Organizational Communication: Challenges for the New Century

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Organizational communication covers an eclectic mix of approaches, theories, and methodologies, developed within organizational settings or applied from other areas. The authors start their assessment of recent literature with 6 challenges for the field that have been delineated in previous reviews: (a) to innovate in theory and methodology, (b) to acknowledge the role of ethics, (c) to move from micro- to macrolevel issues, (d) to examine new organizational structures and technologies, (e) to understand the communication of organizational change, and (f) to explore diversity and intergroup aspects of communication. All 6 challenges implicate the importance of considering the intergroup level of analysis as well as the interpersonal and organizational levels, to undertake multilevel research in context, and to consider the role and place of voice in organizations. Finally, researchers must make their research ethical and consequential.

Early definitions of organizations focused on groups of individuals working together in a coordinated way in the pursuit of production-related goals (see Morgan, 1997). Communication then becomes "the central means by which individual activity is coordinated to devise, disseminate, and pursue organizational goals" (Gardner, Paulsen, Gallois, Callan, & Monaghan, 2001, p. 561). An alternative viewpoint, first espoused by Weick (1979), is that communication is the core process of organizing. Indeed, Iedema and Wodak (1999, p. 7) stated that organizations do not exist independently of their members, but are "created and recreated in the acts of communication between members." Organizations typically involve highly differentiated social systems (Scott, 1997; Trice & Beyer, 1993), with formal and informal boundaries and negotiated identities. As Taylor, Flanagin,

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Cheney, and Seibold (2001) and many others have noted, organizations are increasingly called upon to adapt to economic pressure by changing their internal structures, processes, and relationship to their markets (see Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992). This state of continual change means that communication processes are also changing both to create and to reflect the new structures, processes, and relationships.

The breadth and complexity of organizations result in communication processes from intraindividual to mass. As a result, organizational communication is as broad in its domain as the field of communication as a whole. Furthermore, communication in organizations has been studied not only by communication scholars, but by scholars in most of the social sciences. This breadth has given the area an eclecticism in approach, theory, and methodology that is a strength in its diversity, but that makes research in organizational communication impossible to review as a whole. Nevertheless, for at least the past 20 years, the field has been repeatedly and extensively reviewed and is arguably the most thoroughly reviewed domain of communication research. In the late 1980s, two handbooks (Goldhaber & Barnett, 1988; Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, & Porter, 1987), very different from each other in content and perspective, both reviewed major theories, methodologies, topics, and applications. In their reviews, Wert-Gray, Center, Brashers, and Meyers (1991) and Allen, Gotcher, and Seibert (1993) focused on research topics and methodologies. Recent handbooks and perspective books and articles (e.g., Corman & Poole, 2000; Deetz & Putnam, 2001; Gardner et al., 2001; Jablin & Putnam, 2001; Taylor et al., 2001) have taken a number of approaches, including positioning organizational communication in terms of its explicit and implicit history (Taylor et al., 2001), its major metaphors (Putnam, 1998), and arguments for specific approaches such as social identity theory (e.g., Gardner et al., 2001). Most recently Grant, Hardy, Oswick, and Putnam's (2004) handbook reviews discursive approaches to the study of organizational contexts.

As diverse as these reviews are, they identify common issues and challenges facing scholars in the area. In this article, we have taken a slightly different approach. As we reread the reviews, we realized that they shared several recurring issues needing to be addressed or limitations in present research. We believe that it is timely to examine these challenges and the extent to which researchers have taken them up. We found six challenges to researchers in organizational communication that appeared repeatedly in reviews, including recent ones: (a) to innovate in theory and methodology, (b) to address the role of ethics, (c) to move from microlevel interpersonal issues to more macrolevel ones, (d) to examine new organizational structures and technologies, (e) to understand the communication of organizational change, and (6) to explore diversity and the intergroup aspects of communication.

A number of themes that crosscut these challenges are also repeated through the reviews, making it difficult to decide where one challenge ended and another began. In some cases our choice to locate a particular study under one challenge rather than another may seem somewhat arbitrary (e.g., the issue of ethics recurred in many contexts). One crosscutting theme involved the need to broaden both theoretical and methodological perspectives; we begin with this challenge,

but it is relevant to every part of this article. Another key theme was for research to address the intergroup as well as the interpersonal and organizational aspects of communication. In spite of calls for at least the past 15 years to do this, there has still been relatively little research taking this perspective. Because of this, as well as our own orientation, of course, we consider the impact of intergroup variables at a number of points throughout this review. A third recurring theme is the need for researchers to consider the role and place of voice in organizations.

We reviewed selected research over the past decade in terms of the ways and extent to which researchers have addressed the challenges we identified. Our search of the literature was limited to publications between 1993 and 2003 (2004 where we had access to them). We searched 26 communication and organizational journals,[1] as well as books and book chapters. We believe that we have sampled from a wide enough range of journals and books to reach convergence about the recurring issues and challenges, as well as the ways in which communication scholars have (or have not) considered them. Necessarily for such a diverse field, we have had to place some limits on the topics we cover. For example, we do not cover in depth the literature on conflict and negotiation, decision making, or leadership.

In the sections below, we take up each challenge in turn, describing the challenge as it has appeared in the literature. We then review recent research in the light of the challenge, point to remaining gaps and note additional issues. In the final section, we draw conclusions in terms of three crosscutting issues that must be addressed in the next few years for these challenges to be met.

