

# THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

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### DEVELOPING COMPETENCIES THROUGH . . .

- KNOWLEDGE** Describing the Functional approach to organizational communication  
Describing the Meaning-Centered approach to organizational communication  
Describing Emerging Perspectives for organizational communication  
Distinguishing among the Functional approach, the Meaning-Centered approach, and Emerging Perspectives
- SENSITIVITY** Understanding the importance of meaning generation for organizational communication  
Identifying how organizational communication creates and shapes organizational events
- SKILLS** Developing analysis abilities using the Functional approach, the Meaning-Centered approach, and Emerging Perspectives  
Practicing analysis abilities
- VALUES** Viewing communication as the fundamental organizing organizational process  
Relating organizational communication to a variety of value and ethical issues

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**THE CORONADO COMPANY'S QUALITY DEFECTS CASE**

Coronado Manufacturing Company, located in Trenton, New Jersey, is a small-appliance manufacturer providing house brand products to a series of major chain stores. The situation you are about to examine was once a major issue for Coronado, threatening their long-term survival. We use their quality defects problem to assist in understanding major theoretical perspectives for organizational communication.

Bill Drake, president of Coronado Manufacturing Company, could hardly believe the conclusions in the consultant's report. Product quality had always been a strength of Coronado Manufacturing, and now defective products were being blamed for declining sales in the company's small-appliance line. The report went on to say that the sales department for Coronado was not passing along customer complaints to anyone in manufacturing. Furthermore, Drake was confused by his own lack of personal knowledge about customer dissatisfaction and about problems in manufacturing. After all, he met weekly with the management team responsible for spotting these problems, and they all knew that he felt that the customer was number one.

Drake thought about the history of Coronado Manufacturing. Coronado had been founded some fifty years ago by Drake's father and uncle. Both men had worked most of their lives for a major manufacturer of small appliances well known for its quality products and customer concern. In founding Coronado, both men had hired people who cared about quality and understood customers. In fact, stories were told about the founders personally emphasizing quality to newcomers on the manufacturing line and making "surprise" visits to customers to check on how "their" products were working. When Bill Drake's father retired, he had admonished Bill not to forget the basics that had made the business successful.

Bill Drake had assumed he was successfully carrying on Coronado's quality and customer traditions. Was the report accurate? Was his management team withholding information? How could he determine what to do?

Bill Drake is confronted with a management problem requiring immediate action. The decisions he makes, the action he takes, and what ultimately happens to Coronado Manufacturing provide examples of how organizational communication creates and shapes events.

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**INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 1 we defined organizational communication as the process through which organizations create and shape events. This chapter is designed to help us understand this process and to develop our competencies in determining how Bill Drake might approach his problem. Three different approaches—Functional, Meaning-Centered, and Emerging Perspectives—are presented as ways to understand the processes of organizational communication and are used as frameworks to help analyze specific organizational situations, experiences, and problems.

The Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches ask different questions about organizational communication. The Functional approach asks how and why communication

works, whereas the Meaning-Centered approach asks what communication is. The Functional approach asks what purpose communication serves within organizations and how messages move. The Meaning-Centered approach asks if communication is the process through which organizing, decision making, influence, and culture occur. The Functional approach describes organizational reality in such terms as chains of command, positions, roles, and communications channels, whereas the Meaning-Centered approach defines as reality the symbolic significance of these terms. The Functional approach subordinates the importance of the individual to his or her organizational position and function, whereas in the Meaning-Centered approach the significance of the individual is the key focus.

The Emerging Perspectives we discuss ask questions about communication as a constitutive or basic process of social construction. Emerging Perspectives focus attention on power and control and on the marginalization of voices other than those of the dominant control structure. They also begin our discussion of influences beyond a specific organization, namely the concepts of institutions, globalization, and technology.

After studying this chapter, you will be able to answer several questions about the Functional approach, the Meaning-Centered approach, and Emerging Perspectives.

