

*perspectives on*  
**ORGANIZATIONAL  
COMMUNICATION**

SECOND EDITION



TOM D. DANIELS  
BARRY K. SPIKER

*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, and to the indomitable spirit of my mother, Imogene Spiker. —BKS

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## 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 this book in the basic organizational communication course has supported that confidence. Thankfully, those who adopted the first edition of the book also turned out to be enthusiastic and constructive critics, who have offered us many ideas that we have incorporated as improvements in the second edition.

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. At the same time, we wanted to acknowledge and incorporate new themes and orientations to the study of the subject that were beginning to challenge old and established ways of thinking about organizational communication. Consequently, the book was dominated by the conventional socio-behavioral science tradition that has been labeled variously as functionalist, modernist, or rationalist. We included a chapter on newer interpretive orientations to organizational communication along with occasional references to interpretive studies at various points in the book. We reviewed, but also essentially dismissed radical perspectives on organizational communication as relatively unimportant at that time. Well, much has changed in the four years since *Perspectives* originally was published.

As we enter the 1990s, it is fair to say that organizational communication is still a field in transition, but the emerging shape of this particular discipline is now much clearer and much more discernible. The conventional social science approach to the field, while still very prominent, has nonetheless given way to the emergence of a healthy and maturing school of naturalistic, interpretive scholarship on organizational communication. And both of these approaches have 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 the neo-Marxist influence of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Frankfurt. Neo-Marxism is, by the way, not quite the same thing as the orthodox, economic Marxism that has been crumbling throughout Eastern Europe. Despite the demise of its older cousin, neo-Marxism appears to be alive and well. Indeed, it even may have provided some of the impetus for change in Eastern Europe. Neo-Marxist scholarship, referred to generally as the critical perspective, certainly is beginning to influence the study of organizational communication.

The second edition of *Perspectives on Organizational Communication* is designed to reflect the state of the field as it exists in the 1990s. Consequently, we have retained our reviews of familiar standard topics, but we also have expanded our treatment of new trends and emerging issues in the field. You will still find all of the standard theories of organization and organizational effectiveness (classical, scientific, human relations, human resource development, systems) as well as traditional scholarship on communication structure and function, superior-subordinate relationships, and group decision making, but we have updated the book to include the most recent lines of research in each of these areas. We have expanded our discussion of interpretive research in the chapter on organizational culture. We have added a new chapter on power and conflict. This chapter contrasts the traditional view of power with the radical view and introduces students to scholarship that has developed from the critical perspective. Of course, the very first chapter of the book also has been rewritten to reflect these changes.

We have revised substantially our chapter on information technology. At the time this chapter originally was prepared for the first edition (i.e., in 1985), we were obliged to conclude that there was much more speculation than real research regarding the potential impact of these technologies on organizations. Again, the world has changed in a few short years. We now know that new technologies—or at least the choices that people make when they use these technologies—are changing the form and content of organizations generally, and organizational communication specifically.

The new edition includes a number of minor changes, mostly in the form of updating the content, but there is one more major change. Case studies for the first edition were included in an accompanying instructor's manual prepared by Michael Smilowitz. As a consequence of feedback from numerous users of the book (as well as one fairly uncharitable review of the book!), we located the thirteen case studies in the book for the second edition. Each chapter is accompanied by a specific case study. Three of these cases were written by Michael Smilowitz for the original instructor's manual. Three more 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, IL. 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 second edition of the book is, like its progenitor, organized in four sections: Orientation, Themes, Contexts, and Applications. Unit I, 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 more generally under *critical theory* in this edition. In chapter 2, we review definitions and models from communication theory 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 eclectic theories that do not fit these categories.

Unit II 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 expanded this chapter somewhat to include discussion of recent interpretive scholarship in organizational communication. Chapter 6 on power and conflict is new. We borrowed a few pages from sections on power and conflict that had already been included in the first edition, but most of the content is completely new to the book, including material on *critical theory* and scholarship, updated research on conflict, and theory and research on bargaining and negotiation. Chapter 7 includes a significant revision of 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. Unit III 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-protége relationships, and group

decision-making processes. Chapter 10 includes an expanded discussion of public relations, issues management, and corporate advocacy along with a discussion of traditional concepts in internal and external public communication.

Finally, we consider the problem of organizational communication *applications* in Unit IV 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 the Unit IV 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 Unit IV.

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**

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Papa, Ohio University; and Ron Sandwina, Purdue University. We incorporated many of their suggestions in this edition.

