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Communication in Organizations

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Annu. Rev. Organ. Psychol. Organ. Behav. 2017.
4:501–26

The *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* is online at
orgpsych.annualreviews.org

<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-orgpsych-032516-113341>

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Keywords

communication, organizational communication, workplace communication

Abstract

This article focuses on the study of organizational communication, which is a dominant subarea of communication scholarship as recognized by the National Communication Association (NCA) and the International Communication Association (ICA). Because communication, and organizational communication as a subarea, is multiperspectival, this article first defines communication and then organizational communication. Next, the article describes the philosophical perspectives of organizational communication. The next section points to specific areas of individual-, dyadic-, group-, and organizational-level communication research in which communication and organizational psychology and organizational behavior (OPOB) share similar interests. The article concludes by describing practical implications of this area of scholarship (i.e., what can organizations and individuals do with the findings of organizational communication scholarship) and by identifying promising areas of organizational communication study.

COMMUNICATION IN ORGANIZATIONS

The discipline of communication studies how people use verbal and nonverbal messages to generate meanings within and across various contexts, cultures, channels, and media. As a discipline, there is no omnibus definition of communication, as the philosophical perspectives that are a foundation for communication scholarship can be conflicting or complementary. Thus, philosophical perspectives are foundational for how communication scholars position receivers to senders and message to meaning. For example, some philosophical perspectives and subordinate theories focus on the intent or purpose of a message. Some philosophical perspectives and subordinate theories focus on the success of a judgment or evaluation of the communication. Finally some philosophical perspectives and theories steer researcher focus to a particular level of abstraction or restrict focus to a particular context. As a result of this multiperspective approach of the discipline, there are different perspectives on (a) what constitutes communication and (b) if communication should be evaluated (and, if so, how). In their edited collection, Shepherd et al. (2006) provide space for communication scholars to present and defend 27 different perspectives on communication. In each chapter, authors define communication from a particular stance. As a volume, the chapters describe the richness of contemporary thinking about communication, the breadth of communication's influence on its intellectual endeavors, and the significance of the discipline's theorizing.

HISTORY OF THE DISCIPLINE

Communication as a discipline is quite wide and varied; most communication departments are staffed by rhetoricians and social scientists. The discipline began in 1917 with a focus on speech instruction and the study of persuasion. By 1921, the speech departments of the University of Iowa and the University of Wisconsin offered doctoral coursework. Between 1920 and the early 1940s, research in the communication discipline was influenced by the theories of Sigmund Freud and John Dewey. As a result, communication scholars studied personality and its relation to speech. In the late 1940s, communication scholars turned to other topics associated with psychology, especially those associated with the study of groups and teams [see brief histories of the National Communication Association (NCA) and the International Communication Association (ICA), respectively, here: <http://www.natcom.org/historyofNCA/>, http://www.icahdq.org/about_ica/history.asp]. NCA is the primary scholarly association for communication scholars in the United States; ICA is the primary scholarly association for communication scholars across the world. Both associations hold annual conferences, have organizational communication divisions, and publish journals.

HISTORY OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The field of organizational communication emerged in the 1940s in the United States amid concerns about organizing people in work settings effectively and efficiently. Charles Redding is credited with founding organizational communication as a discipline and field of study. During the 1950s through the 1970s, organizational communication research focused on improving organizational life and organizational production. During this period, humans were believed to be rational beings, formal logic was employed, communication was examined as a mechanical process, and a container was the prominent metaphor for an organization.

During the 1980s, the field moved away from a business-oriented approach and moved toward the constitutive role of communication in organizing based on two important events. In 1982, the *Western Journal of Communication* published articles based on papers presented at the

Summer Conference on Interpretive Approaches to the Study of Organization Communication (aka the Alta Conference). Authors of these articles argued for the importance of incorporating interpretive methods in the study of organizational communication. Closely following, Putnam & Pacanowsky's (1983) edited book, *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*, solidified the importance of this perspective and the use of qualitative research methods in organizational communication. Scholars used qualitative methods in this interpretative turn as they sought to describe and understand how knowledge is socially constructed from the point of view of participants within organizations, as well as between organizations and the larger society. Typically, in the 1980s, organizational communication researchers favored research on superior-subordinate relationships, communication skills, organizational culture, cross-cultural communication, communication networks, and socially constructed power (Allen et al. 1993).

In the 1990s, organizational communication research turned to critical theories to examine how communication could be used to both oppress and liberate organizational members; at the extreme, critical studies of organizational communication seek to demonstrate how change in communication in organizations can be accomplished. As they do still today, scholars in this era conducted research from critical and feminist perspectives using qualitative methods.

Another important aspect of the history of organizational communication research is the presence of the journal *Management Communication Quarterly* (MCQ) in 1987. This journal is not associated with any scholarly association; however, in its relatively short ~25-year history, and despite the word *Management* in the title, it has become the predominant home for organizational communication research (Sias 2016). As reflected in other books and articles in other journals, articles published in MCQ have become more socially aware (see Sundstrom et al. 2013, in **Table 2**) and have taken a decidedly democratic orientation (see Wieland 2011 in **Table 1**). This journal also documents the internationalization of organizational communication (Rooney et al. 2011; see, also, Norander & Galanes 2014 in **Table 2**). In addition to MCQ, organizational communication scholars publish empirical studies in *Communication Monographs* (see Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma 2013 in **Table 1**), *Communication Research* (see Kotlarsky et al. 2015 in **Table 1**), *Human Communication Research* (see Zorn et al. 2011 in **Table 2**), *Journal of Applied Communication Research* (see Streeter et al. 2015, in **Table 1**), *Journal of Communication* (see Kramer 2011 in **Table 1**), and *Western Journal of Communication* (see Barrett 2014 in **Table 1**). Conceptual and theory development articles are published in *Communication Theory* (see Stohr 2015 in **Table 2**)¹. The discipline of organizational communication has also published two recent standard bearers: (a) *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods* (Putnam & Mumby 2014), and (b) *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication* (Scott et al. 2017).

Choices about research methods also have changed. Quantitative methods were preferred until the introduction of interpretive research (Putnam & Pacanowsky 1983). As compared to earlier organizational communication scholarship (see Wert-Gray et al. 1991), the field of organizational communication now favors qualitative methods over quantitative methods (Stephens 2016). This shift in methodological preference resulted in two trends: (a) Qualitative methods revealed new ways for identifying and analyzing organizational communication phenomena and revealed new research topics that would be difficult, if not impossible, to study with quantitative methods (as an example, see Mitra 2010 in **Table 1**); additionally, (b) this shift in methodological preference encouraged researchers using quantitative methods to move beyond student subjects to embrace

¹Communication devoted to positioning the organization within the marketplace or society is referred to as external organizational communication.

