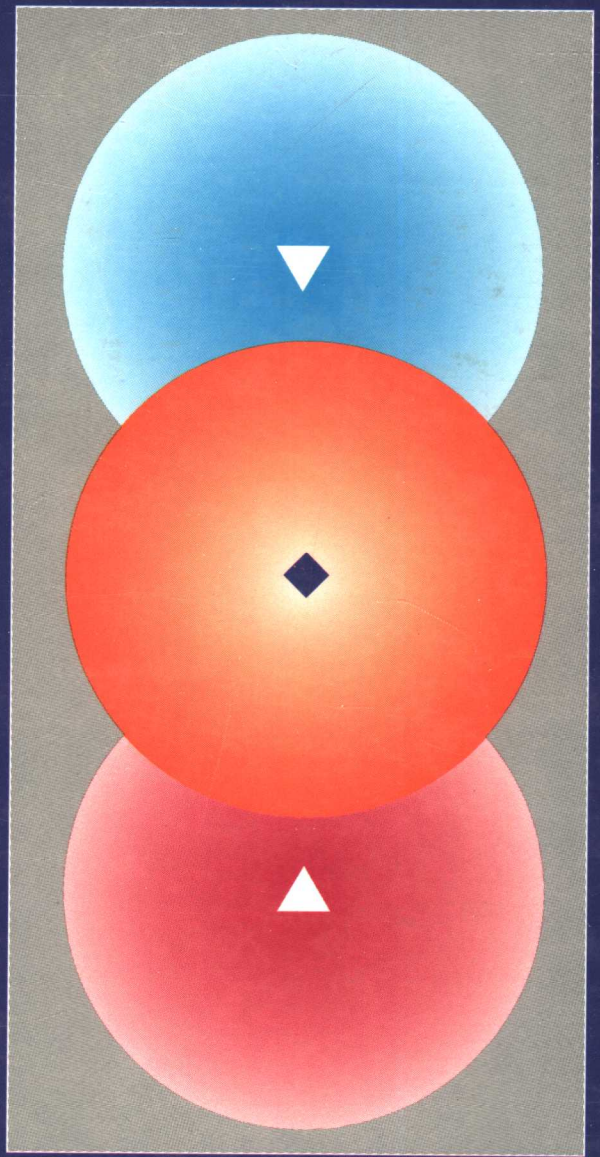
Third Edition

PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION



Tom D. Daniels ◆ Barry K. Spiker

Third Edition

PERSPECTIVES ON ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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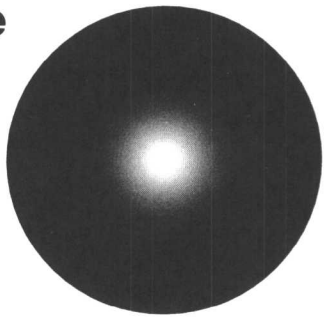
To my parents, Harlin and Doris Daniels, to my wife, Deborah, and to my daughters, Shannon, Erica, Lindsey, and Lauren. —TDD

To the memory of my father, Bill Spiker, to the indomitable spirit of my mother, Imogene Spiker, and to my wife, Evelyn. —BKS

Preface



In the preface to the first edition of *Perspectives on Organizational Communication,* we admitted that we probably had fallen short of our goal "to present an artful mosaic which would somehow include every subtle nuance of this phenomenon" (1987, p. xii). Even so, we were confident that we had produced a sound survey text for the study of organizational communication. The wide acceptance of both the first and second editions of this book in the basic organizational communication course has supported that confidence. We are thankful that those who have adopted the book also are constructive critics who have offered us many ideas that we have incorporated as improvements in the subsequent editions.

The first edition of *Perspectives* was shaped largely by the instability, flux, and transitions that characterized the academic study of organizational communication in the 1980s. In a sense, the book represented our response to this instability. We anchored the book on a foundation of traditional concepts and themes that had guided the study of organizational communication into the 1980s, but we also acknowledged and incorporated new themes and orientations to the study of the subject that were beginning to challenge old and established ways of thinking about organizational communication.

As we entered the 1990s with our second edition, organizational communication was still a field in transition, but the emerging shape of this particular discipline was much clearer and much more discernible. The conventional social science approach to the field, while still very prominent, had nonetheless given way to the emergence of a healthy and maturing school of naturalistic, interpretive scholarship on organizational communication. And both of these approaches had been obliged to make room for the arrival of a small, but steadily growing and assertive body of radical scholarship that has been inspired largely by neo-Marxist influences. The second edition of *Perspectives on Organizational Communication* was designed to reflect these changes.