#### **THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH**

1. What are different types of organizational messages?
2. How do organizing, relationship, and change messages differ?
3. How can communication networks be described?
4. How do different communications channels affect messages?
5. What is communication load?
6. What is distortion in organizational communication?

#### **THE MEANING-CENTERED APPROACH**

1. How is “reality” generated through human interaction?
2. Why are communicating and organizing almost synonymous processes?
3. How does communication contribute to decision making?
4. What is meant by sensemaking?
5. What are influence processes in organizations?
6. What are communication rules?
7. What is the difference between treating culture as something an organization has versus something an organization is?
8. What is meant by communication climate?

#### **EMERGING PERSPECTIVES**

1. What is meant by communication as constitutive processes?
2. What are the issues for organizational communication when adopting a postmodern viewpoint?
3. What is the emphasis of critical organizational communication theory?
4. What is feminist organizational communication theory?
5. How do the values evidenced in Emerging Perspectives differ from the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches?
6. What is the common ground among the three perspectives? What are the most important differences?
7. How does the concept of institutions influence individual organizations?

8. What is the relationship between global cultures and organizational communication?
9. What is the relationship of emerging communications technologies to issues in the Functional, Meaning-Centered, and Emerging Perspectives approaches?

Think back to the Coronado Quality Defects case. Which of these questions should Bill Drake be asking? As you study the material in this chapter, try to determine how the Functional approach, the Meaning-Centered approach, and Emerging Perspectives can help Bill Drake solve his problem at Coronado Manufacturing.

This chapter contributes to *knowledge* competencies by describing and contrasting three approaches to organizational communication. It contributes to the development of individual *sensitivity* competencies by examining the development of meaning in organizations and individual communication behaviors that shape and change organizational events. It contributes to *skill* development by applying Functional, Meaning-Centered, and Emerging Perspectives approaches to cases and exercises. Finally, it encourages *value* competencies by examining organizational communication as the fundamental organizational process reflective of multiple ethical issues and concerns.

## THE FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

### Functional approach

Way of understanding organizational communication by describing what messages do and how they move through organizations.

The **Functional approach** helps us understand organizational communication by describing what messages do and how they move through organizations. This perspective describes communication as a complex organizational process that serves organizing, relationship, and change functions: what messages do. The way messages move through organizations is described by examining communication networks, channels, message directions, communication load, and distortion. The Functional

approach suggests that communication transmits rules, regulations, and information throughout the organization. Communication establishes and defines human relationships, helps individuals identify with goals and opportunities, and is the process by which the organization generates and manages change. These functions occur during the repetitive patterns of communication interactions in which organizational members engage.

In Chapter 1 we described organizations as dynamic systems in which individuals engage in collective efforts to accomplish goals. We found that organizations can be understood not only in terms of their structure but also by the way they continually create and change what they do and how they do it. We claimed that, as such, organizations emerge and evolve through communication behaviors. The Functional approach describes organizations as dynamic communication systems with the various parts of the system operating together to create and shape organizational events.

### Organizational communication system

Number of related units and processes that operate together within the organization and with its environment to create and shape organizational events. Information processing is the primary function of the communication system.

## Organizational Communication Systems: Component Parts

Before we can examine what messages do and how they move in organizations, we need to understand the concept of an **organizational communication system** on which the Functional approach is based. What are

the main parts of the system? What parts work together to create and shape organizational events? How does communication contribute to keeping a system dynamic? What role did communication play in organizations that cease to exist?

In the Functional approach, information processing is seen as the primary function of organizational communication systems. It takes place in a number of related units that when taken together are called organizations or suprasystems. The individual units, sometimes called subsystems, are related by some degree of structure and when described as a whole can be distinguished from other organizations in the environment by their boundaries. The individual units are interdependent and permeable to other units and the external environment.

The Coronado Manufacturing Company provides an example of an organizational communication system with its manufacturing and sales units; Bill Drake as president represents a management unit. These units relate to one another to produce a product that customers in the external environment, outside the Coronado boundary, will buy. Coronado Manufacturing Company is the suprasystem with management, manufacturing, and sales subsystems. The external environment, however, is important to Coronado. Sales are slipping. Bill Drake needs external information (from the consultant and customers) to make decisions about internal operations, decisions that in turn will influence future sales.

