A final aspiration is for continued support of the preceding ones through our professional associations. Prominent business communication associations including the Association for Business Communication (ABC), the Modern Language Association (MLA), the National Communication Association (NCA), the International Communication Association (ICA), the Institute for Public Relations, and special interest groups from the Academy of Management and the American Marketing Association are all examples of scholarly/professional communities which advocate for business communication theories. These and other associations can recommit their vigor to nurture business communication theories which make stakeholders' lives better, transcend silos, adopt global perspectives, incorporate rapid changes and flexibility in organizational environments, and hone utility and validity through construct clarification. We also encourage these associations to persist in their promotion of relevant business communication research skills to major academic accreditation bodies and in the classroom.

Concluding Thoughts

We are deeply grateful that you read this book and hope that you found it both useful and enjoyable. At the very least it can be a handbook to access business communication theories. On another level it can help guide your research, teaching, and practice. There are many limitations to be sure. Our book does not claim to be all inclusive. It is certainly a journey, not a destination. We were motivated to build the groundwork for a collected body of business communication theory. In this voyage, we acknowledge missing significant research, but aimed to start a conversation instead.

Where do we want this conversation to go and who should it engage? Our long-term vision is that this rudimentary map will be refined, embellished, and replenished by business communication scholars from all related disciplines. Also important, our goal is that students and professionals can participate in this ongoing development. We humbly ask you to consider and adopt the preceding aspirations where you can. Together, we can elevate business communication theory to its rightful contributor status in our service as enthusiastic, collaborative stakeholders.

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CHAPTER 16

Recommended Readings

There are so many great sources on organizational communication theory to read. Here we present a non-exhaustive, eclectic list of recommended books and book chapters which have been written over several decades. Throughout our book, we also tried to use our chapter reference lists to highlight some of the more highly cited (and thus influential) sources for better understanding business communication theory. With this chapter, we wanted to give you sources that give broader overviews of topic in business communication research and philosophy. You will find some well-known sources, but we also wanted to include some that we consider hidden gems. We hope that you will find some of them inspiring, informative, and insightful.

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M. Mayfield et al., *Fundamental Theories of Business Communication*, New Perspectives in Organizational Communication,
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