Now, in the mid-1990s, the challenge that we face in the field centers not so much upon the need to understand theoretical pluralism in the field, but to address the problems and paradoxes of organizational communication and the changing features of organizational life that have been revealed through the application of pluralistic perspectives. Organizations are becoming more racially and culturally diverse, yet African-Americans, especially males, generally continue to be left out of the organizational equation. Feminization of

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organizations is occurring at a quickened pace, focusing attention on issues in organizational life that are of particular importance to women. A virtual revolution in information technologies is still continuing in the 1990s, reshaping communication practices in ways that we would not have imagined only a few years ago. Finally, American economic organizations are undergoing great change in an effort to respond to global competition. Much of the new material in our third edition is devoted to these kinds of issues.

Nearly all of the chapters in the third edition have been treated to updating of research or examples and editorial improvements. The most obvious substantive changes have occurred in chapters 2, 3, 5, and 8. In chapter 2, a worn-out discussion of communication models has been replaced by a discussion of communication theories. The illustrative theories (symbolic convergence and rules) were moved to chapter 2 from 5 and 8. This shift allowed for more new material to be included in 5 and 8. Chapter 3 includes new material on Mary Parker Follett's administrative theory, on Japanese management and the American response, and on system theory. In chapter 5, the discussion of managed cultural change under the functionalist paradigm that appeared in the first two editions has been replaced with an extensive discussion of cultural change through increased diversity, particularly changes involving gender, race, age, and physical abilities. Chapter 8 has been reorganized for more clarity. The chapter includes new research on superior-subordinate communication, other organizational dyads, and assimilation theory, but it no longer includes personality, motivational, and rules theory.

Important substantive changes in other chapters include:

—new network research and structural revision of the network section in chapter 4,
—discussion of the feminist organizational perspective under critical approaches to power and politics in chapter 6,
—reorganization of chapter 7 and discussion of new research on computer mediated communication systems and group decision support systems,
—revision and updating of the sections on group decision making effectiveness and phases in chapter 9,
—a new section on public communication in crisis situations in chapter 10.

As in the second edition, each chapter in the third edition is accompanied by a case study. Several cases are carried over from the second edition. Others are new or revised. The cases for chapters 1 and 4 were written by Michael Smilowitz, University of North Carolina, Charlotte. The cases for chapters 2, 5, 9, and 11 were prepared by Tom Daniels. The remaining cases were written by professionals with Andersen Consulting at the Center for Professional Education, Arthur Andersen & Co., S.C., St. Charles, Illinois. These individuals are Janice Goodman, Bill Hendry, Mark Holt, Jill Peddicord, Grover Ray, Rob Reindle, and Jeanne Russell. Each case study is based on a real incident or an amalgam of two or more real incidents, but the cases have been written with fictitious names, settings, and other elements in order to protect the identities of the persons and the organizations involved in these incidents.

Organization of the Text

The third edition of the book is, like its predecessors, organized in four sections: Foundations, Themes, Contexts, and Applications. Part 1, including the first three chapters, provides some basic *foundations* for understanding the field of organizational communication. In chapter 1, we define organizational communication and discuss some of the history as well as the present status of the field. We give special attention to several different perspectives that influence the study of organizational communication, namely, functionalism, interpretivism, radical humanism, and radical structuralism, but we subsume the two radical groups and the feminist perspective more generally under critical theory in this edition. In chapter 2, we review definitions and theories of communication that have influenced the study of organizational communication. This chapter is included primarily for students who may be entering the organizational communication course without prior coursework in communication fundamentals. Since organizational communication is influenced not only by communication theory, but also by organization theory, we review the major twentieth century theories of organization and organizational effectiveness in chapter 3, namely, classical, scientific, human relations, human resource development, and systems as well as some ecletic theories that do not fit these categories.

