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Introducing COMMUNICATION THEORY

Analysis and Application

Richard West | Lynn H. Turner

Second Edition

Introducing Communication Theory

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION

Second Edition

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Introducing Communication Theory

Preface

Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application explores the practical, engaging, and relevant ways in which theory operates in our lives. The text is written for students who have little or no background in communication theory. We originally wrote the book because we felt that students needed to know how theorizing helps us understand ourselves, our experiences, our environment, and our culture.

Specifically, our original objectives included:

- Familiarizing students with the principles and central ideas of important theories they are likely to encounter in the communication discipline
- Demystifying the concept of theory and helping students see the application of theory in their everyday activities
- Helping students become more systematic and thoughtful critical thinkers
- Providing students with an overview and brief history of how the communication discipline came into focus
- Introducing students to the research process and the place of theory within this process

The second edition of the book maintains its original focus of introducing communication theory to students in an accessible, appealing, and memorable way. Our hope is that students will take away a basic knowledge of and appreciation for communication theory from reading our text. Over the course of more than thirty combined years of teaching communication theory, we have learned that students understand material best when it is explained in a simple, direct way through a number of realistic and applicable examples. *Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application* adapts and applies all that we as teachers have learned from our students. We continue to be indebted to both students and colleagues whose suggestions and comments have greatly influenced this second edition.

Because of the interdisciplinary nature of communication theory, we include not only the unique contributions of communication theorists but also theories that originated in other fields, such as psychology, business, sociology, biology, and philosophy. We do not presume to speak for the theorists; our goal is to frame their words and illustrate their theories with real-world examples and applications so that they become accessible for our students.

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The Challenges of Teaching and Learning Communication Theory

Instructors teaching communication theory face a number of challenges. Because many students think of theory as distant, abstract, and obscure, teachers must overcome these potentially negative connotations. Negative feelings toward the subject can be magnified in classrooms where students represent a variety of ages and socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. *Introducing Communication Theory* addresses this challenge by offering a readable and practical guide that integrates content with examples, capturing the essence and elegance of theory in a straightforward manner.

A second challenge is that instructors often must overcome preconceived ideas about scholarship, which students may view as difficult or remote. This book demonstrates to students that they already possess many of the characteristics of researchers, such as curiosity and ambition. Students will be pleasantly surprised to know that they operate according to many personal theories every day. Once students begin to revise their misconceptions about research and theory, they are in a position to become critical thinkers and learners.

A third challenge of teaching and learning communication theory is capturing the complexity of a theory in an approachable way without oversimplifying the theoretical process. To address this problem, instructors often present a skeletal version of a theory and then fill in the missing pieces with personal materials. By providing a variety of real-life examples and applications reflecting a wide range of classroom demographics, *Introducing Communication Theory* facilitates such an approach.

Special Features and Learning Aids

To accomplish our goals and address the challenges of teaching communication theory, we have incorporated a number of special features and learning aids into the second edition:

"The first four chapters of the book give students a solid foundation for studying the theories that follow. This groundwork is essential in order to understand how theorists conceptualize and test their theories."

- *Part I, Setting the Stage.* The first four chapters of the book continue to give students a solid foundation for studying the theories that follow. This groundwork is essential in order to understand how theorists conceptualize and test their theories. Chapters 1 and 2 define communication and provide a brief history of the discipline. We also present the prevailing contexts in which theory is customarily categorized. Chapters 3 and 4 cover the basics of theory and research as well as the relationship between them.
- *Coverage of twenty-five theories.* Discrete chapters on each of twenty-five theories provide accessible, thorough coverage for students and offer flexibility to instructors. We kept the original theories from the first edition, but have added two **NEW** theories to this edition: Chapter 13, Communication Privacy Management Theory (Sandra Petronio), and Chapter 25, Medium Theory (Marshall McLuhan).

- **NEW** *section openers.* The theory chapters in Part II, Understanding the Dialogue, are organized into six sections. In this edition, we have written new section openers to introduce these groups of chapters. The overviews provide students with an explanation for our choices, placing the theories in context and allowing students to see the connections between and among theories.
- *Chapter opening vignettes.* Each chapter begins with an extended vignette, which is then integrated throughout the chapter, providing examples to illustrate the theoretical concepts and claims. These stories help students understand how communication theory plays out in the everyday lives of ordinary people. Students' comments have affirmed the value of these opening stories.
- *A structured approach to each theory.* Every theory chapter has a consistent format that includes a vignette, an introduction, a summary of assumptions, a description of core concepts, and a critique (using the criteria established in Part I). This consistency provides continuity for students and ensures a balanced presentation of the theories.

