A HANDBOOK FOR THE STUDY OF HUMAN COMMUNICATION:
Methods and Instruments for Observing, Measuring, and Assessing Communication Processes

edited by
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Ablex Publishing Corporation
Norwood, N.J. 07648

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A Handbook for the study of human communication.
(Communication and information science)
Bibliography: p.
Includes index.
1. Communication—Methodology. I. Tardy, Charles H.
II. Title. III. Series.
P91.H36 1987 001.51'01'8 87-14317
ISBN 0-89391-424-X

Ablex Publishing Corporation
355 Chestnut Street
Norwood, New Jersey 07648

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This book is dedicated to teachers, especially mine. They inspire students to ask the interesting questions.

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Preface

This book describes the available options and the rationale for selecting among them for observing, measuring, or assessing processes of communication. This approach contrasts radically to that in many preceding volumes which explain the applicability of general types of quantitative research, for example, content analysis, laboratory experiments, and statistical analysis to the study of communication. Our approach focuses on the methodological problems and solutions unique to the study of communication.

We do not, however, intend to provide a "cookbook" for research. Decisions as to which strategies to utilize ultimately rest with the person conducting research. This volume does not attempt to replace the investigator's prerogative with dictum. Rather, it provides the reader with an outline of the problems and/or alternatives that face the researcher.

Though all the chapters share certain common goals, each reflects unique concerns dictated by the state of research in its respective content area. While instruments may be of primary concern in one chapter they may be absent in another. While one chapter makes specific recommendations for a measurement strategy, another concludes that current alternatives are problematic and new ones need to be devised. The authors assess the state of the art on methods utilized in a particular research area and render appropriate conclusions and judgments.

A brief summary of the 15 chapters best illustrates the methodological philosophy of this volume. Burleson and Waltman's (Chapter 1) discussion of cognitive complexity focuses on a single measure: the Role Category Questionnaire. The authors convincingly demonstrate its superiority and provide valuable insight into its use. Greene (Chapter 2) reviews the "possibilities and pratfalls" for studying cognitive processes related to communication. Because his is an infinitely broader topic, the discussion is limited to more general methodological considerations. Readers are directed to other sources for additional information about specific techniques and strategies. In a sense, the chapter functions as a map to direct investigators through a maze of

problems associated with the study of cognitive processes. Spitzberg (Chapter 3) undertakes an exhaustive survey of instruments used to assess communication competence. Space limitations prohibit the inclusion of additional information about the more than 100 instruments identified. Monge and Contractor (Chapter 4) describe the types of communication variables used in network studies. Procedures for measuring these variables, as well as methods of acquiring network data, are discussed. The authors also address the important and controversial issue of the validity of self-report network data. Street (Chapter 5) provides a rationale for the behavioral observation of communication style. He reviews problems faced by investigators, makes recommendations for minimizing them, and provides data to illustrate his conclusions. Methods of discourse analysis for the study of conversational structure are reviewed by Sigman, Sullivan, and Wendell (Chapter 6). Data acquisition, transcription procedures, units of analysis, and informant data are among the topics covered. Their chapter provides coherence to a disparate body of literature. Baxter (Chapter 7) examines instruments used in the study of dyadic personal relationships. She identifies a wide range of useful measures for describing and evaluating significant interpersonal relationships. Hirokawa (Chapter 8) examines the use of interaction analysis to study groups and discusses the method's appropriateness as well as specific concerns for undertaking interaction analysis. Many of the ideas about interaction analysis are relevant to its use in contexts other than the small group. Gouran (Chapter 9) reviews measures of group decision-making outcomes and concludes that prior concepts of correctness, quality, utility, and acceptability are deficient. He offers appropriateness as a more useful concept and provides suggestions for its operationalization. In a chapter on interpersonal evaluations, I assess (Chapter 10) scales for the measurement of attraction and trust. Though not the only evaluative aspects of relationships, these two topics are of perennial interest to a wide variety of researchers. I also discuss systems for coding interpersonal interaction (Chapter 11). Unlike the chapter by Hirokawa, the only aspect of interaction analysis considered here is the choice of alternative coding schemes. The discussion will aid researchers in identifying and selecting among procedures developed to categorize observed interaction. Bradac (Chapter 12) discusses methodological problems for the study of language. He addresses accent, rate, intensity, immediacy, powerful and powerless styles, and lexical diversity. I examine (Chapter 13) the procedures used to operationalize self-disclosure. In addition to reviewing instruments designed for various purposes, this chapter discusses the experimental manipulation of self-disclosure. The review

of social support measures (Chapter 14) first delineates aspects of the concept. An earlier version of this article appeared in the *American Journal of Community Psychology*. Several important changes were necessitated by the rapid accumulation of research on this topic. Leary (Chapter 15) discusses the measurement of anxiety, as associated with communication in the interpersonal context. He examines scales designed to measure communication apprehension, shyness, and other related concepts.