### **The Authors**

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Barry K. Spiker (Ph.D., Ohio University, 1979) is Senior Manager in the Change Management Services unit with Andersen Consulting of Arthur Andersen & Co., S.C., Chicago, IL. Prior to assuming this position, he held positions as 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 Andersen Consulting, he travels for himself, often to New Mexico where he owns land near the Sandia Mountains. 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 nearly 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, Chicago, Illinois

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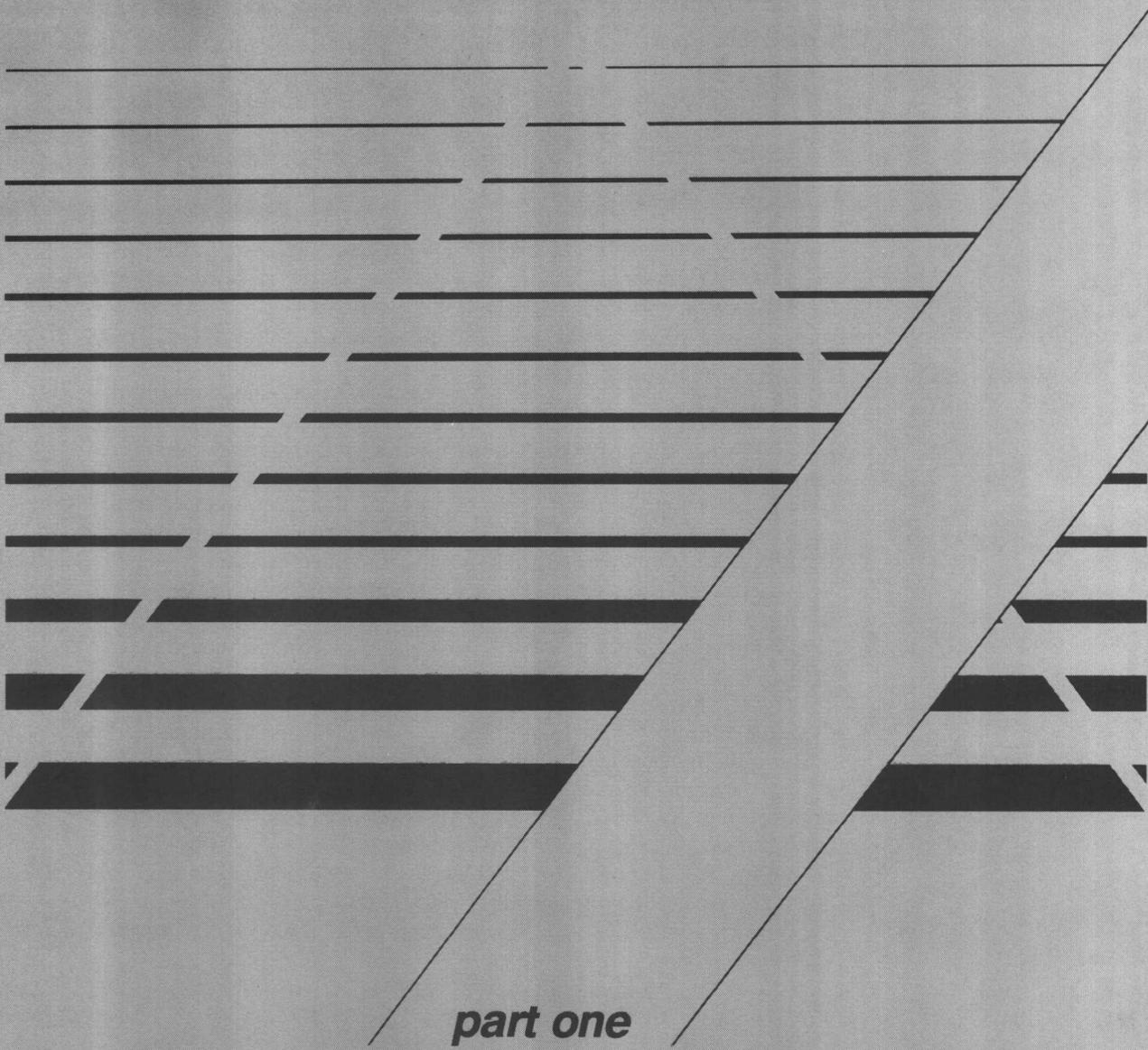
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*part one*

# FOUNDATIONS

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## **Outline**

Studying Organizational Communication	Critical Theory and the Radical Perspectives
Understanding Organizations	Reality and Order in
Awareness of Skills	Contemporary
Career Opportunities	Functionalism
Development of the Field	Other Features of Contemporary
Relationship to Other Fields	Functionalism
Perspectives on Organizational Communication	Human Communication
Organizational Order	Organizations and
Organizational Reality	Organizational
Functionalism	Effectiveness
Interpretivism	Organizational
Radical Humanism and	Communication
Radical Structuralism	Communication Professionals
Alternative Models of	Acceptance of the Perspectives
Organizational	Approach of the Text
Communication	Summary
Distinctions among the Perspectives	Discussion Questions/Activities
	Case Study
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# An Orientation to Organizational Communication

1

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 it 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.