Challenge 1: Innovate in Theory and Methodology

As we reviewed the literature, we were astonished by the range of theories being used, drawn from both within and outside of communication. The latter range from social psychology (e.g., attribution theory, role theory, social information-processing models) to sociology, economics, and political science (e.g., structuration, institutional theories). At the same time, organizational communication scholars have continued to critique old theories and develop new ones (e.g., Conrad & Haynes, 2001; Deetz, 2001). There has been criticism that the field lacks unifying theories (see Gardner et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2001). Indeed, Tompkins and

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[1] Journals searched for the literature review included the following: *Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, Communication Monographs, Communication Research, Communication Theory, Discourse and Society, Group and Organization Management, Human Communication Research, Human Performance, Human Relations, Human Resource Management, Journal of Applied Communication Research, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of Business and Technical Communication, Journal of Communication, Journal of Conflict Resolution, Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, Journal of Organizational Behavior, Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, Journal of Vocational Behavior, Leadership Quarterly, Management Communication Quarterly, Organization Studies, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, Personnel Psychology, Written Communication.*

Wanca-Thibault (2001) challenged communication researchers to develop a communication-based theory of organizations. On the other hand, researchers have argued that organizational communication should include theories from other disciplines and the broader communication literature (e.g., Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001; Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). In examples of this, Chiapello and Fairclough (2002) attempted an integration of the new sociology of capitalism and critical discourse analysis (CDA); Paulsen, Graham, Jones, Callan, and Gallois (in press) advocate using social identity theory (SIT) and CDA to research intergroup communication in organizations.

Debates of this type implicate the fundamental role of theory: Is theory a guiding set of assumptions and postulates from which predictions are made (the positivist perspective), or does it have a larger (and more heuristic) role? In an introduction to a special issue on practical theory, Barge (2001) emphasized that communication is a practical discipline; similarly, Daly (2000) argued that communication research must be consequential. This work admonishes scholars to be mindful that research must be useful to people in ongoing organizations.

Reviewers have also commented on the increasing diversity of methods in the field. For example, Iedema and Wodak (1999) described the growing number of discursively oriented publications in organizational communication. Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) illustrated the ways in which organizational discourse analysis cuts across sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, pragmatics, interaction analysis, semiotics, rhetorical and literary studies, critical discourse analysis, and postmodern studies. The major linguistic-discursive approaches also include ethnomethodology, as well as narratives and myths.

This move from more positivist approaches to a rich examination of organizational talk brings with it a number of related issues. First, DeWine and Daniels (1993) noted the need for methodological triangulation, especially between empirical and interpretive research methods. There are some examples of such triangulation in current research (e.g., Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, in press), but not many. Part of the reason lies in the philosophical divide between qualitative and quantitative researchers. It is essential to bridge this divide and encourage the use of triangulation and mixed methods in the next decade.

House, Rousseau, and Thomas-Hunt (1995; see also Miller, 2001) proposed that a full understanding of organizational processes requires examination of the "meso" level—the simultaneous study of at least two levels of analysis. McPhee and Poole (2001) acknowledged a number of advances in the study of multilevel, macro-micro-, or mesolevel relationships and described the contribution that macro-micro research can make. In one example, Lin (2003) described an interactive communication technology adoption model aimed at integrating micro- and macrosystems and considering the interconnections of social, technological, and human factors. Even so, this approach is not consistent across organizational communication.

Impact of Context
In a challenge to both theory and methodology in the area, Allen et al. (1993) argued that researchers must develop more complex research designs that take

account of social and contextual factors affecting organizations and their communication processes. Miller (2001) urged quantitative researchers in particular to provide more background information on the rationale underlying their methodology, as well as explicitly acknowledging the relationship between their findings and the context in which the research was conducted. Putnam and Fairhurst (2001) urged researchers to complicate their analysis by giving context a focal position in research. Theorizing context involves examining the ways that organizational structures and the external environment influence communication.

To date, the response from communication researchers has been slight. Context does play a focal role in one of the newer theoretical contenders in organizational communication, social identity theory (SIT). Here, context refers to the ways in which individuals contrast themselves to others at varying levels of abstraction (Haslam, 2000). Thus, in one organizational context a fellow worker may be viewed as a rival (for resources), but in a second context as an ally and group member (competing with another organization for a contract). A related theory, communication accommodation theory (CAT; see Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2004, for a recent overview), outlines the role of sociohistorical relations together with context and identity salience to explain the cognitions and motivations that underlie interactants' communication. Critical discourse analysis similarly explicates the crucial role of context (e.g., Lemke, 1995). Context is fundamental to the communication process, and we need to make more use of theories that detail its role.

Examination of Communication in Real Organizations

Wert-Gray et al. (1991) encouraged researchers to conduct research in actual organizations, rather than in simulated situations. Likewise, Allen et al. (1993) stressed the need to move away from survey studies and focus on naturally occurring communication in the workplace, with longitudinal research as crucial. Lewis and Seibold (1998) echoed this view in the area of organizational change. The move from simulations and the laboratory to ongoing organizations continues to challenge communication researchers, particularly at the interpersonal and intergroup levels. In addition to logistics and problems of access to existing organizations, there are significant implications for methodology in a major shift toward field research. For instance, it is important to examine behavior at the microlevel. Macrolevel field research examines naturally occurring messages, but research examining microlevel processes in real organizations has continued to rely extensively on surveys.

A second issue involves finding methods adequate to handle the diversity and complexity of stakeholder relationships (e.g., see Deetz, 2001). To date, the major approach to this area has been to analyze networks. More is needed to capture the rich variety of coalitions that form within and between organizations. Cooren (2001), for example, examined coalitions in a way that gives researchers a framework for studying their stability, sources of instability, and so on. Beyond this, it is essential to take a longitudinal approach to organizational communication. Communication—for example, between supervisors and subordinates—is a process that occurs over time—although a snapshot can be revealing, it cannot foreground the impact of interpersonal, intergroup, or organizational history. Few researchers

have had the time or resources to do major longitudinal research on actual communication behavior at more than a case-study level, but the field should move in this direction.

The positivist idea that theory is objective and stands back from the biases of researchers has also been criticized. Ashcraft and Allen (2003) challenged researchers to consider the ways in which the field is fundamentally raced (or racist), just as feminist theories have focused on organizations as gendered (cf. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001). They aimed to stimulate theoretical and empirical examination of the racial dynamics in organizational communication. Ashcraft and Allen's review of foundational texts in the field identified five latent messages in the texts, including that white (collar) workplaces and work/ers constitute "universal" settings, identities, and practices. Ashcraft and Allen argued that race is viewed as a separate, singular concept relevant only in circumstances in which it involves cultural differences that can be identified, valued, and managed to improve organizational performance.