Table 1 Topics of organizational communication research

Subarea	Representative research study
Activism, social justice	Norander & Galanes 2014
Agency	Koschmann & McDonald 2015
Bullying	Cowan 2013
Collaboration	Hansen & Milburn 2015
Communities of practice	Doerfel et al. 2013
Conflict management	Kramer 2009
Corporate social responsibility	O'Connor et al. 2016
Coworker relationships	Colin & Omilion-Hodges 2013
Decision making	Bonito et al. 2013
Diversity	Gallant & Krone 2014
Engaged scholarship	Collier 2015
Gender issues	Newsom & Lengel 2011
Globalization	Mitra 2010
Groups	Keyton & Beck 2010
Identification	Askay & Gossett 2015
Identity	Feldner & Fyke 2016
Impression management	Erhardt & Gibbs 2014
Information and communication technologies	Larson & Pepper 2011
Information exchange	Streeter et al. 2015
Leadership	Browning & Boys 2015
Materiality	Bean et al. 2013
Meaning	McAllum 2014
Meetings	Beck & Keyton 2009
Messages	Stephens et al. 2014
Multinational organizations	Leonardi & Rodriguez-Lluesma 2013
Networks	Eisenberg et al. 2015
Nongovernmental organizations	Shumate & O'Connor 2010
Organizational emotions	Rivera 2015
Organizational assimilation	Kramer 2011
Organizational change	Barbour et al. 2013
Resistance	Wieland 2011
Rituals	Koschmann & McDonald 2015
Job satisfaction	McKinley & Perino 2013
Sensemaking	Berkelaar 2014
Sexual harassment	Keyton & Menzie 2007
Socialization	Dailey 2016
Social justice	Heuman 2015
Storytelling	Bridgewater & Buzzanell 2010
Supervisor-subordinate relationships	Sheer 2012
Teams	Ervin et al. 2016
Technology	Weber & Kim 2015
Temporality	Barrett 2014

(Continued)

Table 1 (Continued)

Subarea	Representative research study
Transactive memory	Kotlarsky et al. 2015
Transformational leadership	Men 2014
Virtual teams	Scott 2013
Work-life issues	Golden 2013
Workplace friendships	Sias et al. 2012
Workplace romantic relationships	Malachowski et al. 2012
Whistleblowers	McGlynn & Richardson 2014

data collection with employed participants (in some studies, within one organization or industry). Both moves enhanced the ecological validity and generalizability of organizational communication research, as researchers moved to the field regardless of their methodological choice. One drawback of field research, however, is its limitation of repeatedly returning to a specific organization/industry for follow-up or additional studies required to create a line of research. Still, organizational communication scholars typically select some aspect of communicative activity that illuminates the centrality of communication, which constitutes organizational life. For example, Bisel and colleagues (Bisel et al. 2011, 2012; Ploeger et al. 2011; Zanin et al. 2016) develop and extend a line of quantitative research on the hierarchical mum effect (i.e., the reluctance to communicate bad news for fear of being associated with the message, and, as a result harming the relationship). The notion that a hierarchical constraint on upward information flow is created by

Table 2 Organizational communication research methods

Method	Representative research study
Applied communication research	Scott & Trethewey 2008
Autoethnography	Tracy 2015
Case study	Stohr 2015
Content analysis	Jenkins et al. 2014
Discourse analysis	Mitra 2013
Ethnography	Driskill et al. 2012
Experiments	Bisel & Kramer 2014
Field experiment	Bailard 2012
Interviews	Tan & Kramer 2012
Meta-analysis	Feeley et al. 2010
Mixed methods	Williams & Connaughton 2012
Narrative analysis	Hinderaker & O'Connor 2015
Network analysis	Walker & Stohl 2012
Postcolonial approaches	Dutta & Dutta 2013
Postmodern approaches	Sundstrom et al. 2013
Qualitative field research	Norander & Harter 2012
Rhetorical analysis	Gill & Wells 2014
Survey research	Zorn et al. 2011
Technology	Agarwal et al. 2014

power differentials extends previous research on organizational psychologists' mum effect theory (Tesser & Rosen 1975). Using qualitative methods, Scott and colleagues (Dunn et al. 2016, Maglio et al. 2016, Scott & Trethewey 2008) developed and extended a line of qualitative research on workplace safety and occupational hazards.

The next sections highlight the philosophical perspectives organizational communication scholars use as grounding for their research. To help scholars in other disciplines find touchstones of relevance with organizational communication scholarship, I then organize the main section of the article into organizational communication research framed by focal units of analysis (i.e., individuals, workplace relationships, groups and teams, and organizational phenomena). Two tables capture what I could not present fully in this article. **Table 1** identifies recent and major areas of organizational communication study and provides representative studies as examples. **Table 2** identifies research methods used in the study of organizational communication and provides representative studies as examples of each method.

PERSPECTIVES FOR ARTICULATING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

Just as various philosophical perspectives and definitions serve communication scholars at large, organizational communication scholars also embrace philosophical and theoretical diversity (as well as methodological diversity; see **Table 2**). A reader wanting a broad overview of organizational communication scholarship would be well served by reviewing Putnam & Mumby's (2014) handbook of organizational communication that features chapters on theory and methods.

Communication scholars agree that organizations "are processes which create, maintain, and dissolve social collectives, that these processes constitute the work of organizing, and that the ways in which these processes are continuously executed are the organization" (Weick 1965, p. 1). Simply put, "Organizations cannot exist without communication" (Keyton 2011, p. 11). Indeed, even the noncommunicative elements of an organization (e.g., financial system) are enabled by communication (Poole 2014). Communication is necessary in the organizing process and is persistent throughout the lifespan of the organization. During organizational creation, staffing and hiring, and creating and developing the organization's products and services, organizational members are communicating with one another and with stakeholders, such as customers, suppliers, and regulators. Thus, organizational communication covers a wide variety of communicative activity across several different types of senders and receivers—as individuals, groups, or teams—and the organization as a whole.

McPhee & Zaug (2001) point out that communication is also tailored to interrelated and overlapping organizational functions. Thinking of what occurs in an organization, some communication socializes or negotiates; other communication, particularly, that of management, is devoted to structuring and controlling. Still other communication is designed for negotiating and coordinating work activities. These internal and role-related examples represent the core of internal organizational communication.² Across these three functions, communication can be formal or informal; planned or unplanned; as well as verbal, nonverbal, written, or visual. Communication may be face to face or mediated. Thus, as individuals, dyads, and groups interact with one another, the processes of leading, supervising, decision making, managing conflict, and hiring and firing are unfolding, creating the day-to-day reality of employees and management.