## Communication Inputs

This relationship between external environment information and internal information processing is important for understanding organizational communication systems. Information

### Communication inputs

Information in the external environment that may influence the decision making of the organization.

in the external environment, commonly known as **communication inputs**, is any information that can potentially influence the decision making of the suprasystem (organization). It is crucial for an organization to have accurate and timely information inputs to adapt and change. Bill Drake realizes that the future of Coronado Manufacturing is related to the accuracy of the inputs about quality defects from his customers.

Without this information his understanding of the sales problem is incomplete. Only with accurate information about quality problems can he make informed decisions.

## Communication Throughput

### Communication throughput

Transforming and changing of input information for internal organizational use and the generation and transmission of internal information throughout the organization.

When information enters the organization, the communication system begins a process known as **communication throughput**, or the transforming and changing of input information for internal organizational use. Bill Drake, in taking the consultant's report and evaluating what to do, is taking inputs and transforming them into organizational action. His decisions and the decisions of people in sales and manufacturing can be described as throughput communication. In other words, the internal subsystems (management, sales, manufacturing) of Coronado move messages through the organization that will influence the production of

products and ultimately customer satisfaction. The quality of throughput communication will determine whether the defects problem is solved. Even with accurate and timely inputs, the subsystems of Coronado require effective internal communication to increase sales. Bill

Drake questions the throughput communication of his organization when he realizes that despite weekly staff meetings, he was unaware of the quality problem.

## Communication Output

### Communication output

Messages to the external environment from within the organization.

Messages to the external environment from within the organization are known as **communication output**. Outputs can be thought of as the results of the input and throughput process and are both intentional and unintentional. Coronado Manufacturing, through its sales force and advertising, generates intentional output communication. The defects in

its products, however, have become unintentional output messages with important consequences. The low-quality message from the defective products is a potentially more powerful message than positive messages from advertising and sales campaigns.

### Open systems

Organizations that continually take in new information, transform that information, and give information back to the environment.

## Open versus Closed Systems

The response of the environment (in Coronado's case, the customers) to organizational communication is feedback that in turn becomes new inputs to the system. The way the organization responds to these new inputs with throughput efforts and new outputs determines whether it has an open or closed system. **Open systems** continually take in new information, transform that information, and give information back to the environment. By contrast, **closed systems** are characterized by a lack of input communication, making it difficult to make good decisions and stay current with the needs of the environment. Open systems use a variety of problem-solving approaches. There is no one best way to do things. This ability to use a variety of approaches is called **equifinality**, meaning that there are many ways to reach system goals.

### Closed systems

Organizations that lack input communication, making it difficult to make good decisions and stay current with the needs of the environment.

### Equifinality

Potential for the use of a variety of approaches to reach system goals.