These critiques highlight the need for more research at the intergroup level of communication in organizations. That social inequalities and intergroup histories or rivalry are mirrored in organizational life is well known but often ignored in theory construction, which often construes organizations as stand-alone entities. Research on organizational and workgroup diversity (see Oetzel, Burtis, Chew Sanchez, & Perez, 2001, for a review) must systematically address intergroup relations to be applicable in real organizations. In the same way, theories need to be representative and to give voice to marginalized as well as dominant groups. Great progress has been made by acknowledging that organizations are gendered and developing consequent theory. In the same way, theories that do, or do not, address the implications of race, culture, and ethnicity inevitably influence the types of organizations that are considered for study and the participants targeted for research. Even now, there is a tendency to focus on large white collar organizations in the public or private sectors and on professional participants, even for feminist researchers (cf. Taylor & Trujillo, 2001).

Summary

Scholars must reach out to other disciplines and theoretical frameworks to expand our understanding of organizational communication. It is also essential to justify the rationale underpinning research methodology, which includes embracing, when appropriate, both empirical and interpretive methods. We need to promote more contextualized research in actual organizations and to observe actual communication, rather than relying on survey data; there is still a dearth of the longitudinal research that is central to this endeavor. Finally, researchers must never lose sight of the intergroup nature of organizations.

Challenge 2: Acknowledge the Role of Ethics

Johannesen (2001, p. 202) argued that ethics is "inherent in the human communication process," as we make choices about our communicative behaviors in order to have an impact on others. Redding (1996) chastised organizational communica-

tion researchers for virtually ignoring ethics. Earlier reviews (e.g., Allen et al., 1993) had found limited coverage of ethics; DeWine and Daniels (1993) noted that research into ethical issues has been pursued most often by rhetoricians, not social scientists. More recently, Cheney and Christensen (2001) highlighted the need to consider the integrity and consequences of messages relayed within and outside organizations. Taylor et al. (2001) argued in particular for more ethics research on communication-related functions, such as how organizations deal with dissent and how they understand the concept of "just business." Ralston (1997) stressed the need to close the gap between ethical standards for communication and those specific to business communication, in order to address the belief of some organizations that cutting ethical corners is necessary for business success.

Allen et al. (1993) linked ethics to workplace diversity as a possible area of future study. Given the changes in the structure of multinational companies (incorporating virtual and global infrastructures), the ethical and social responsibilities of CEOs, and the obligation on boards to reassure stakeholders of their veracity and ethical rigor, this area is highly relevant to all of social science, but especially to communication. Allen et al. also discussed the task of communicating good business practice and related ethical issues. Likewise, Deetz (2001) argued that to address social concerns such as environmental and social responsibility, researchers must work from a stakeholder model of organizations and communication, going beyond the economic concerns of stakeholders to acknowledge a range of stakeholder goals, including social values and responsible decision-making.

Despite these calls, there continues to be limited research on ethics. Furthermore, much of the research on communication and ethics is published in the *Journal of Business Ethics*, rather than in communication outlets (although in 1997 the *Journal of Business Communication* did run a special issue on the ethics of business communication). There is great scope for discussion of ethical issues in areas such as external communication by organizations.

There has been research on organizational image, including the ethical implications of its manipulation through different media. For example, Connell and Galasinski (1996) examined the use of the Internet to create a positive corporate image for the CIA. Among the many researchers examining companies' annual reports, Yuthas, Rogers, and Dillard (2002) analyzed narratives in the reports and the ways in which organizations used them to convey an image about veracity and trustworthiness (see also Fiol, 1995; Hooghiemstra, 2000). David (2001), in a qualitative analysis of the graphics and design in annual reports, found that these evoked positive attitudes and cultural myths and concealed the details of the reports. David developed criteria for examining the ethics of the images. Nevertheless, there has been little systematic scholarship on the impact of new technology on ethics and communication, which is particularly important given the increased capacity of technology to assist surveillance of workplace communication (e.g., Internet use). Equivocal reporting or strategic ambiguity (Bean, 2001; Paul & Strbiak, 1997), particularly in corporate reports, is a related recurring issue that has received relatively little attention. Changing structures and processes also present

new areas for research on ethics (e.g., Herschel & Andrews, 1997, studied the ethical implications of technological advances; Harshman & Harshman, 1999, described an ethical-values model of communication for contemporary organizations).

There has been even less research explicating ethical behavior. In rare examples, Redding (1996) developed a typology of unethical communication phenomena, using the categories of coercive, destructive, deceptive, intrusive, secretive, and manipulative-exploitative communication to delineate unethical behavior. Mattson and Buzzanell (1999) used a feminist organizational communication perspective to reveal the managerial bias of the traditional approach. They defined unethical behavior as "communicative actions and processes that attempt to marginalize, silence, and disempower individuals or groups and that prohibit the development of voice" (p. 62). Thus, ethics is understood through a value system that takes account of individual needs and voice. In the same vein, Cheney and Carroll (1997) describe the many ways in which people in organizations have come to be treated as objects, along with the consequences of this treatment.

Summary

Over the past 10 years there have been recurring calls for communication researchers to focus more on ethics, yet the response has been limited. Deetz (2001, p. 38) challenged us to rethink the goals of research and to move from a managerial bias to consider alternative goals (and voices), as well as the social and political consequences of organizational activities. Communication scholars also need to engage in the increasing discussion in the broader organizational literature about the social and corporate responsibilities of organizations. In addition, new models of communication ethics, like new models in many other areas, are needed to deal with the values that underlie new organizational structures encouraging greater participation in decision-making and other processes.

Jablin and Sias (2001) called for research on the relationship between communication competence and ethical standards of communication, as goal attainment does not necessarily involve ethical behavior. There is also room for research on the relationship between cultural and social values and organizational ethics, as well as on the ways in which communication processes influence and are influenced by the match between cultural and organizational practices. Johannesen (2001) queried the possibility of transcultural ethical standards; whatever the answer, we must move beyond Western views of ethics to include the beliefs of other cultures.