²The Communication Source and Communication and Mass Media Complete databases are literature databases specific to the communication discipline.

How managerial requirements are positioned in organizational communication research differs greatly from how these requirements are positioned in other disciplines. Rather than focusing on top-down messages, effectiveness, productivity, or profitability, organizational communication scholars remove these constraints (Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo 1982) to examine all levels of organizational members (i.e., hourly employees, part-time employees, volunteers) and other unintended consequences of organizational life (i.e., effects of whistleblowing, sexual harassment, surveillance, racial politics). More recently, Deetz & Eger (2014) argued that “human interaction explains organizational phenomena . . . [thinking of] Communication as an explanation, rather than as a phenomenon or community, is what makes a communicative approach to studying organizations unique” (p. 30). In summary, an organizational communication perspective is in alignment with Weick’s (1965) theorizing, but identifies the communication among organizational members at all levels within and across organizational functions and structures as the processes by which organizing occurs. Communication is not limited to one modality but, rather, occurs through verbal, nonverbal, textual, and visual forms (mediated or not).

THEORIES AND PERSPECTIVES FOR STUDYING ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The most traditional view of communication relies on a postpositivist approach. For organizational communication scholars, it is a philosophy that respects the social-scientific spirit, “in the context of fundamental reforms of positivistic principles” (Corman 2005, p. 21). Corman further characterizes this perspective as upholding the tenets of falsification, naturalism, transformational models, and emergent objectivity, which he argues are significant departures from positivist beliefs. Bisel & Kramer’s (2014) experimental study is an example. Participants assigned to one of three scenarios were conditioned to their role as a supervisor receiving a request from a subordinate, a coworker receiving a request from a coworker, or a subordinate receiving a request from a supervisor. In each condition, the request was unethical and against organizational policy. Their written responses to these requests were content analyzed, which indicated that participants invoked policy justifications to deny requests. However, hierarchical relationships did not influence justification frequency or type. This experiment is an example of postpositivism in that the researchers designed and followed procedures to assure that observations were verifiable, accurate, and consistent; at the same time, the researchers accepted that their background, knowledge, and values biased what they observed. Social constructionism is another perspective employed by organizational communication scholars (Allen 2005). This perspective assumes that humans derive knowledge of their world from the larger social discourses in which they are embedded. Social discourses, of course, are laden with the dominant belief system. This perspective stresses the significance of language and social interaction, especially those associated with identity development of belonging to gender, race, and social class. Following in the path of Berger & Luckmann (1966), organizational communication scholars tended to focus on the product rather than processes of constructionism. The key takeaway of this perspective for the study of organizational communication is that “knowledge is largely understood as information, and agency is located in the person. Communication implicitly is viewed as what happened from the personal to the social rather than as the social presses of producing the person” (Deetz & Eger 2014, p. 31).

As an example of research using this perspective, Sias’ (1996) examination of coworkers’ conversations revealed that these conversations were the location of workers becoming aware of differential treatment that might otherwise escape their notice. Indeed the retelling of an event in the form of a story to a coworker was the moment in which coworkers realized that differential

treatment from their supervisor had occurred. Thus, communication among coworkers was the site in which attitudes and perceptions of social reality occurred.

Another philosophical/theoretical approach is based on systems theory, in which messages and meanings are created, delivered, and received by individuals in a complex web of relationships. Systems theory served as a foundational theory for the early study of organizational communication as models revealed “how relatively simple processes at the level of parts generate unexpected and surprising phenomena at the level of wholes” (Poole 2014, p. 70). Systems theory allows for the study of communication within and across organizational units, organizational levels, as well as environmental influences. Despite its prominence in early organizational communication research, systems theory has largely been replaced by studies anchored by structuration and network theory.

Structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984) is useful to organizational communication scholars because the theory addresses “the relationship of agency and structure, the articulation of organizations and society, the place of material factors in explaining organizational interaction, and the communication constitution of organizations (CCO)” (McPhee et al. 2014, p. 75). Furthermore, structuration “stands as an invaluable metatheory and research enterprise, one that includes unique productive solutions to problems plaguing other organizational communication theories” (McPhee et al. 2014, p. 93).

Organizational communication researchers have conducted studies to explore the mutually influential relationship through which technologies shape human interaction while human interaction influences how technologies are conceived and used. Using in-depth interviews and focus groups at a high-tech company, Larson & Pepper (2011) discovered that the use of technology sent important symbolic messages about what was going wrong with an acquisition occurring at that time. Corporate emails, virtual coffee talks, and company websites were interpreted based primarily on their channel. In other words, the formality and form in which the message was delivered displaced the messages themselves. This interpretation became so dominant that “technologies seemed to foster more suspicion and distrust, rather than identification. In short, the use of technology to deliver these top-down messages was perceived so negatively by employees that the forms in which the messages were delivered were considered to be more significant than the content of the messages. As a result, the employees chose separateness, rather than attachment, and began actively disidentifying with the new organization” (Larson & Pepper 2011, p. 7).

Shortly after the introduction of structuration, the Montreal School’s version of Communicative Constitution of Organizations (CCO) became a primary perspective for organizational scholars, as this helped organizational communication scholars explicate the relationship between organization and communication. In positioning CCO, MCPhee & Zaugg (2001) set out four flows, or constitutive forces for the organization (i.e., membership negotiation, organizational self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional position in the social order of institutions). Taylor (2001) identified four transformations embracing both medium and form. These are organization as (a) a network of practices and conversations, (b) a collective experience through distancing (i.e., a shift in scale from many to one in which communication expresses the view of the organization as if it is a single entity), (c) authoring through textualization (i.e., transformation of organizational voices into text that moves organizational members from the present tense into the past tense, allowing abstraction and objectification such that there is a single body of employees), and (d) representation and presentification (i.e., the organization represents the collective and can present itself this way to others). Thus, an organization “is a set of transactional relationships, mediated by interaction” (p. 231). A study of Doctors without Borders illustrates these concepts. Cooren et al. (2007) collected data by shadowing people with a video camera while they were working; the goal was to understand members’ daily activities and duties, and to discover how they used talk to solve problems. Analyses of the transcripts revealed the notion

that the overarching discursive message of an organization must be embedded in the everyday text or talk of organizational members “in order for it to be reproduced, sustained and transported from one point to another” (Cooren et al. 2007, p. 181). In other words, a significant amount of interactive work must be done to create that stability. Taking a longitudinal view of discourse, Cooren et al. discovered a greater stability in the way people speak and the type of discourse they promote.