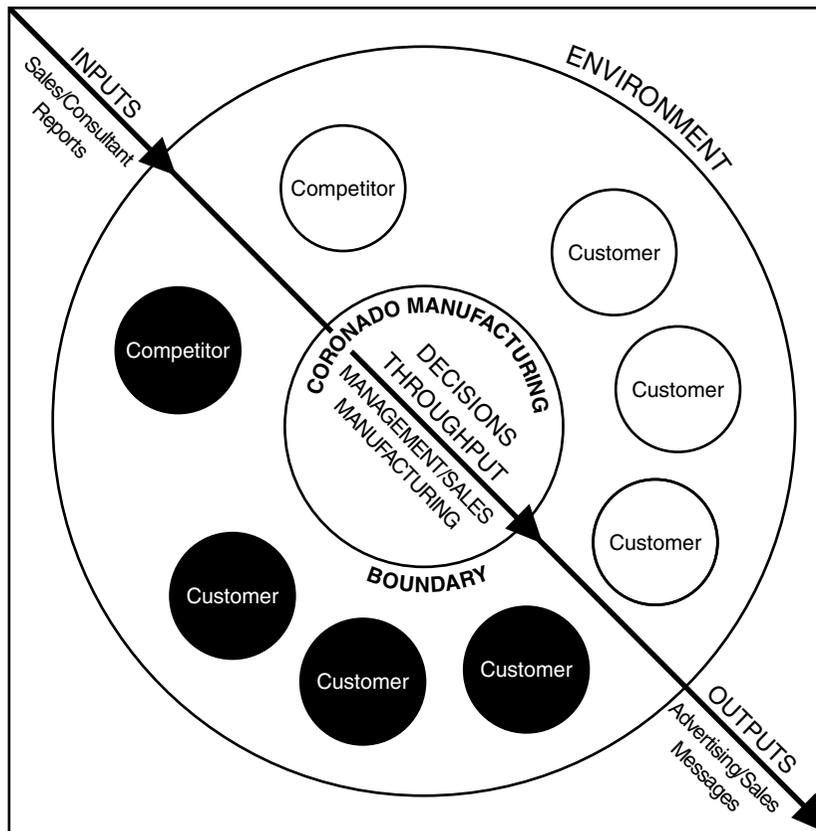
Bill Drake wants Coronado Manufacturing to operate as an open system. He listens to customer complaints to try to decide what to do. He can consider a new advertising campaign or new approaches from his sales staff. He knows, however, that he is unlikely to be successful until the defects problem is solved. In the long term, if Bill Drake pays no attention to sales or quality problems, he increases the likelihood that Coronado Manufacturing will go out of business. As we can see from studying the Coronado case, however, Bill Drake has more than one way to approach his problems. He can work with both manufacturing and sales, he can work only with manufacturing, he can assign responsibility to others, he can retain much of the responsibility himself, and he has other options. There are a number of ways (equifinality) to solve Coronado's problems. Figure 2.1 illustrates the Coronado Manufacturing communication system.

### Message functions

What communication does or how it contributes to the overall functioning of the organization.

## Message Functions

When we talk about **message functions** within organizations, we are talking about what communication does or how it contributes to the overall functioning of the organization. In our attempt to understand



**FIGURE 2.1 Coronado Manufacturing Communication System**

organizational communication from the Functional approach, we describe message functions in three broad categories—organizing functions, relationship functions, and change functions. Each function is seen as necessary for an open communication system, although the exact balance among message functions will vary by organizational type and circumstance.

## Organizing Functions

People who work together talk more about doing tasks than any other subject. This finding is not surprising. To engage in organized activity in pursuit of goals, people in organizations must develop and exchange messages about rules, regulations, policies, and tasks.

**Organizing functions**  
Messages that establish the rules and regulations of a particular environment.

**Organizing functions** establish the rules and regulations of a particular environment. Policy manuals, employee handbooks, orientation training, newsletters, and a variety of other sources convey information

about how the organization expects to work and what it requires of its members. These organizing messages define and clarify tasks, develop work instructions, and evaluate task accomplishment.

Organizing messages can be found in every aspect of our lives. The school you attend publishes standards for admissions and requirements for specific majors and degrees. Instructors establish requirements and define performance expectations. You converse with teachers and peers about assignments and responsibilities. All these messages and many more describe how your school is organized, how it is supposed to work, and how you fit into that process.

The adequacy and effectiveness of organizing messages can be evaluated by how well organizational members understand and perform tasks, how rules and regulations are understood and followed, and how adequately daily operations support organizational goals. In sum, the organizing function of communication guides, directs, and controls organizational activity.

## Relationship Functions

### Relationship functions

Communication that helps individuals define their roles and assess the compatibility of individual and organizational goals.

The **relationship function** of organizational communication helps individuals define their roles and assess the compatibility of individual and organizational goals. Relationship communication contributes to individuals' identification with an organization or sense of "belonging" in their work environment. Frequently referred to as integrative or maintenance messages, relationship communication contributes to employee morale and maintains or integrates individuals with their work environments.