The shift toward methodologies based on nonpositivist paradigms presents challenges for communication ethics (Johannesen, 2001). Positivist paradigms assume the independent agency of individuals, whereas postmodernist paradigms question it. Overall, there are indications that ethics are beginning to be taken seriously as an area of communication study. There is much to do, however, to move this area beyond case studies to systematic and theory-driven accounts of ethical practice in organizational communication and to disentangle the concepts of ethics, image, voice, and diversity.

Challenge 3: Move From Microlevel to Macrolevel Issues

Many scholars have lamented the systemic focus in organizational communication on microlevel questions at the expense of more macro ones, including whole organization issues. Allen et al. (1993) identified interpersonal relations as the most researched area in organizational communication. Wert-Gray et al. (1991) noted that organizational communication research in the 1980s focused mainly on only three topics. In particular, researchers explored in great depth superior–subordinate relations. They noted that a shift to macroissues was in evidence by the late 1980s from interpersonal communication (micro) to examining the ways in which communication underlies the structure of the organization and its external environment (macro). Wert-Gray et al. (p. 151) argued that such a shift was necessary in order to recognize the bigger concerns in organizational communication, such as "culture, hierarchy, power, and corporate discourse."

Our review indicates that, although much research is still done at the microlevel, there has been an increasing amount at a more macrolevel, particularly at the organizational and interorganizational levels (Iedema & Wodak, 1999, noted the increase through the 1990s in the study of organizational discourses and practices). The shift to more macroissues has been accompanied by the application of new theories and methodologies, with accompanying emphasis on new philosophical paradigms. Thus, the 1990s can be characterized as a decade during which much organizational communication research no longer came only from a positivist paradigm.

Over the past decade microlevel research has continued to focus on some core areas. A plethora of research has been done on superior–subordinate communication (see Gardner et al., 2001; Jablin & Putnam, 2001, for reviews), and there has been continued interest in the areas of conflict and negotiation tactics, psychological climate, performance feedback, and influence tactics (see Higgins, Judge, & Ferris, 2003, for a meta-analysis on influence tactics). Research on communication competence continues to be popular (see Jablin & Sias, 2001), although less so at the individual level. Finally, there has been a good deal of microlevel research into computer-mediated communication (CMC), which we take up later under Challenge 4.

At the same time, research on intraorganizational communication has continued apace. In particular, recent work has focused on organizational innovation and its communication (Johnson, Donohue, Atkin, & Johnson, 2001; Tannenbaum & Dupuree-Bruno, 1994) and on strategic management (e.g., Barry & Elmes, 1997). The explicit management of knowledge fundamentally challenges organizations (Gold, Malhorta, & Segars, 2001; O'Dell & Grayson, 1998), with researchers calling for a greater understanding of the human and social components of knowledge management (e.g., Cross & Baird, 2000; Davenport, De Long, & Beers, 1998; McDermott, 1999). This includes the need to acknowledge that organizational subcultures, structures, silo behaviors, and other intergroup factors frequently inhibit intraorganizational knowledge flow (De Long & Fahey, 2000; Irmer, 2004). Finally, a number of scholars have employed critical discourse analysis to explain the rise and fall of management ideologies (e.g.,

Abrahamson, 1997; Chiapello & Fairclough, 2002; Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002; Graham, 2002).

Communication Beyond Organizational Boundaries

In 1994, Finet commented that organizational communication was focused primarily on interaction among organizational members within organizational boundaries and argued that the external communication of organizations is important, too. Moreover, the boundaries between organizations are now more fluid, both between organizations and their environments and between work and nonwork domains. Thus, there is more interest in communication beyond organizational boundaries (cf. Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Paulsen & Hernes, 2003; Stohl, 1993).

Recently, there has been increased interest in stakeholders, both within and around organizations. For example, Phillips and Brown (1993) employed a critical hermeneutic approach to examine how interested groups and individuals present particular understandings to create or sustain preferred patterns of social relations. Lewis, Richardson, and Hamel (2003) described a stakeholder approach to communication by the implementers of organizational change, and Patterson and Allen (1997) noted the stakeholder approach to perceptions of the legitimacy of impression management strategies used by environmental activist organizations. Deetz (2001) suggested the need for further research from a stakeholder perspective. In particular, he argued that stakeholders have more power than before to voice their goals for the organization. Thus, communication scholars should focus on how decisions are made and on whether stakeholders' goals are realized.

Other researchers have focused on understanding strategic alliances (e.g., Olk & Elvira, 2001). In particular, there has been a growing application of network theory to interorganizational communication (e.g., Taylor & Doerfel, 2003, on relationship building among NGOs). Kraatz (1998) found that strong ties to other organizations mitigate the impact of uncertainty and promote adaptation by increasing communication and information sharing. Thus, networks can promote the social learning of adaptive responses rather than less productive forms of interorganizational imitation (see also Kenis & Knoke, 2002). Both interorganizational and stakeholder research could benefit from taking a more intergroup approach, an issue discussed again under Challenge 6.

The 1990s also saw an increase in research on crisis management, particularly in natural disasters (e.g., Perry, Taylor, & Doerfel, 2003; Sellnow & Brand, 2001; Sellnow, Seeger, & Ulmer, 2002; Ulmer, 2001) and major corporate collapses. This research has examined impression management strategies by organizations to maintain a positive image. For example, Allen and Caillouet (1994), through an analysis of documents, identified impression management strategies embedded in the external discourse of an organization in crisis and developed a typology of them. More recently, Coombs (2000), in a study on responses to different methods of crisis control, found that an organization's reputation is best preserved when the response to a crisis is consistent with the organization's level of responsibility for it.