The most recent treatment of networks as multidimensional (Shumate & Contractor 2014) positions network theory to accommodate (a) all types of actors (i.e., individuals, groups, organizations, and technologies), (b) multiple relational dimensions (i.e., flow, affinity relations, representational relations, and semantic relations), and (c) process over message exchange. Doing so employs a plethora of theories to explain network emergence. Atouba & Shumate (2010) use multidimensional network theory to explore and explain the structure and collaboration of the interorganizational network of international development organizations. Using exponential random graph modeling with Markov Chain Monte Carlo maximum likelihood estimates, they found that collaboration is more likely among organizations of the same type, among organizations with similar funding sources, when the ties are reciprocal, with organizations that are selected by others, and among organizations with existing relationships with a common other. These findings suggest that development organizations are similar to networks of business organizations in that they reject asymmetric dependencies in favor of joint dependencies.

Another distinct approach to the study of organizational communication is the rhetorical approach, which focuses on the study of influence and persuasion. Cheney & Lair (2005) note that a rhetorical perspective for the study of organizational communication recognizes “how discourse links individual persuasive choices with organizational resources” (p. 68). For example, Bormann’s (1972, 1982, 1983) symbolic convergence theory (a type of rhetorical criticism) allows scholars to examine how groups of people construct shared symbolic realities through the use of narratives, heroes, villains, and inside jokes. When these develop, they foster common understandings among organizational members at the work group, department, and organizational level. As these symbolic notions chain out to other organizational members, a rhetorical vision develops. Burke’s pentad is a more traditional rhetorical approach. Meisenbach et al. (2008) employ it to discover the discursive paths of empowerment and transformation from the interviews of nonmanagerial women who have taken at least one maternity leave. Speaking with frustration and disgust, these women still spoke in such a way that favored the financial motivations and interests of their organizations.

Finally, communication is also studied and defined from a critical/cultural or postmodern perspective. Organizational communication studies “play an important role of critique in exposing organizations as discursive sites of contradiction, where systems of power and politics are enacted and reproduced in ways that benefit some stakeholders over others” (Mumby 2014, p. 119). But its most defining characteristic for organizational communication is that “critical work encourages the exploration of alternative communication practices that allow greater democracy. . . and productive cooperation among stakeholders” (Deetz 2005, p. 85). Frequently, postmodern theory “describes a series of breaks and continuities between modern and contemporary conditions” (Taylor 2001, p. 115). Taylor draws upon Donnellon (1996) for one example of this distinction: “Where modern organizations favor centralized authority and hierarchy, postmodern organizations favor decentralized authority, lateral relationships within and between units, and localized autonomy in employee decision making” (p. 118). He continues with other metaphors in which networks replace pyramids as the symbol of organizational structure, and where collaboration replaces authority models of communication.

Mumby (2014) argues that “the effects of neo-liberal political discourses and global economic markets have dramatically altered the organizational landscape, with particularly profound

implications for the relationships among work, identity, and organizing” (pp. 101–2). He further posits that “the field of organizational communication was thus transformed from the study of *communication in organizations* to the study of the *communicative politics of organizing*” (p. 103). The goals of such studies are to (a) understand through deep insights, (b) critique by uncovering hidden assumptions and processes that maintain the status quo, and (c) educate by expanding the conceptual terms through which organizational members experience their world (Deetz 1982, 1992; Deetz & Kersten 1983).

Feminist theory lingered on the fringes of the organizational communication literature in the mid-1990s, but now it is “a subsidiary branch of critical organization inquiry” (Ashcraft 2005, p. 143), although more narrow in scope than the broader emancipatory agenda of critical scholarship. Ashcraft distinguishes feminist theory from critical theory, as it draws “on another long-standing, independent tradition of accounting for relations of power: feminist theory” (p. 143). Feminist theory as used in organizational communication research has demonstrated that “critical and mainstream organization studies can function as unwitting allies in constructing men as universal working subjects. . . refusing the relevance of gender amounts to denying a primary way in which difference, subjectivity, and domination are configured (Ashcraft 2014, pp. 144–45).

Feminist approaches in organizational communication scholarship are organized by Ashcraft (2014) into five theoretical frameworks. The first of these, liberal feminism, emphasizes equal opportunities based on shared humanity, or sameness. Buzzanell’s (1995) examination of the glass ceiling is an example, as her theorizing and critique exposes a double standard about treatment. A second framework is cultural feminism, which advocates equity for difference. As such, cultural feminism can lead to discrimination as standardization is based on the baseline rules for men. Cultural feminism provides two explanations. The first, gendered communication expertise, posits that women are treated differently because they are different. Still, male-oriented benchmarks or values are used for assessment. The second explanation is one based on a gendered organizational culture. Edley’s (2000) ethnography provides an example by exploring and explaining how women “participated in their own subordination. . . doing so strategically as a way to enact power and to resist the culture of control” (p. 295).

Ashcraft’s (2014) third theoretical framework is standpoint feminism in which women are as fundamentally different from men as they are from one another; difference “emanates from the specific web of cultural, political, temporal, spatial, and economic relations” (p. 134), in which one is embedded. Parker’s (2005) analysis of the narratives of African American women executives is an example of this type of research.

Radical and poststructuralist feminism is the fourth of Ashcraft’s (2014) theoretical frameworks. Theories and studies are characterized by identifying gender as a “primary determinant of difference in patriarchal societies,” acknowledging that “masculine ways are irretrievably repressive,” and that “dominant institutions are premised on masculinist principles” (Ashcraft 2014, p. 138). Ashcraft’s (2000) participant observation and interview study of a nonprofit that serves female victims of domestic violence is an example of research grounded in this perspective.

The fifth and final framework of feminist theorizing (Ashcraft 2014), postmodern feminism, argues that gender is not a real thing, except as a social construction generated through discourse. A researcher’s task is to trace how discourse generates knowledge about gender and (its) enactments, as well as the production of difference in work and organizations. Medved & Kirby’s (2005) analysis of websites and self-help books is an example of how a postmodern feminism approach is used to uncover how corporate language is used to professionalize the work of stay-at-home mothers.

Organizational communication scholars embrace several philosophical perspectives and theoretical traditions. Thus, from a communicative perspective, the definition of communication,

the topics of studies, and methods employed are shaped by the philosophical perspective of the researcher. As a result, a single definition of communication cannot represent the entirety of the communication field that examines its subject at the individual, dyadic, group, organizational, or societal level of analysis, as well as through mediated (or not) channels. Another way to situate and compare definitions is to consider how definitions address the symbols that create messages from which meaning is extracted. Taking this perspective allows for multiple channels of communication to be considered simultaneously. Disciplinary debates about the definition of communication still exist but appear to be less problematic.