Communication establishes relationships between supervisors and employees and within peer groups. Relationship messages range from informal conversations to visible symbols of status such as large offices and reserved parking spaces. Job titles, awards, and promotions are other examples of relationship communication that determine how individuals identify or relate to the organization.

Whereas organizing messages communicate how the organization operates, relationship messages establish the human interactions that make such operation possible. Chances are, for example, that your sense of belonging with your school or lack of it closely relates to your interpersonal interactions with teachers and other students. In fact, your ability to meet performance expectations successfully may be influenced by your relationships with your instructors and how comfortable you are in exchanging ideas with them. The same may be true of your relationships with other students. The quality of your work on a team project is probably influenced by how much you feel a part of—or integrated with—your group. The effectiveness of relationship messages is reflected in individual satisfaction with work relationships, productivity, employee turnover, overall support for organizational practices, and a variety of other less obvious ways.

## Change Functions

**Change functions** help organizations adapt what they do and how they do it and are essential to an open system. Change messages occur in organizational problem solving, individual

**Change functions**

Messages that help organizations adapt what they do and how they do it; viewed as essential to an open system.

decision making, feedback from the environment, and numerous other choice-making situations. Change communication is the processing of new ideas and information as well as the altering of existing procedures and processes. It is essential for continual adaptation to the environment and for meeting the complex needs of individuals working together.

Experiences in decision-making groups help illustrate how change messages function. When working with a group of students to develop a class presentation, chances are you can recall messages speculating about the best approach and who should take what type of responsibility. Furthermore, you probably attempted to reduce the ambiguity of the assignment by determining what the instructor wanted and what would be appropriate for the time you had. Your group's ability to exchange innovative messages and adapt to the requirements of the assignment influenced your effectiveness and final grade. In the Coronado case, Bill Drake became aware of his quality problem through change messages, specifically through declining sales and a consultant's report. His attempt to correct the problem will require change messages with his sales and manufacturing staffs and new approaches to reverse the negative reactions of his customers.

The ultimate effectiveness of change communication is the survival of the organization. Without appropriate change, organizational systems stagnate and die. Change communication is necessary for innovation and adaptation and is the process through which the organization obtains new information, chooses among various alternatives, and weighs current practices against emerging needs. Timely and creative change communication is required for a dynamic and open system. The effectiveness of change messages can be determined by whether the organization gathers information from the best available sources and acts on that information with a timely, quality decision. Figure 2.2 illustrates organizing, relationship, and change functions.

**Message Structure****Message structure**

Movement of organizing, relationship, and change messages throughout the organization and between the organization and its external environment.

The movement of organizing, relationship, and change messages throughout the organization and between the organization and its external environment is the **message structure** of organizational communication. The Functional approach to structure asks questions about the repetitive patterns of interactions among members of the organization (networks), the use of a variety of channels for communication, message directions, and the amount of messages and the types of distortions that

can be expected to occur in organizational communication. In other words, the structure of organizational communication can be understood in terms of networks, channels, message directions, load, and distortion.

**Communication Networks****Networks**

Formal and informal patterns of communication that link organizational members together.

Communication **networks** are the formal and informal patterns of communication that link organizational members together. Networks can be described by how formally or informally they are organized, by the links between people, and by the roles people perform as they link.

**FIGURE 2.2 The Functional Approach***Organizing Messages*


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Rules and regulations  
 Organizational policies  
 Task definition  
 Task instruction  
 Task evaluation

*Relationship Messages*


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Individual role definition  
 Individual/organizational goals  
 Status symbols  
 Integration among supervisor/employees, peers

*Change Messages*


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Decision making  
 Market analysis  
 New idea processing  
 Environmental inputs  
 Employee suggestions  
 Problem solving

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Communication networks develop as a result of both formal organization and informal social contact. Organizations divide work by function and task. Organization charts that map out who reports to whom and in what area of responsibility can be described as blueprints for the way decisions are to be made, the way conflicts are to be resolved, and which groups are responsible for “networking” to reach organizational goals. The formal organization (as illustrated by the organization chart just mentioned) prescribes who has the right to tell others what to do, who is to work together as a unit or team, and who has the final authority in disagreements. In other words, the formal act of organizing creates organizational communication networks or the formal communication system.