Crisis management strategies do not always emphasize positive images, however. For example, Brinson and Benoit (1999) analyzed Texaco's attempt to re-

build its image after the release of negative tapes. As a means of image repair, the executives blamed for the crisis were characterized in extreme out-group terms through public and intracorporate executive messages. Knight and Greenberg (2002) showed the challenge of crisis communication in a case study of why Nike has emerged as a principal target of antisweatshop activism. Knight and Greenberg argued that a promotional strategy integrating commercialism and social responsibility led to problems for Nike in responding to accusations of sweatshop labor. Despite these warnings, Horsley and Barker (2002) found that fewer than 50% of government organizations had a crisis management plan.

Research examining major corporate collapses, particularly from a rhetorical perspective, also has increased. For example, Kuhn and Ashcraft (2003) invoked a communicative theory of the firm as a means of studying corporate scandal. Boje and Rosile (2003) argued for the narration of the fall of Enron from an epic, as opposed to tragic, perspective and claimed that this brings into greater focus the individual roles people played and their interactions, as well as different conclusions regarding the scope of the problems and the potential remedies. In a similar vein, DiTomaso, Parks-Yancy, and Post (2003) concluded that we deny the structural and social interdependence of many groups and individuals when we blame only executives for corporate meltdowns. Many of these studies of crisis communication and corporate collapses highlight ethical issues with which both organizations and external stakeholders must grapple.

Summary

There is continuing research at both micro- and macrolevels. Nevertheless, there is still a tendency by many researchers to view all communication in organizations as interpersonal. It is essential, in examining microlevel communication processes, to take more account of organizational ideology, power relations, and image-maintenance pressures, as they are likely to pervade interpersonal communication, at least in terms of climate. To do this, the shift to examining communication in existing organizations, rather than in the laboratory, should be encouraged (see Challenge 1). Gardner et al. (2001) argued that there is too much focus on effective communication and the impact of communication skills, bringing an emphasis on microissues at the expense of larger ones, along with the assumption of an ideal form of communication in organizational contexts. This means too much concentration on positive communication and inadequate attention to problematizing communication (cf. Allen et al., 1993; Coupland, Wiemann, & Giles, 1991). Likewise, Taylor et al. (2001) proposed that researchers must recognize the synergy between an organization and its communication. We have not yet taken up Stohl's (1993, p. 384) challenge that "expanding our horizons requires a dialectic of micro-practice and macro-thinking," which necessitates more mesolevel research.

Finally, too much research on external communication consists of single-case studies or of theoretical argument. This is a good way to open the field, but it needs to be followed up by empirical research, including systematic studies of image-maintenance strategies. This brings its own challenges, including the impact of changes in structure and technology, managing organizational change, and more contextualization of research, all of which are discussed in later sections.

Challenge 4: Examine New Organizational Structures and Technologies

The past decade has seen the continuing rise of globalization and the proliferation of new organizational structures. Organizational capabilities are increasingly developed through intensely social and communicative processes, which may not be tied to physical resources or locations (Galunic & Eisenhardt, 2001; Panteli, 2003; Symon, 2000; Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, & Garud, 2001). Taylor et al. (2001) noted the emergence of organizational alternatives beyond the private and public sectors that cut across industries and nations. Symon (2000) described the emergence of postbureaucratic forms of organization that are flatter and leaner, and thus supposedly more flexible and responsive to change.

Of course, many new organizational structures have come about because of advances in technology (although see Symon, 2000, for a critique of the implied link between networks and the networked organization). New technologies provide the means for work that is both dispersed and asynchronous, leading to new forms of organization such as global virtual teams (Montoya-Weiss, Massey, & Song, 2001) and knowledge-creating companies (Nonaka, Takeuchi, & Umemoto, 1996). Lin (2003) noted the consequent growth in research in this area, together with the availability of journals dedicated to research on new media (e.g., *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, Journal of Electronic Publishing, Behavior and Information Technology, The Information Society*). The past decade has seen further changes to the nature of the employment relationship, with more use of contract and temporary labor and new work arrangements such as telecommuting. The challenge is to develop theories and methods to handle these new structures.

Information and Communication Technology

Research on the use and implications of information and communication technologies (ICT) has burgeoned over the past decade, in parallel with the development of ICTs themselves. ICTs have been envisaged as providing organizations with detailed and timely information that cuts across hierarchical levels and departmental boundaries (Harrison & Falvey, 2001), with email communication allowing cooperation and coordination among all employees (Hinds & Keisler, 1995). This optimistic view has led to a dramatic increase in research on knowledge management.

Lievrouw and her colleagues (2001) raised interesting questions about the changes in communication media within organizations, challenging the assumption that face-to-face communication is necessarily ideal. Rather, in some communication situations, face-to-face communication may not be necessary. At the same time, the earlier optimism about a dramatic increase in communication potential brought about by new technology has been questioned. For example, Watson, Schwarz, and Jones (in press) showed that, in the short term at least, some organizations are disadvantaged when the possibility of face-to-face communication is suddenly removed.

The past few years have also seen new research on the impact of the World Wide Web on communication and the role of websites in organizations. For ex-

ample, Lemke (1999) presented a case study showing the role of the website as part of organizational change. As noted above, Connell and Galasinski (1996) described the use of the Internet to create a positive image for the CIA. Flanagin (2000) explored the role of social pressure, organizational features, and perceived benefits in the adoption of organizational websites.

One apparent advantage of ICTs is that they permit new forms of working in virtual or partly virtual organizations, such as teleworking, along with new and more casual forms of employment. These changes implicate in fundamental ways the relations between individual employees and organizations. In this context, Gossett (2002) described communicative strategies that prevent rather than promote member identification with organizations, and Galup, Saunders, Nelson, and Cerveny (1997) used social network theory to characterize the relations between organizations and temporary staff. Jablin and Sias (2001) raised questions about the implications of the growth in contingent workers for what is considered competent communication, arguing that competent contingent and permanent workers may require different skills and knowledge. Hylmoe and Buzzanell (2002) used three cultural lenses to illuminate how and why telecommuting functions paradoxically in organizations; other researchers have examined barriers to communication and identification in this context (e.g., Chapman, Sheehy, Heywood, Dooley, & Collins, 1995). Finally, Riedlinger, Gallois, McKay, and Pittam (2004) studied communication in geographically and professionally diverse networked organizations and found that both the greatest barriers and the greatest opportunities involved the diversity of social identities and the ways in which they were managed to create (or not) an overall identity in the organization.