AREAS OF STUDY

Individuals in Organizations

In organizational communication, the study of individuals is primarily focused on the affective aspect of their role as an employee. Two robust areas of research focus on the emotions employees must portray as part of their work, and the way in which individuals balance their personal life with their professional life.

Emotion as part of work. Largely focusing on those employed in some type of service occupation or organization, this area distinguishes emotional labor from emotional work. Emotional labor is defined as “the display of largely inauthentic emotions, emotions, that are used by management as a commodity that can be controlled, trained, and prescribed” (Miller et al. 2007, p. 233). Alternately, emotional work is the display of authentic emotions and is frequently associated with human service workers. Although not mutually exclusive, each addresses emotional communication as an aspect of the work role (Miller 2014).

Building on Hochschild’s (1979) foundational research in sociology, organizational communication scholars have examined emotional labor through ethnographic analysis of the ongoing performances of emotional labor on a cruise ship (Tracy 2000). The analyses revealed that emotional labor was intertwined with power, self-subordination, and identity.

In a multimethod study (e.g., interviews, observations) of municipal court judges, data analyses revealed that emotional deviance occurs and can be a distinctive advantage (Scarduzio 2011). Municipal court judges work directly with the public, often interacting with defendants representing themselves. Accordingly, the work of municipal court judges requires them to “manage emotions to appear (and be) impartial and include ensuring that other people feel the process is fair and the outcome deserved” (Anleu & Mack 2005, p. 592). However, Scarduzio (2011) discovered that judges deviated from these emotional labor expectations. Labeled privileged deviance, judges communicated “emotional deviance [i.e., eye rolling, lack of eye contact, some hand gestures] in ways that appeared to be unintentional or accidental but could be viewed as subtle expressions of [their] frustration or annoyance” (p. 295). More explicit deviance was evidenced when judges used humor in the courtroom or displayed anger and frustration to maintain order. When judges communicated through these nonverbal expressions, it signaled the status and power of their position as well as revealed clues as the emotions they may be feeling.

With respect to emotional work, or authentic displays of emotion at work, organizational communication scholars have focused largely on stress and burnout. Miller (2014) reports that when emotional communication in the workplace can be characterized as genuine, without acting out or through emotions, stress is more likely. Why? Stress in this case develops from the energy expenditure of “over involvement rather than the dissonance of faking it with clients” (p. 575).

Work-life issues. Studies of work-life quality or work-life balance remain an area of interest for communication scholars. Kirby & Buzzanell's (2014) review of the work-life literature points to the signature distinction between communication studies of this phenomenon as compared to studies from other disciplines. That is, "organizational communication scholars. . . provide a unique point of difference by focusing on *how* communication constitutes work-life phenomena" (p. 351). This perspective on work-life issues focuses on sensemaking—how it occurs, why it occurs, and its influence. Thus, as with other organizational phenomena studied by communication scholars, communication is the constitutive process through which work-life issues are generated, used, and understood.

Kirby & Buzzanell's (2014) review of the literature identified five constitutive communicative processes related to work-life issues. The first is policy-ing work life, which covers communication research about work-life policy domestically and internationally. Using an online survey, Ter Hoeven et al. (2016) found that the quickness and efficiencies afforded through technology use simultaneously increased interruptions, unpredictable workloads, and the number of unforeseen and additional tasks. Ultimately, the increase of these job characteristic also increased work-related burnout and decreased work engagement.

The second constitutive communicative process related to work-life issues is norm-ing (or not) issues of work-life in organizations. For example, Cowan & Bochantin's (2009) study revealed that female police officers believed that pregnancy put their careers at risk because their colleagues did not know how to treat them in their work role (i.e., ignore their pregnancy expecting the female officers to continue with all work activities, or accept their pregnancy and excuse female officers from some work activities). Alternatively, their male colleagues recast the pregnancy of female officers as a crime or illness (i.e., sent them home or assigned them to light duty).

A third process, labeled (re)producing ideal workers and the primacy of work, highlights research that examines how ideologies of success are created and reproduced in organizations and societal cultures. Kirby & Buzzanell (2014) point to research, for example, that uncovers a discourse of excess (Wieland 2010) that influences how both organizations and individuals create and uphold extreme career models (i.e., work longer hours). A fourth process, constructing (gendered) (working) identities, highlights research that "seeks to understand the complex intersectionalities of difference that come into play as women and men negotiate their caregiving and worker identities" (p. 360). The research of Tracy & Rivera (2010) exemplifies this aspect of the framework, as their analyses of interviews revealed that work-life problems are often considered as women's issues by the public and portrayed as such by the media.

The fifth and final aspect of their framework of constitutive communicative processes of work-life issues is labeled acting practically and routinizing work and (personal) life. Research under this aspect of the framework is exemplified by that of Golden & Geisler (2006), who found that users of PDAs positioned the technology to (a) contain work to maintain some segregation of work life and personal life, (b) integrated work life and personal life, or (c) protected private life by using personal/private settings for personal-life matters.

Work-life emotion. Waldron (1994, 2000, 2012) emphasizes that workplace relationships are a critical point for understanding emotion at work. He argues the following: "It is the nature of work relationships, not the nature of the task itself that creates the highest potential for intense emotional experience" (p. 66). Why? First, work relationships require a delicate balancing of the personal and the professional, and each work relationship may differ in this balance. Second, work relationships are interdependent and part of a larger system relational network. Third, work relationships may reveal conflicting loyalties. Fourth, workplace relations are imbued with beliefs about organizational justice and fairness.

Workplace Relationships

In her review, Sias (2014) identifies two significant and related areas of communication research about dyadic workplace relationships: (a) workplace relationship forms and functions (supervisor-subordinate and coworker relationships, workplace friendships), and (b) relationship dynamics (supervisor-subordinate relational processes, peer and friendship relational processes, and relationships as sites of power, control, and resistance). Similar to interpersonal relationships outside of work, workplace relationships are characterized as social, ongoing, and defined by patterned interdependent interaction that occurs over time. Moreover, coworker relationships—which are sites of power, control, and resistance—comprise the organization (Sias 1996, 2014; Sias et al. 2002). Not surprisingly, leadership, information exchange, feedback and appraisal, and mentoring were the core functions organizational communication researchers examined in the supervisor-subordinate relationship.

Leadership. Research on leadership first focused on traits and then moved to the study of behaviors. Borrowing leader-member exchange (LMX) theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien 1995, Graen & Scandura 1987) from organizational psychology and organizational behavior (OPOB) scholars was a turning point for organizational communication scholars, as it positioned subordinates as active, rather than passive, and supervisors did not communicate similarly across all subordinates. Especially for organizational communication scholars, LMX theory introduced the concepts of mutual exchange and negotiation in the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Organizational communication scholar, Gail Fairhurst, and colleagues “made an important theoretical move by conceptualizing LMX relationships as communicatively constituted” (Sias 2014, p. 378). With this discursive turn, communication patterns were distinguished, leading to the breakthrough that the interaction patterns within a specific supervisor-subordinate relationship do not simply characterize the relationship, but that the communication of supervisor-subordinate constitutes the relationship (Fairhurst & Chandler 1989).