As individuals work together, interpersonal relationships develop and extend beyond the specific requirements of the work group. Informal networks emerge, with individuals exchanging diverse types of information related both to the organization and to their social relationships. The organizational grapevine is perhaps the most frequently discussed example of an informal network.

Supervisors and employees, task forces, committees, quality circles, and other types of decision-making bodies are examples of formal communication networks. Formal networks also are established with various forms of technology such as computers and video systems. Generally speaking, these telemediated networks establish communication links that geographic separation would otherwise make difficult and costly. These new technologies change literally all aspects of formal and informal networks. Fluid and geographically diverse organizational structures link networks of individuals who may never meet in any

face-to-face interaction. Supervisors manage workers with whom they communicate only through technology. The around-the-clock organization of work creates networks of people who regularly interact with each other across time zones and vast distances.

Informal networks emerge as a result of formal networks and are formed by individuals who have interpersonal relationships, who exchange valuable information across reporting chains, and who disregard formal status and timing. Typically, informal networks exclude numerous individuals who are designated for network inclusion by the formal chain of command.

Formal and informal networks exist side by side; individuals maintain membership in both. Formal and informal networks contribute to organizational reality, and both networks change and shape organizational events. Message structure within organizations cannot be understood without evaluating how both formal and informal patterns of interaction take place.

Think about your own personal networks. What formal networks exist in the organizations of which you are a member? What types of networks exist in your school? How do you establish your informal networks? Which type of network is more meaningful to you? We are all involved in both formal and informal networks. When we evaluate our personal experiences, we can better understand how organizational networks function and how they contribute to the movement of organizing, relationship, and change messages.

## Communication Channels

### Channels

Means for the transmission of messages. Common means are face-to-face interaction, group meetings, memos, letters, computer-mediated exchanges, web sites, presentations, and teleconferencing.

**Channels** are the means for transmission of messages. Organizations typically have a wide variety of channels available for transmitting oral and written messages. Face-to-face interaction, group meetings, memos, letters, computer-mediated exchanges, web sites, presentations, and teleconferencing are among the channels commonly used in contemporary organizations. Increasing emphasis is placed on developing new and improved technical channels that speed information transfer and shorten decision-making response time. Indeed, it is fair to say the choice and availability of communication channels influence the way the organization can and does operate.

Questions arise as to the effectiveness of various channels and what is communicated by channel selection. Although most of us take channel use for granted, selecting one channel over another can communicate subtle and important attitudes about both the message receiver and the message itself. For example, most of us like to communicate good news in face-to-face interaction. We enjoy the reactions of others and deliberately choose channels that permit close, immediate contact. If the news is not positive, we may prefer another channel. Negative messages, more than good news, are likely to be transmitted in a less immediate channel such as letters or memos, the telephone, e-mail, or a third-party announcement. In fact, research suggests that our attitude about the message and our willingness to have contact with the receiver significantly influence the channels we use for communication.

Attitudes about messages and receivers are not the only factors that influence channel selection. Power and status, work requirements, technical capability, and judgments about channel effectiveness all contribute to the mode or modes we use. High-status organizational members, for example, can determine what channels they personally want to use

and what modes others must use in communicating with them. The president of the company can initiate face-to-face interaction with just about anyone in the organization. The chances are good, however, that not all organizational members can walk into the president's office for an unscheduled visit. In the Coronado case, Bill Drake can require the consultant to submit a report and recommendations in writing. Drake can require his sales and manufacturing people to meet with him and make detailed presentations of their ideas. It is unlikely that the consultant or the sales and manufacturing managers could make the same requirement of Bill Drake.

Bill Drake will be confronted with channel selection as he works on the defects problem. He will use internal channels, and once the problem is solved he must consider how to communicate to his customers. How would you advise Drake? Are particular channels more appropriate than others as he seeks to regain lost sales? Attempt to describe the criteria Drake should use for channel selection.