Part 2 includes four chapters on important *themes* or general topic areas in organizational communication. In chapter 4, we discuss organizational communication themes from the perspective of structural functionalism, a central model in the contemporary functionalist view of organizations as living systems. The topics in this chapter include various communication functions, formal and informal systems, and network characteristics. Chapter 5 presents the cultural perspective of organizational communication themes, with special attention to interpretivists' use of this perspective. Again, we have incorporated a discussion of several diversity issues related to cultural change in this chapter. Chapter 6 on power and conflict has been expanded with new research on conflict and, as we noted, the addition of the feminist perspective under critical theory. Chapter 7 contains our review of information processing technology and its influence on organizational communication, especially in the case of computer-mediated communication within local and wide area networks.

Part 3 includes chapters on three major *contexts* in organizational communication—dyadic, group, and public (chapters 8 to 10). These contexts are related closely to the structural-functional concept of levels, but we review both functionalist, interpretivist, and, occasionally, critical scholars work on organizational communication within these contexts. Chapters 8 and 9 include up-to-date reviews of research on topics such as superior-subordinate communication, mentor-protege relationships, assimilation theory, leadership, and group decision-making processes. Chapter 10 includes a discussion of public relations, issues management, corporate advocacy, and crisis communication, along with a discussion of traditional concepts in internal and external public communication.

Finally, we consider the problem of organizational communication *applications* in part 4 from the vantage point of communication professionals in organizations. Chapter 11 concerns the roles of communication professionals in organizations. Chapter 12 describes the tools and techniques that they use in order to evaluate organizational communication. Chapter 13 presents some of the major strategies that are employed to improve organizational communication.

We have retained part 4 because there is, in fact, a large profession and vocation where people apply the kinds of concepts and principles described in this book in an effort to improve organizational communication. Barry Spiker and most of the people who contributed case studies to this book earn their livings by doing precisely those things that are described in chapters 12 and 13. Nevertheless, students should be made aware of two important points about part 4.

First, one need not be a communication professional engaged in evaluation research and intervention activity in order to benefit from organizational communication theory. The concepts and principles can be just as useful to ordinary organization members in making sense of their day-to-day experiences as they are to professionals who apply them in evaluation and intervention.

Second, reading a chapter in a basic organizational communication text about the activities of people in the vocation will not prepare one to enter this vocation. One might as well expect to become a biologist simply by reading a chapter on that vocation in a basic biology text. We have tried to be very clear in this text about the realities of the market demand for such professionals and the extensive academic preparation required to enter the profession.

Special Features

The book includes topic outlines and summaries for each chapter. Key terms are displayed in bold face type at or near points where they are first defined or used in a meaningful way. Activities, discussion questions, a case study, and complete references are included at the end of each chapter.

Instructor's Manual

The instructor's manual, prepared by Michael Smilowitz of the University of North Carolina–Charlotte in collaboration with Tom Daniels, is a very useful tool for both experienced and new instructors. It includes a statement of learning objectives, a very detailed full-content outline, and multiple-choice test items for each chapter in the book.

Acknowledgements

We especially wish to thank four scholars who provided very careful reviews of the revision plan for this edition. These individuals are Michael W. Kramer, University of Missouri, Columbia; Vernon D. Miller, Michigan State University; Jo Young Switzer, Indiana University-Purdue University, Fort Wayne; and Charles Veenstra, Dordt College.

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The Authors

Tom D. Daniels (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1979) is Professor and Associate Dean of the College of Communication at The Ohio University. He also served as an assistant professor of communication at the University of Wisconsin–Green Bay and at the University of New Mexico. He has held line management positions in both private and public-sector organizations and is an experienced trainer and consultant. He has authored and coauthored articles and book chapters on various topics in organizational communication, communication theory, philosophy of social science, and research methods. Daniels is past secretary of the organizational communication division in the Speech Communication Association, past chair of the organizational communication division in the Central States Communication Association, a member of the organizational communication division of the International Communication Association, and an associate editor for *The Quarterly Journal of Speech.* When Tom is not writing and teaching, he brews beer, canoes whitewater rivers in West Virginia, and coaches girls little league softball.

Barry K. Spiker (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1979) is a vice-president with Mercer Management in Boston, MA. Prior to assuming this position, he held positions as Manager of Change Management Services, Andersen Consulting Co., Manager of Organization Development and Manager of Automation Planning for Honeywell, Inc. He also was an assistant professor in the Department of Communication at the University of New Mexico and corporate chief of staff for a privately held, midwestern manufacturing corporation. He has authored and coauthored articles and book chapters on topics in organizational communication, technological advancement and integration, and social science research methods. He is a member of the organizational communication divisions of the International Communication Association and the Academy of Management, a member of American Society for Training and Development, a member of the Organization Development Network, and an associate editor for *Management Communication Quarterly.* When Barry is not traveling for Mercer Management, he travels for himself, often to exotic locations. Barry flies airplanes and cooks gourmet meals.