As the communication discipline explored leadership as communicatively constructed, the discipline also adopted social and cultural lenses for examining leadership processes (Fairhurst & Connaughton 2014). Organizational communication scholars have a complex view of leadership, which is moving “toward a more dialectical view of leadership. . . individually informed yet relational phenomenon between people. . . to see leadership as a medium by which collectives mobilize to act but also as a highly desired outcome of this interaction. . . but also definitionally unstable” (Fairhurst & Connaughton 2014, p. 401). These philosophical views of leadership moved leadership communication to any individual who is a transformative agent regardless of organizational role or title. In this social constructionist view of leadership, communication “is central, defining, and constitutive of leadership” (Fairhurst & Connaughton 2014, p. 407). This view emphasizes a meaning-centered view of communication, removes the premise that leadership is found in a person’s traits or qualities, and positions power and influence as both positive and negative.

Sensemaking and framing are often called upon as theoretical positions from which to examine leadership in organizational communication studies. Making the move from persons in permanent leadership roles, Browning & McNamee (2012) used in-depth interviews incorporated with their cultural knowledge of the organization to examine how interim internal leaders make sense of their roles. Organizational members in these roles chose whether to be caretakers or trailblazers based on interactional dynamics in the organization as well as their professional history and future aspirations.

Fairhurst’s (2011) work on framing illuminates how those in leadership roles manifest that ability by adept framing; that is, leaders use communication to control the context and define the

situation. For example, because leaders typically want others to see the situation as they do, they must ethically persuade others to see the situation in a certain way. Doing so may be difficult especially when ambiguity is present. To counter ambiguity, leaders must make sense for others from that ambiguity. In the acts of creating and sustaining their interpretation, they are positioning themselves to apply for the leadership role they may already occupy. Importantly, someone who is believed to be the leader must sustain a reliable performance as a leader by framing the role and his/her enactment of it in a believable manner. Finally, leaders must be able to control their framing in both formal and informal settings. From these perspectives, language use is central to acts of leadership.

Throughout the past 15 to 20 years, organizational communication researchers have developed a communicative lens for the study of leadership. Fairhurst & Connaughton (2014) identify six points: (a) Leadership communication is transmissional and meaning centered; (b) leadership is relational, but neither leader or follower centric; (c) leadership is interactionally produced, with an emphasis on the talk, action, and other symbols associated with the material world; (d) leadership communication is inherently power based and often contested, and someone who can become a leader is more a function of recognizing and managing these tensions; (e) leadership is a diverse and global phenomenon, and a phenomenon that must consider issues of space, distance, and time when interactions are mediated; and (f) leadership communication must integrate issues of morality, ethics, and accountability.

Information exchange. With respect to information exchange (typically studied between supervisors and subordinates), organizational communication scholars focused on the overt and unobtrusive strategies (Miller & Jablin 1991) of newcomers as they seek information from their supervisors. Organizational communication researchers also focused on how veteran employees asked their supervisors questions to decrease uncertainty when new employees are hired (Casey et al. 1997). Mentoring is another type of dyadic interaction within organizations. Organizational communication research found that employees receiving mentoring (formal or informal) are more satisfied and have greater understanding of work and organizational issues (Jablin 2001).

Peers and coworkers. Peers and coworkers also engage in important communication relationships and are important information resources for one another, as employees rely on information from their peers to a greater degree than information from their supervisors (Comer 1991). Coworkers also provide social support to one another because they share a unique understanding of the work task and environment (Ray 1993).

Workplace friendships are unique in that friends are voluntary and personal, and characterized by emotional and affective bonds lacking in other workplace relationships. Several positive outcomes (employees receive higher-quality information and greater social support) are associated with workplace friendships, even when these friendships cross hierarchical and functional boundaries (Sias 2014). However, we should not forget that workplace relationships can also be destructive and carry negative consequences for individual employees, the dyadic relationship, and the organization (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher 2009).

GROUPS AND TEAMS

Initially, communication scholars studying groups borrowed heavily from both psychology and sociology. Today, the study of teams is largely situated in the psychology, management, and communication disciplines; these scholars publish in each other's journals and appear together

in edited collections. Less frequently, scholars from these disciplines collaborate together. Two current directions in organizational communication focus on (a) internal dynamics relative to team members' organizational role (see Beck & Keyton 2009 in **Table 1**) and (b) the team ↔ organizational relationship.³

Embedded teams. Institutional and environmental forces have shaped changes to team structures, as well as to how teams are integrated in and across organizational structures (Seibold et al. 2014). As organizations collaborate with one another, team members are the primary ways in which interaction among organizations occurs (Keyton et al. 2008). Typically, these teams have changeable and permeable boundaries as membership is fluid and dynamic (Putnam & Stohl 1990).

From a communicative perspective, teams are constituted through interaction among team members, as they “process information, develop shared meanings, coordinate their actions, manage conflict and consensus, express emotions, and offer interpersonal support” (Seibold et al. 2014, p. 329). Following this reasoning, individuals may be appointed to a team (or volunteer), but these actions are not sufficient for constituting the team. Team interaction, both formal and informal, is the constitutive agency. The organization(s) provides the contextual features that both enable and constrain the team and its interaction (e.g., social, political, spatial, temporal, organizational climate, power structures, temporal factors). A communicative perspective recognizes that teams also influence the organizations(s) in which they are embedded.

Studies of groups and teams are conducted with quantitative, qualitative, and interaction analysis methods by scholars in communication, organizational behavior, and organizational psychology. The primary distinction between communication and OPOB research on teams is that communication scholars focus on what messages team members create, how messages are delivered, and what meanings are created by team members from those messages. Message-driven studies are more centrally located in the communication discipline (e.g., Beck et al. 2012, Ervin et al. 2016) than perception-driven ones (e.g., Wellman et al. 2016).

Organizational Phenomenon

At the macro level, organizational communication scholars treat the organization as an entity rather than dividing it into its levels or functions. Research on organizational culture exemplifies this approach.