Much of the work in this area has involved interpersonal, small-group, or team communication. It has focused, for example, on the use of different communication channels and media, channel preferences, and decision making (e.g., Carlson & Zmud, 1999; Flanagin, Tiyaamornwong, O'Connor, & Seibold, 2002; Rice, D'Ambra, & More, 1998; Webster & Trevino, 1995). Therefore, it has involved extensions of theory based on nonvirtual groups (e.g., social identity theory). Spears, Lea, and Postmes (2001) outlined the range of social psychological theories being applied to the study of computer-mediated communication, including the social presence model, media richness theory, the social information-processing model, the reduced social cues model, and their own social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE). They pointed to the limitations of theories that focus on the generic effects of information loss leading to reduced sociality of the medium without considering the role of context. They proposed SIDE (Spears & Lea, 1994) as an alternative model and postulated (Spears et al., 2001, p. 616) that "the interaction of features of the medium with local norms and conditions in the communication situation can accentuate the social form and content of behavior of CMC in certain theoretically specified circumstances." Postmes, Spears, and Lea (1998) noted that computer-mediated communication has not been considered enough as an intergroup context in which group conflicts may be reconstructed as barriers are broken down and democracy is encouraged (but see Walther, 1997).

Structure and Technology
McPhee and Poole (2001) argued that there is a stronger relationship between structure and communication in new organizational configurations than in traditional organizational structures. Many people assume that new technologies in themselves drive new organizational structures. There is evidence, however, that structure and culture may drive technology use. For instance, Zack and McKenney (1995) found that email use reflected the climate and structure of the organization. Likewise, Ahuja and Carley (1998) found that many virtual organizations were quite hierarchical in their communication processes, even where information seeking was involved. Electronic networking has the capacity to allow both great autonomy and flexibility and increased managerial control and surveillance (Stanworth, 1999). Harrison and Falvey (2001, p. 24) argued that "new technologies are far more frequently used to gather information about employees than they are appropriated by employees for their own purposes." As Symon (2000, p. 405) noted, "network technologies cannot effect organizational change in themselves," and it is essential that researchers explore the impact of structure on technology as well as the impact of technology on structure.

Summary
Communication and new technologies is one of the most popular areas of research at present. As it grows, researchers must take account of the limits of theory designed for face-to-face communication to explicate communication mediated by new media. Media richness and channel preference in particular are changing as organizations adopt and adapt to ICTs. At the same time, existing theory used appropriately can account for many consequences of the introduction of ICTs into organizations and the structural changes that come with them. Research on knowledge management, networked organizations, and computer- and Internet-mediated communication will benefit from the use of theory that addresses the interpersonal and intergroup motivations that impinge on it.

Challenge 5: Understand the Communication of Organizational Change

Change is a ubiquitous phenomenon in organizations, and communication is a central process in planning and implementing change. Lewis (1999, p. 45) argued that "communication process and organizational change are inextricably linked processes" and that research focus has been on issues like design, adoption, and user response rather than the implementation process itself. In describing the problems experienced by change implementers, Lewis highlighted two recurring issues: employee participation in the change (particularly by employees at lower levels of the hierarchy) and management communication of the change (see also Covin & Kilmann, 1990; Rubenstein, Lammers, Yano, Tabbarah, & Robbins, 1996; Taylor et al., 2001). Relatedly, D'Aprix (1996) stated that proactive responsible lines of communication aid employees' responses and may reduce employee resistance.

Lewis (1999; Lewis & Seibold, 1998) argued that researchers must look at the actual communication in organizations during times of change. Lewis and Seibold

identified six areas to be explored from a communication focus: (a) approach to the actual change implementation, (b) strategies and actions for implementation, (c) change agents, (d) variables or circumstances affecting the change process, (e) planning and implementation, and (f) recommendations. They concluded that too often implementers use a top-down approach and move to recommendations without taking on board empirical evidence. Lewis, Richardson, and Hamel (2003) similarly found that information dissemination was the most prevalent communication. Zorn, Page, and Cheney (2000) described a pervasive managerialist discourse biased toward regarding change as both inevitable and desirable.

Although the centrality of communication during the change process is recognized, surprisingly little research has been undertaken. One reason for this gap may be access to organizations, with a focus by organizations on cost effectiveness, particularly during the planning and implementation stages of change. Yet often cost effectiveness and the full potential of a change implementation, especially information technology changes, are not realized. A common explanation for the focus on cost-effectiveness is that organizations need to reposition themselves in the marketplace in response to rapidly escalating competition (Boudreau, Loch, Robey, & Straud, 1998). Companies recognize the need to compete and to be seen as more advanced than their competitors. They often fail to acknowledge the variability of human action, which often leads to difficulties and challenges for individuals during change (Schwarz & Watson, in press).

Research to date has emphasized the importance of change communication by middle managers and supervising staff (see Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999), who have the power to influence employees' behavior (Larkin & Larkin, 1994; Pfeffer, 1998). Effective organizational communication by supervisors and managers reduces uncertainty about change and is linked to higher levels of employee adjustment and more positive organizational outcomes (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, in press; DiFonzo & Bordia, 1997, Martin, Jones, & Callan, in press; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Terry, Callan, & Sartori, 1996); conversely, communication problems are viewed as among the most serious by implementers (Lewis, 2000).

It is essential to consider intergroup factors, which are highly salient during change. Organizational change, especially large-scale change such as merger and acquisition, has important implications for organizational identities. If a work unit or company division is removed through restructuring, it is no longer available as a source of social identity. Thus, organizational change can be conceptualized as a threat to social identity and is clearly theorized in SIT.