We have worked together on research studies and consulting projects in organizational communication since 1976. Between us, we have over forty years of management, consulting, and teaching experience. We have tried to incorporate as much of that experience as possible in this text.

Tom D. Daniels, Athens, Ohio
Barry K. Spiker, Boston, Massachusetts

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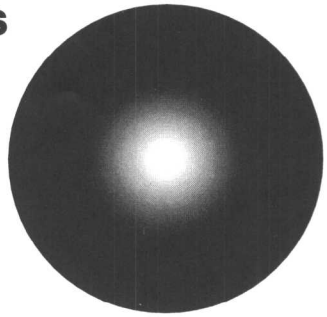

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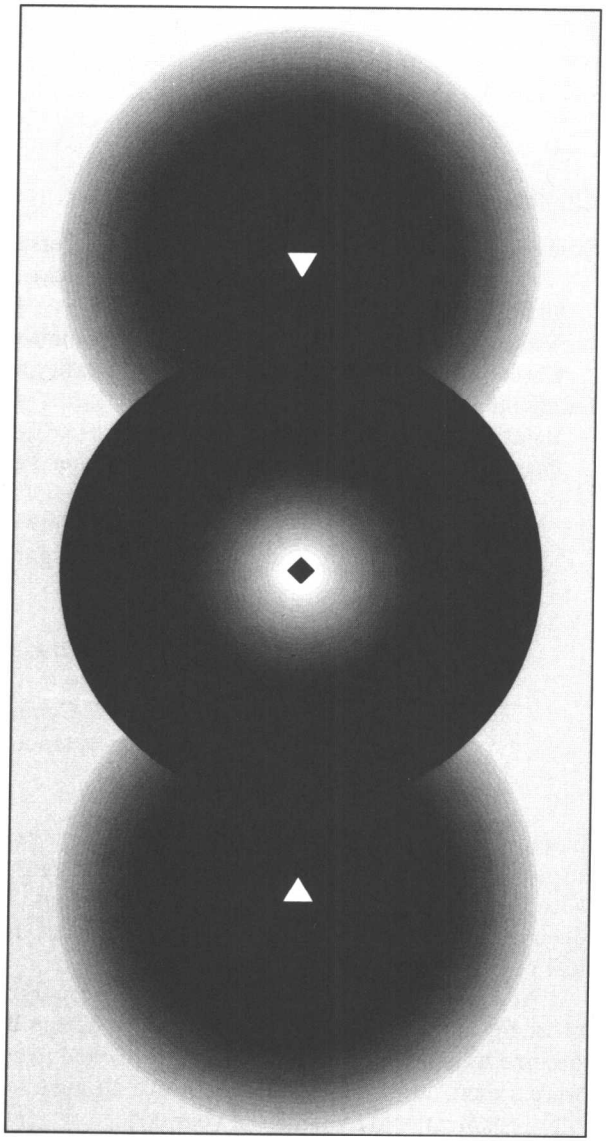
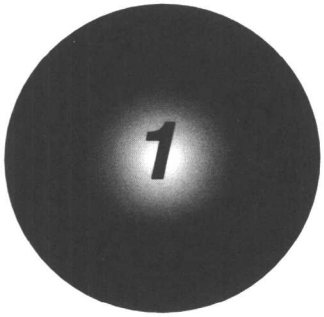
PART ONE



Foundations



An Orientation to Organizational Communication

Outline

- Studying Organizational Communication
  - Understanding Organizations
  - Awareness of Skills
  - Career Opportunities
- Development of the Field
  - Relationship to Other Fields
  - Perspectives on Organizational Communication
    - Organizational Order
    - Organizational Reality
    - Functionalism
    - Interpretivism
    - Radical Humanism and Radical Structuralism
- Three Perspective Modifications
  - Critical Theory and the Radical Perspectives
  - Feminism
  - Reality and Order in Contemporary Functionalism
  - Other Features of Contemporary Functionalism
    - Human Communication
    - Organizations and Organizational Effectiveness
    - Organizational Communication
    - Communication Professionals
- Acceptance of the Perspectives

Organizational life is a major feature of human experience. We are not only social creatures, but also organizational creatures. We work in, play in, cope with, and depend on many types of organizations. They include business, industrial, governmental, educational, professional, religious, social, and political organizations.