Organizational culture. Across many social science and management disciplines, researchers study organizational culture—albeit with different underlying theories and intentions. A communication perspective on organizational culture is meaning centered and produced by organizational members at all levels; organizational communication researchers conduct their studies to identify, analyze, and theorize how people create and negotiate meaning through interaction:

Conceptually, organizational culture is “the set(s) of artifacts, values, and assumptions that emerges from the interactions of organizational members” (Keyton 2011, p. 28). From this definition, two premises are derived: (a) organizational culture is a multilevel system of artifacts,

³Teams and groups are also studied by group communication scholars. This body of research is more focused on the message ↔ meaning relationship and other internal team and group dynamics, with considerably less attention given to the team ↔ organizational relationship. In the discipline of communication, some scholars identify with both organizational and group communication. However, many group scholars do not identify with organizational communication.

values, and assumptions, and (b) some members or groups in the organization must share interpretations of cultural elements, yet it is unlikely that all members or groups will share all or most interpretations (Keyton 2011, 2014).

Artifacts are visible and tangible elements or items generated by or found in the organization (e.g., company logo, newsletter, training manual). Values are ideals or beliefs about what an organization should pursue. Always stated in a positive form, values the organization upholds often appear in a mission statement or vision. But, values can also be found in how organizational members behave. Values can be found in organizational stories, in ritualistic practices, and in the vocabulary used by organizational members. Assumptions are entrenched organizational beliefs that are difficult to talk about because they are taken for granted.

The interpretive turn in the field of organizational communication was central to the development of organizational culture as a communicative study. Pacanowsky & O'Donnell-Trujillo (1982, 1983) embraced the assumption that communication constituted organizational life, which allowed communication researchers to move the study of organizational culture from a managerial perspective to one that included all levels and types of employees. Mumby (2014) recommends using the phrase linguistic turn for several reasons. First, several theoretical approaches can fit within this phrase (e.g., interpretive, postmodern, poststructuralist). Second, linguistic turn “repositions communication as constitutive of organizing” (Mumby 2014, p. 102). Third, the phrase is also useful to management and other organizational scholars, illuminating that scholars from many disciplines study many of the same phenomena. Fourth, the phrase illuminates the political, economic, and social environments in which organizations operate and research is conducted. This perspective remains dominant in the study of organizational culture, and organizational communication scholars often study discourse as evidence of an organization's culture.

Several lenses help to focus scholarly investigations. These are symbolic performance, narrative reproduction, textual reproduction, management, power and politics, and technology (Keyton 2011). Researchers use these as lenses to sharpen or bring into focus some aspect of an organization's culture. The use of multiple lenses is encouraged as any lens by itself is incomplete.

The expression of passion is a type of symbolic performance and is captured in Carmack's (2008) study of employees at an ice cream store. In addition to selling ice cream, employees were required to engage in the emotional labor of singing and dancing. This type of performance is a symbolic expression to both customers and employees. The lens of narrative reproduction focuses on storytelling—a device commonly used by employees to make sense of their organization, as stories are told at all levels of the organization. The lens of textual reproduction examines artifacts that appear in text (e.g., website, mission statement, email exchange). By examining the hundreds of emails from Enron employees, Turnage & Keyton (2013) discovered subcultures existed, which were based on the degree to which employees trusted Enron's leadership (or not). The lens of management reveals organizational culture as a control device. Hoffman & Cowan's (2008) examination of websites of one year's *best places to work* competition is an example. They found that the organizations maintained control over work-life issues by the way organizational messages were constructed. The lens of power and politics is based on power and hierarchy in its many forms. For example, Dougherty's (2001) study of a healthcare center revealed that males had different rules than females for what constituted sexual harassment. Hylm's (2006) study of telecommuting used the lens of technology to demonstrate that the values and assumptions associated with telecommuting were different between employees who did telecommute and those who did not.

Thus, a communicative focus on organizational culture examines artifacts, values, and assumptions beyond those associated with management. By investigating informal conversations and texts, communication researchers highlight the social and symbolic realities that are not as readily apparent.

APPLICATION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP

Many organizational communication scholars design their scholarship as applied communication research. This integration is highly valued. Indeed, the vast majority of scholars awarded the National Communication Association Phillips Award for Applied Communication Scholarship have been organizational communication researchers. Applied organizational scholarship addresses practical concerns for which research findings can be placed into practice. Scott and colleagues' (Dunn et al. 2016, Maglio et al. 2016, Scott & Trethewey 2008) research mentioned at the beginning of this article is a good example of applied organizational communication scholarship. Generally using qualitative methods, Scott and colleagues collected data from the field as they rode along with firefighters. Having first-hand knowledge of the profession and its day-to-day practices, these scholars were able to bring both intimacy and distance to their analyses of the data. These results have been published in occupationally relevant outlets and used in revising training for firefighters.

As another example of applied organizational communication research, Keyton and colleagues' research on sexual harassment was prompted by a news article about sexual harassment in a local organization. After discussing how the organization was responding to and handling these incidents, Keyton and colleagues (Keyton et al. 2001, Keyton & Menzie 2007, Keyton & Rhodes 1999) were allowed to collect data from employees, which resulted in the design and creation of video scenarios displaying friendly, flirting, harassing, and sexually-harassing behaviors. Findings revealed that women are not better at identifying social-sexual behaviors, students do not identify many behaviors that employees identify as sexually harassing, empathy does not increase participants' abilities to identify social-sexual cues, and those who believe they are fairly treated by the supervisor believe that the organization is compliant with its zero-tolerance policy. These findings were then considered as the organization continued to revise its policy and training on and reporting of sexual harassment.

FUTURE ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP

Both the discipline of communication and the study of organizational communication have changed—not to put differences aside, but to allow for different viewpoints to coexist, and to acknowledge new forms of communication (and its problems). Thus, this generation of organizational communication scholars is comfortable with multiple perspectives, theories, and methodologies. Deetz & Eger (2014) comment that that in the study of organizational communication there has been “a clear move from a psychological and sociological grounding to a direct interest in language interaction—what is often called the discursive turn” (p. 43). Potential future research questions as identified by other organizational communication scholars are described below. **Table 3** also identifies potential research questions that could be investigated by multidisciplinary teams.

Future research on work-life issues should be aligned (or realigned) as new technologies enter the workforce. For example, many workers use several different technologies (e.g., cell, tablet, laptop). Researchers may find it useful to examine how work-life issues are addressed across digital platforms. There are also reports of employees who try to manage their work-life balance by having a work phone and personal phone (Holmes 2014). When employers require that employees use digital devices or that they be available after work hours raises the question, Does having more or different communication technologies favor or disfavor work-life balance?