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- *Tables and Figures.* To increase conceptual organization and enhance the visual presentation of content, we have added numerous **NEW** tables and figures throughout the text. Nearly every chapter has a new visual aid for students to consider, helping them to understand the material. These visuals provide a clearer sense of the conceptual organization of the theories, and they support those students who best retain information visually.
- *Theory into Practice (TIP) boxes.* These boxes, featured in every theory chapter, come from popular media and demonstrate how theory (or its components) relates to real life. For example, in Chapter 8 on Expectancy Violations Theory, the TIP box examines how space variations affect the flirting process. Ten **NEW** TIP boxes have been added to the second edition to keep the material current. Further, we have added a **NEW** follow-up question to each TIP so that students can apply the information to both theory and their life experiences.
- *Research Note boxes.* These boxes present abstracts of research articles and essays that are relevant to the chapter and, like TIP boxes, appear in every theory chapter. Research Note boxes demonstrate how theories or theoretical principles are utilized in research studies; they also serve to familiarize students with the content and conventions of original research. Updated in many chapters for the second edition, the feature reflects the breadth and depth of the research being conducted in the discipline today.
- **NEW** *Running Glossary.* Throughout each chapter, a new running glossary gives students immediate access to unfamiliar terms and their meanings.
- **NEW** *The Theory Chronicles.* These new, unique journal assignments appear in each chapter and demonstrate the usefulness of theory in our

surroundings. For instance, in Chapter 12, Relational Dialectics Theory, students are asked to detail the extent to which the conclusions on dialectics would differ if the research had been set in Africa or Asia.

"We ask students to look at how two theories from different contexts relate to each other. We also consider how some theories may deal with similar contexts but approach them in very different ways."

- NEW *The Theory Connection.* We believe that many theories cut across multiple contexts. Therefore, we ask students to look at how two theories from different contexts relate to each other. We also consider how some theories may deal with similar contexts but approach them in very different ways. The Theory Connection, feature asks students to think about these contrasts. For instance, in Chapter 14, Groupthink, we ask students to consider the role of silence in both Groupthink and Muted Group Theory (Chapter 28).
- NEW *Theory Application in Groups (TAG).* Working with others can help students better appreciate the material. We developed this feature to encourage collaborate learning and to foster critical thinking across different learning styles. In Chapter 15, Adaptive Structuration Theory, for instance, we ask small groups to think about ethical lapses in judgment from organizational leaders and how Adaptive Structuration Theory can inform their thinking about this issue.
- *Discussion Starters* conclude each chapter. These thought-provoking questions prompt students to critically examine the chapter and focus on critical issues.

Supplemental Resources

The Online Learning Center at www.mhhe.com/west2 provides interactive resources to address the needs of a variety of teaching and learning styles. For every chapter, students and instructors can access chapter outlines, sample quizzes with feedback, crossword puzzles using key terms, and Internet activities. For instructors specifically, the Online Learning Center offers an online Instructor's Resource Manual with general guidelines for teaching the basic theory course, sample syllabi for quarter and semester courses, chapter outlines, and classroom activities.

In addition, a computerized test bank with multiple-choice and short-answer questions for every chapter is available in both Windows and Macintosh versions. The computerized format allows instructors to edit the test bank and incorporate their own questions.

Organization

Part I, Setting the Stage, provides a conceptual foundation for the discrete theory chapters in Part II. Chapter 1 begins by introducing the discipline and describing the process of communication. It then explores the dark side of communication, which looks at how people use negative communication to impair human interaction (to deceive, hurt, verbally abuse, and so forth). We conclude the chapter with a discussion of ethics. Chapter 2 gives a brief history of the

communication field by examining research pioneers and the establishment of the largest communication association: the National Communication Association. In this chapter, we focus both on the roots of communication theory in ancient Greece and on current trends. The chapter then turns to the primary contexts of communication (intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, organizational, public, mediated, intercultural), which frame the study of communication in most academic settings across the country. Chapter 3 explores the nature of theory, providing definitions and characteristics of theories in general. The chapter also discusses perspectives that guide communication research and outlines criteria for evaluating theories. Chapter 4 explores the relationship between theory and research. Our goal in this chapter is to familiarize students with the research process, explaining its direct relationship with theory and practice. We present four common research methodologies (surveys, experiments, depth interviews, and textual analysis) to illustrate how communication research is conducted.

With this foundation established in Part I, Part II, Understanding the Dialogue, introduces students to twenty-five different theories, each in a discrete, concise chapter. Many of these theories cut across communication contexts. For example, Relational Dialectics Theory can be understood and applied in an organizational context as well as in an interpersonal context. However, to facilitate understanding, we have grouped theories into six sections according to primary focus: The Self and Messages, Relationship Development, Groups and Organizations, The Public, The Media, and Culture and Diversity.

It was not easy for us to decide which theories to include because there are so many from which to choose. In making our selections, we were guided by four broad criteria: (1) whether the theory was significant in the history of the field, (2) whether it reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field, (3) whether it is important in the context of current thinking in the field, and (4) whether it contributes to a balance of pioneering and contemporary theories in the book. In addition, we were sensitive to the need to include theories developed by a diverse group of scholars.

Finally, in Part III, Beyond the Curtain Call, Chapter 30 describes the constant evolution of theory and theory building based on new societal trends. To show students that the communication major provides practical knowledge leading to employment, we conclude with a focus on career paths that make use of communication theory. We also make suggestions for becoming more adept in a communication career.

Acknowledgments

Any book owes its existence to efforts made by others in addition to the listed authors, and some people who have helped with this book may not even realize the debt we acknowledge here. We would like to thank all those who have helped us as we worked our way through this large project. First, our work rests on the shoulders of the theorists whose creations we profile in this book. We are grateful for their creative thinking, which allows us to understand and

predict the complexities of the communication process. Second, our insights represent the discussions that we have had with our communication theory students over the years. Several parts of this book are based upon student input at both of our universities. Students have contributed to this book in both direct and indirect ways. Our families, too, contributed in ways both large and small in helping us complete this project. For providing us with patience, support, and food, we cannot thank them enough.

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