The research philosophy implicit in these chapters is the book's strength and weakness. The empirical and quantitative orientation of the chapters reflects a useful approach to research. Though qualitative methods of studying communication are extremely important, a single volume cannot provide a comprehensive treatment of all perspectives. Nor is the purpose of this volume to convince others of the utility of this type of research. Rather, we hope to facilitate the conduct of research by scholars with similar interests.

The selection of the communication processes to be included in this book posed problems. The opportunity to select the topics which I thought were most important to the study of interpersonal communication, broadly defined, was challenging and humbling. I endeavored to include discussions of issues which were timeless but not trite; timely but not trendy. The volume should not be historically pedantic, on the one hand, or irrelevant by the time of publication, on the other. Pragmatic considerations also influenced my decisions. The topic selection should appeal to a broad audience. Some topics were not included because they could not be treated adequately in the available space or because of existing comparable discussions. As editor I assume all responsibility for errors of omission and comission.

Many people helped make this volume possible. I thank the contributing authors for sharing my vision and committing their time and energy to seeing it materialize. Melvin Voigt and Ablex Publishers have been patient and supportive. I am especially grateful to the authors and publishers who allowed us to reprint their instruments. The University of Southern Mississippi assisted my work by providing a summer research grant, teaching load reductions, and allowing a one-semester sabbatical. Richard L. Conville provided encouragement at the right times. Lawrence A. Hosman's comments were always useful. A special thanks goes to my wife Chris for her endearing support.

Charles H. Tardy

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CHAPTER 1

Cognitive Complexity: Using The Role Category Questionnaire Measure

Brant R. Burleson and Michael S. Waltman

Research concerned with stable individual differences in social-cognitive ability has often utilized the concept of *cognitive complexity*. In general, the term indexes the degree of differentiation, articulation, and integration within a cognitive system. That is, a cognitive system composed of a comparatively large number of finely articulated, well integrated elements is regarded as relatively complex. Although most discussions of cognitive complexity make some reference to the notions of differentiation, abstractness, articulation, and integration, several quite distinct conceptualizations and operationalizations of the cognitive complexity construct have appeared in the literature (see the reviews by Goldstein & Blackman, 1978; Miller & Wilson, 1979; D. O'Keefe & Sypher, 1981; Streufert & Streufert, 1978). Moreover, different measures of cognitive complexity have often been found either uncorrelated or only weakly correlated—findings indicating that the various measures of cognitive complexity are not all assessing the same thing (e.g., see D. O'Keefe & Sypher, 1981, pp. 75–76).

This chapter focuses on only one approach to the study of cognitive complexity, an approach introduced by Walter H. Crockett (1965). There are two reasons for this limited focus. First, virtually all cognitive complexity research appearing in the human communication literature has made use of Crockett's conceptualization and operationalization of this variable. This research has stemmed largely from the theoretical perspective of *constructivism* (see Delia, O'Keefe, & O'Keefe 1982)—a perspective which has subsumed Crockett's analysis of cognitive complexity within more general analyses of social cognition and sophisticated interpersonal functioning. Second, a recent

review (D. O'Keefe & Sypher, 1981) comparing a number of different cognitive complexity measures along several criteria concluded that only Crockett's approach to the assessment of cognitive complexity satisfied "all the criteria for an adequate complexity measure" (p. 85). In other words, of the most commonly employed measures of cognitive complexity, Crockett's measure appears to be the most reliable and the most valid.

Theoretical Foundations of the Cognitive Complexity Construct

This section presents a brief overview of the theoretical framework underlying the constructivist approach to the measurement of cognitive complexity.[1] More detailed presentations are available in several sources (e.g., Crockett, 1965; Delia, 1976; Delia et al., 1982; B. O'Keefe & Delia, 1982).

Crockett's (1965) original analysis of cognitive complexity is based on a fusion of the personal construct psychology of Kelly (1955) and the structural-development theory of Werner (1957). From Kelly, Crockett drew the basic unit of cognitive structure: the personal construct. Kelly assumed that features of the world are never apprehended directly, but rather are always apprehended through the mediation of the psychological structures termed "personal constructs." Personal constructs are "transparent templates" or bipolar dimensions which a person "creates and then attempts to fit over the realities of which the world is composed" (Kelly, 1955, p. 9). As such, personal constructs constitute the basic cognitive structures through which persons interpret, anticipate, evaluate, and understand aspects of the world.

Kelly (1955) argued that each construct has a specific focus and range of convenience. That is, for each construct, some events fall within the specific focus of the construct, other events fall outside this focus but are still capable of being understood through the mediation of the construct, while still other events fall outside the range of the construct and thus are irrelevant to it. In addition, Kelly maintained that constructs having a similar range of convenience (i.e., applying to roughly the same domain of phenomena) are organized

[1] The theoretical analysis of cognitive complexity presented here is based on the "original" analysis of this construct detailed in such sources as Crockett (1965) and Delia (1976). More recent theoretical analyses of the cognitive complexity construct are discussed briefly in the concluding section of this chapter and in detail by B. O'Keefe (1984) and B. O'Keefe and Delia (1982).