Only limited research has dealt with the role of identification during organizational change, although research on mergers has shown that employees' beliefs about the nature of the relations between the two merging organizations, especially relative status and the potential for moving from one group to another, determine how they respond to the merger (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Terry & Callan, 1997, 1998). Within organizations, changes may lead to new groups and teams, as well as different lines of authority, changing the existing order and connections between groups. As new groups form during the change process, one of the many challenges for employees is to renegotiate their identification with and within the organization. For example, Chreim (2002) examined management communication

strategies aimed at inducing disidentification with previous organizational identities and reidentification with a new identity. Kuhn and Nelson (2002) showed how centrality in an organization's communication network influenced employees' multiple identities during organizational change. Still, little research has examined the impact of identification on the extent to which employees feel that change is communicated effectively to them (cf. Lewis & Seibold, 1998). As Schwarz and Watson (in press) noted, analysis of employees' social identities helps us understand how different meanings can be attached to the same change process.

Along these lines, it is clear that groups of employees differ in perceptions of communication during organizational change. For example, managers and supervisors perceive more informational support and more opportunity and access to information during change (Haugh & Laschiner, 1996; Luthans & Sommer, 1999). Watson, Jones, Hobman, Bordia, Gallois, and Callan (2001) found that all staff spoke about the problematic nature of communication and participation during organizational change, but that some issues were specific to a particular professional role or level. Watson et al. (in press) found that different groups talked about the effects of change on communication differently, and this reflected the salience of different organizational identities. Examinations of employees' talk can inform the implementation of support for employees during change.

Finally, there is very little longitudinal research that examines prechange, change, and postchange in organizations. It is essential to understand the holistic nature of the change process and follow the communication of the complete change implementation. Understanding the implications of the change means examining what groups have changed or remained intact, as well as how the work structure has altered. Susskind, Miller, and Johnson (1998), noting that this was a much underresearched area, used network theory to identify the holes in employees' networks after downsizing. Relatedly, Terry, Callan, and Sartori (1996) found that resistance to change led to employees identifying with groups that no longer exist. Such a finding has implications for the subsequent effects of change.

Summary

Communication is central in the change process, and employees need to be part of the change implementation. Following the communication of change across the stages of implementation offers the chance for organizations to manage the change process better. Lewis and Seibold (1998) laid out specific research questions for the area, and we urge researchers to address these. In addition, the intergroup aspects of organizational life are highly salient during change and should be central to research. The ways in which employees perceive, talk about, and manage change from their work and professional identities have important implications for organizational change.

Challenge 6: Examine Diversity and Intergroup Communication

As organizations move to organic or network structures, with more reliance on task forces and cross-functional project teams, the importance of groups and inter-

group communication has grown (see Paulsen & Hernes, 2003). There has been much research on basic group processes, but the nature of work groups and teams is changing from relatively homogeneous groups to more diverse ones. The increased diversity within organizations means that communication now occurs across many more boundaries, including cultural and professional ones (Nkomo & Cox, 1996; Riedlinger et al., 2004). Recent studies have adopted an intergroup perspective in organizational contexts (see Haslam, 2000), starting with the seminal work of Ashforth and Mael (1989). Nevertheless, research on organizational communication processes from an intergroup perspective is still very limited (Gardner et al., 2001).

Taylor et al. (2001) discussed the need for greater research attention to groups as mediating structures in organizational communication. More specifically, DeWine and Daniels (1993) commented that cross-cultural communication is among the least studied subjects in organizational contexts. They highlighted the importance of intergroup communication; other scholars have also noted the gap in research at this level (e.g., Deetz & Putnam, 2001). An imbalance favoring interpersonal and intragroup over intergroup communication is evident in reviews (e.g., Allen et al., 1993; West, 1996).

Organizational Identity and Communication

In studies over the past 10 years taking an intergroup perspective to organizational communication, on the one hand researchers have explored how social identity influences communication. For example, supervisor–subordinate communication has been examined from an intergroup perspective (e.g., Gardner & Jones, 1999; Postmes, Tanis, & de Wit, 2001; Willemyns, Gallois, & Callan, 2004). Hutt, Walker, and Frankwick (1995) analyzed cross-functional barriers to change as an intergroup communication and change issue involving work unit identification. On the other hand, researchers have explored how communication creates, maintains, and modifies social identity. Suzuki (1998) demonstrated that level of identification was related to the perceived adequacy of communication with both ingroup and out-group. Wiesenfeld, Raghuram, and Garud (1999, 2001) examined the role of communication and social support in developing organizational identity among virtual workers. Scott and his colleagues (Scott, 1997, 1999; Scott & Timmerman, 1999) showed that communication and multiple identification targets can predict turnover intentions.

Social identity theory (SIT), thus, can be usefully applied to the study of organizational communication. Mael and his colleagues first applied SIT to organizations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Mael & Ashforth, 1992, 1995; Mael & Tetrick, 1992), arguing that individuals develop an identity with their organization, and that this organizational identification is comparable in nature and influence to identification with other social groups. Social identities, particularly those related to work and professional contexts, become relatively stable parts of self-definition (Haslam, 2000). Communication can be highly group-specific, with members sharing distinctive communicative codes. Haslam (p. 128) stated that "those who share a communicator's social identity will always have most access to his or her meaning."

More recently SIT has theorized multiple identities, which are particularly relevant to communication in cross-functional and diverse work groups and during change. Employees acquire a range of identities associated with the organizational categories or groups to which they belong or are perceived to belong (Hartley, 1996; Kramer, 1991). The result is that in large, complex organizations, individuals are likely to identify more strongly with salient groups within the organization, like work units, than with the organization as a whole (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Scott, 1997; Scott & Lane, 2000). A number of recent studies have examined the role of multiple group identifications and the relative importance, overlap, or congruence among multiple sources of identification (Bennington, Carroll, Trinastich, & Scott, 2000; Grice, Jones, Callan, Paulsen, & Gallois, 2003; Roccas, 2003; Scott, 1997, 1999; Scott & Timmerman, 1999).