You probably have been involved with organizations in one form or another for most of your life. If you ever joined the Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts, became a member of a service club, or worked in some type of company, you were a member of an organization. As a student, you participate in the complex organizational dynamics of your college or university. You must deal with your institution's policies, procedures, expectations, customs, and habits. You may even be caught up in its internal conflicts, territorial rivalries, and power struggles.

Basically, human beings **organize** in order to get things done. When we organize, we define and arrange positions or roles in complex relationships. We engage in concerted action with one another by coordinating these roles in order to accomplish some purpose. Organizations, then, are elaborate and complicated forms of human endeavor.

We often talk about organizations as if they are separate from the people who comprise them. A young engineer speaks of "going to work for IBM," or a news report advises us that "Chrysler has announced a recall," as if IBM and Chrysler are actual places or beings. This is not especially surprising because many organizations do seem to exist apart from individual members. People come and go, but the organization remains. Even so, the image of the organization as an independent object is misleading. It implies that the organization is like the shell of the notorious little jumping bean—a container in which some mysterious activity (in this case, human behavior) is occurring. We need to remember that an organization is not merely a container for behavior. Rather, an organization literally *is* human behavior.

An organization is constituted by interaction among the people who comprise it. In other words, an organization really is defined by its members' joint actions. Since the basis for joint action is communication, the process of human communication is the central feature of an organization. As Daniel Katz and Robert Kahn, two prominent organizational psychologists, observed, "Communication . . . is the very essence of a social system or organization" (1978, p. 428).

This book is about the communication processes that characterize human organizations, processes referred to collectively as **organizational communication.** We have tried to present our discussion of organizational communication from a comprehensive, contemporary point of view that will provide you with a sound foundation of concepts for understanding and discussing this subject. No one book or course is going to cover everything that you could or should learn about organizational communication. This book is no exception. It is intended only as an introduction to the field of study.

We think that this book will be more useful to you if you understand something about the background for the book and for the course in which it is being used. In order to provide that background, we need to answer four basic questions:

1. Why is the study of organizational communication useful to you?
2. How did this field of study develop?
3. What is the status of the field today?
4. What is the authors' approach to the field in light of answers to the first three questions?

The answers to these four questions provide background for this book and for the course in which it is being used. A really good understanding of the field depends on some familiarity with this background.

Studying Organizational Communication

You may have wondered from time to time just why you should enroll in a particular course or of what relevance and importance the course is going to be to you. In the case of organizational communication, we see at least three reasons for studying this topic:

1. You can improve your understanding of organizations and of your own experiences as an organization member.
2. You can develop awareness of the kinds of communication skills that are important in organizations.
3. The course may start you down the path to a career as a communication professional in an organization or as an academic scholar in the field.

Understanding Organizations

"I've seen all of this before, but I never had a way to make sense of it until I took this course." This is a common remark that we hear from students who have just completed their first course in organizational communication. Because communication is such a central feature of life in organizations, the study of organizational communication provides a basis for understanding virtually every *human* process that occurs in organizations. Conflict, cooperation, decision making, the use of power and authority, compliance gaining, resistance, morale and cohesion, and the creation and maintenance of relationships all are reflected in human interaction.

Of course, organizational communication does not provide insights about *every* aspect of human organizations. It is not a study of the technology for creating a product or service or of the methods for producing and marketing these things. It is not a study of cost control and financing or of laws and regulations governing business and employment practices. However, such topics often are relevant to organizational communication. Some people in the field spend a lot of time discussing them, but organizational communication primarily is concerned with the content and structure of human interaction in organizations' day-to-day activities. Unless you plan to be a hermit, you are almost certain to participate in and cope with organizational communication throughout most of your life.

Awareness of Skills

There is broad, general agreement that well-developed communication skills are essential to personal effectiveness in organizations or, at least, in managerial, professional, and leadership positions (Huse & Bowditch, 1977). Review any survey of skills that organizations expect of new college graduates upon entry into the job market, and you probably will find communication skills placed somewhere in the list (Di Salvo, 1980).

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