Sias (2014) suggests several future research areas to examine the effects of diversity on workplace relationships. She notes that “our conceptualization of diversity [in this area of organizational communication research] is relatively simplistic and constrained by traditional categories such as

Table 3 Future research questions in the study of organizational communication

Level of phenomena	Research question
Individuals in organizations	<p>What messages (and from whom) can help or deter part-time or temporary workers identifying with their organization?</p> <p>How can employees be encouraged (or trained) to use their voice to identify embedded organizational values that are destructive to their work or to them personally?</p>
Workplace relationships	<p>How can coworkers communicatively manage their privacy boundaries and maintain effective and collegial workplace relationships?</p> <p>In what ways does communication differ for virtual coworker relationships than for colocated coworker relationships?</p>
Groups or teams	<p>In self-managing cross-functional teams, how can communication processes be developed by team members to work effectively with other such teams in multiteam systems?</p> <p>How can members of virtual teams develop and maintain cohesion without negatively influencing creativity and innovation?</p> <p>What are effective ways for team members from different disciplines or professions to develop shared meaning?</p> <p>How, and to what degree, does communication among team members sharpen or weaken organizational directives?</p>
Organizational	<p>How do the cultural influences of organizational power and politics influence employees (mis)use of technology?</p> <p>When employees have multiple meanings of an organizational phenomenon, how do organizational members negotiate those differences?</p> <p>When organizational information is pushed downward digitally, how does a network of employees control or constrain its dissemination?</p> <p>Which organizational phenomena become important when employee diversity does not match the diversity where employees live?</p> <p>What values from non-Western organizations could and should be adopted by Western organizations?</p>
Methods	<p>How can the patterns of messages in big data not collected by design inform the study of organizational communication at other levels?</p> <p>How can studies be designed to leverage microlevel processes without subordinating macrolevel processes (and vice versa)?</p>
Theory	<p>Should ethics be considered another lens for the study of organizational culture?</p> <p>How can organizational communication be theorized across the micro-macro dimension?</p>

race, ethnicity, and gender” (p. 392). She also points to the need to examine the relational and communication processes within and between generational cohorts at work.

Mumby (2014) argues that despite the significant advances in critical and postmodern organizational communication research, scholars need to be “more theoretically adventurous” (p. 117). He suggests that researchers could explore issues of power, discourse, and identity through the work of Lacan, Deleuze, and Guattari. Mumby admits that Lacan’s psychoanalytic perspective may not, at first, lend itself to the study of organizational communication, but that his approach could help scholars reframe organizational identity “as the processes through which organization members struggle” (Mumby 2014, p. 119). As feminist theory now permeates nearly all aspects and contexts of organizational communication research, Ashcraft (2014) promotes intersectionality to enable feminist critiques to be considered alongside other types of differences (e.g., racial, sexuality, class) found in organizations.

New technologies are continually integrated into workplace practices, and communication about the adoption of those technologies as well as communication through those technologies

will occur. New technologies will continue to push the study of organizational networks into what some are labeling computational social science. Similarly, big data and broad data (often in the form of trace data, i.e., logs of actions, interactions, and transactions) can be used by organizational communication scholars in combination with more traditional methods of field studies, experiments, and ethnography (Shumate & Contractor 2014) to deepen our understanding of how communicators and communication are networked, and why communicators choose (willingly or blindly) to be part of these networks. Bridging systems and network perspectives, organizational communication scholars should examine the relationship of informal (more relationally oriented) networks with formal (more task-related) networks (Poole 2014).

Certainly, big data will provide many opportunities for organizational communication scholars. To date, only one organizational communication research study of this type has been conducted. Agarwal et al. (2014) used twitter data to explore how Occupy Wall Street developed and operated as a networked organization. Big data is currently being used in social network analysis, especially when digital data are available. Other sources of big data may exist in archived data sets, such as the data sets used by Bonito et al. (2015).

With respect to teams research, researchers should strive to link communication processes to team and organizational performance outcomes, as well as test whether individual characteristics can be linked to the messages team members create and the meanings they develop. Organizational communication scholars must develop collaborative projects with group communication scholars to ensure that research on groups and teams in organizations emphasizes and takes advantage of cross-level hypotheses. To date, individual-team cross-level analysis has been performed; a team-organization cross-level analysis should be the goal.

Studies of organizational culture would benefit from using a lens of globalization to examine how cultural sameness/difference influence values and assumptions about work life. This area of study would also benefit from development of theories that ask about the spaces among artifacts, values, or assumptions. What are those spaces? How are they negotiated by organizational members?

Koschmann et al. (2011) point out that a collaborative turn in organizational communication research is at the precipice with “a concern with collaborative and emergent forms of decision making” (p. 43). Such research is based on twenty-first-century realities of meta-problems that (a) are beyond the scope of any organization; (b) affect and are affected by multiple stakeholders; and (c) will require interdependencies among organizations, nations, and cultures.

Methodologically, organizational communication scholars take a decided pluralistic approach (Putnam & Mumby 2014; also see **Table 3**). Theoretically, Sotirin (2014) describes organizational communication as a richly multitheoretical known for “creative hybrids and eclectic conceptual borrowing across diverse philosophical and theoretical traditions” (pp. 19–20). Despite the range of communication theories (and theories from other fields), organizational communication scholars choose theory based on the research context and the problem or issue being studied (Putnam & Mumby 2014).

Deetz & Eger (2014) also point to engaged scholarship as a second turn of organizational communication research in which scholars engage stakeholders in their organizations in the design of the research study as well as in implementation of study findings. Labeled engaged scholarship (Dempsey & Barge 2014, Simpson & Shockley-Zalabak 2005) or participatory action research, these studies of organizational communication seek to understand and improve the world by changing it. This type of research moves beyond applied organizational communication research to studies that are collective, self-reflective inquiries, which researchers and participants undertake together. The reflective process is directly linked to action, but it is influenced by understanding of history, culture, and local context and embedded in social relationships.

For an area of study that has “so many research topics, conceptual orientations, tensions, and contradictions” (Conrad & Sollitto 2017), it is not feasible (or even a worthy goal) for scholars to coalesce around a philosophical perspective (or two), several theories, or one dominant method. Although combative at times, organizational communication scholars have generally made peace with its multiplicity and plurality—to the extent that organizational communication scholars borrow from other perspectives, theories, and methods to reflexively analyze their own work. As Conrad & Sollitto (2017) note, organizational communication scholars have been quite productive in the past 15 years. Particularly exciting are attempts by some scholars to reach across perspective, theory, and method “to reconnect with other perspectives as a way of enriching and further expanding their own work.”

Organizational communication scholarship is a vital resource for OPOB scholars. By contributing theory and data about symbols, messages, and meanings, organizational communication scholars can make essential micro-macro links that can be more difficult to make in other disciplines.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

The author is not aware of any affiliations, memberships, funding, or financial holdings that might be perceived as affecting the objectivity of this review.

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