Although this discussion highlights how SIT can be applied usefully to an understanding of organizational behavior, direct links with organizational communication have not often been addressed. Haslam (2000) has suggested, however, that communication both reflects and creates social identities in organizations, noting that shared identity provides motivations to communicate and a shared cognitive framework on which productive communication can be based. Similarly, Cheney (1983) emphasized the role of senior managers in using communication to develop a distinctive organizational identity and to influence and persuade employees, as well as other stakeholders, to become identified with the organization.

The limitation of SIT is that it is a theory of intergroup relations, not a theory of intergroup communication. Paulsen et al. (in press) call on researchers to integrate SIT with communication theories and methodologies, such as critical discourse analysis. As we noted above, communication accommodation theory (CAT; see Gallois et al., 2004) is well suited to exploring intergroup aspects of organizational communication. This theory was developed to explicate the relationship between identity, context, and communicative behavior. CAT's strengths are that it includes motivation, perceptions, and behavior, as well as intergroup and interpersonal aspects of talk, and that it can be applied across a broad range of contexts. CAT is only beginning to be applied in organizational settings. For example, Bourhis (1991) studied the impact of language on communication in officially bilingual organizations. Gardner and Jones (1999) and Willemyns et al. (2003, 2004) looked at strategies for and reactions to communication accommodation in supervisor-subordinate interactions (see also McCroskey & Richmond, 2000). Boggs and Giles (1999) theorized the role of accommodation in intergender interactions in male-dominated workplaces, and Winsor (2000) examined the difficulty in comprehension between white-collar and blue-collar workers. CAT and SIT will gain in utility as researchers conduct longitudinal studies of communication, in which identity management is dynamic and subtle changes in communication carry great importance.

Workplace Diversity and Communication
There is a parallel tradition of research on communication within and between culturally or professionally diverse work groups (see Oetzel et al., 2001). This

research highlights the difficulties in interpersonal communication and cohesion that arise in heterogeneous as opposed to more homogeneous groups. This is useful knowledge, but it is essential to develop sophisticated theories around diversity. Much research has used Hofstede's (1980) dimensions of cultural values, which are important but probably not proximally relevant to the dynamics of communication. Many studies on diverse work groups now explicitly refer to SIT and CAT (e.g., Haslam, 2000; Riedlinger et al., 2004), and the intergroup lens has great potential.

Conclusion

Each section of this article has included suggestions for future research. Rather than repeat them, we focus in this final section on some overarching issues that we believe should underlie research in organizational communication in the future. These issues consolidate criticisms and suggestions from the sections above. Our goal in proposing them is to initiate continuing discussion and debate about what we do as communication scholars.

Theory and Method: Multilevel Research in Context

First, it is imperative to broaden our theoretical and methodological perspectives, as well as to lift the level of sophistication. It is hard for many researchers to let go of the elegance of positivist methods. It is just as hard for others to let go of the uniformly critical perspective. Future researchers need to do this, however, if we are to achieve a full understanding of communication in organizations. It is important to transcend the unhelpful debate about the worth of qualitative versus quantitative research and to combine these approaches appropriately. The trick will be to develop theory and method sufficiently broad to capture the diversity of organizations, yet sufficiently specific to allow predictions.

There are two specific challenges. The first is to incorporate multiple levels of analysis into both theory and methodology. This has been a recurring theme in reviews and critiques of organizational communication, yet few researchers have considered it. Second, we must thoroughly explore the context within which communication takes place, at both local and global levels. Emerging theories address a myriad of contextual factors that researchers could incorporate. In so doing, communication scholars will inevitably move from the study of basic processes into research in actual organizations, taking this part of the field beyond case-study research to systematic examinations of communication.

Organizational Diversity: Take Account of All Voices

Most reviewers agree that it is time to bury the myth of the homogeneous organization, especially given the changes toward globalization, virtual organizations, and larger social forces like population movements. Researchers should include diversity in every study of organizational communication, whether at the interpersonal, intergroup, or organizational level. This entails an emphasis on intergroup dynamics and the application of theories that do this (e.g., SIT, CAT, CDA). It also

entails the recognition that values and ethics affect researchers as well as managers and workers. We must study organizations as gendered, raced, and biased in other ways and examine the implications of bias not only for communication practices but for our own choice of theory and method.

We have alluded throughout to the importance of voice. There have been repeated calls to consider organizational communication from the perspectives of all stakeholders and to go beyond the top–down advice to managers that has characterized much research in the past. To some extent, this is happening already, but there is great scope to expand this work in describing the various groups of stakeholders in an organization, their relationships, and their opportunities to influence or be influenced.

Using an intergroup lens to explore the dynamics in organizations is an excellent way to elucidate the role and place of voice. We have argued throughout this article that the intergroup perspective allows researchers to consider the impact of context at the interpersonal and organizational levels, to examine implicit values, and to consider the perspective of employees at all levels in the organization. This may mean reconceptualizing communication competence. Providing employees with communication skills training is not sufficient to ensure a good communication flow and may in fact be counterproductive (cf. Gallois & Giles, 1998). The extent to which employees can use their voices to negotiate and influence specific organizational issues depends on the context for them, and context involves both interpersonal and intergroup relationships.

Furthermore, to understand how voice operates we must look at who makes the decisions and how they are made (Deetz, 2001). Therefore, interactions should be examined at a dyadic or higher level, and the impact of listening included in the study of voice. Deetz and Putnam (2001) argued that individuals are not able to challenge the embedded values in our society, even though we live in a liberal democracy. Because of prior social constructions people are not heard and their goals are not considered. This perspective will drive research on ethical standards in organizational communication, as well as be a standard for ethical research.

In conclusion, we hope that organizational communication scholars in the 21st century will take up Daly's (2000) challenge to make our research consequential, along with Deetz's (2001) challenge to address social concerns. We must continue to ask how we are constrained by past research conventions and by current theories and models, as well as how we are constrained by our own culture. If we do this, we will not lose sight of the research questions that have not yet been asked and the voices that have not yet been heard.

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