## Message Direction

### Direction

Description of the movement of messages in organizations based on authority or position levels of message senders and receivers; typically described as downward, upward, and horizontal communication.

As messages move through channels, we begin to think about that movement in terms of **direction**. Researchers typically describe three primary message directions in organizations: downward, upward, and horizontal. Downward communication describes message movement from a person in a position of authority to a subordinate or subordinate group. It is characterized by those with higher authority developing messages to transmit to those lower in authority, with authority being defined by the chain of command or the formal structure of the organization. We have downward communication, for example, when the board of regents for the univer-

sity votes to raise tuition for the upcoming semester. The board formally informs the school's president, who in turn informs officials in admissions and records; finally, students, who will pay the new fees, are advised of the bad news.

Upward communication describes message movement that begins with lower organizational levels and is transmitted to higher levels of authority. As with downward communication, the formal organization defines authority levels. Employees engage in upward communication when they complain about working conditions to a supervisor, who in turn reports their concerns to higher management.

Horizontal communication moves laterally across the organization among individuals of approximately the same level and without distinct reporting relationships to one another. In other words, horizontal flow occurs when various department heads come together to discuss common problems from their respective groups. This communication generally moves messages more quickly across the organization than if the messages were to follow the vertical chain of command.

Information flow cannot always be described in terms of specific direction. Informal network flow such as the grapevine and flow between organizational members and the organizational environment (i.e., customers, vendors, stockholders, regulators) may move both vertically and horizontally, all within the transmission of a single message. The call a salesperson makes to a customer does not specify a place in a single organizational hierarchy for either individual with regard to the other. Messages may move among people of different organizational authority levels and different organizations without the message

having anything to do with authority or reporting relationships. When the research engineer speculates about the feasibility of a new product with the head of the marketing department, they represent different authority levels. One is a manager and one is not. We do not, however, label that flow as up or down the chain of command because the exchange is about a subject not related to the authority of the two individuals. R. Wayne Pace (1983) described this interaction as cross-channel communication. Whether cross-channel or grapevine, informal network flow does not depend on formal organizational structure and is more difficult to describe in terms of specific message directions.

## Communication Load

The number of messages moving through the communication system is yet another important variable for describing the message structure of organizational communication. We commonly refer to the number of messages as communication **load**, or the volume, rate, and complexity of messages processed by an individual or the organization as a whole.

### Load

Number of messages moving through the communication system; commonly referred to as load, overload, and underload.

*Load* is a common term for most of us. In fact, it is a rare student who does not proclaim himself or herself to be in information overload during midterms or final examinations. The concept of load, however, is not limited to the overload state. Load, for example, can be defined as

the optimum or ideal volume, rate, and complexity of messages for a particular individual or organization. Underload is present when the volume, rate, and complexity of messages to an individual or organization are lower than the capacity of the individual or system. Underload is frequently found when individuals engage in routine, repetitive tasks that have been thoroughly learned and no longer present challenges. This situation leads to boredom and the underutilization of human potential. Overload, on the other hand, occurs when the volume, rate, and complexity of messages exceed the system's capacity. It generates stress and strains the capacity of individuals to deal with information. In fact, one of the continuing concerns of the information-rich society is that the ease with which we can use new technologies to process large volumes of messages generates a permanent overload in many jobs, a situation that actually impairs rather than strengthens the decision-making process.

## Message Distortion

### Distortion

Anything that contributes to alterations in meaning as messages move through the organization.

Closely related to the concept of load are the types of communication problems, or **distortions**, that occur as messages move throughout the organization. These distortions occur because of load, message direction, channel usage, and the very composition of the networks themselves. Put simply, distortions are those things that contribute to alterations in meaning

as messages move through the organization. Distortions are noise in the organizational communication system.

Organizational communication is characterized by the serial transmission of messages. Messages pass first to individuals as receivers, who then become senders of

information. Supervisors learn of changes in policies and have the responsibility to transmit those changes to an employee group. Messages are influenced by the numbers of people involved (the network), the channels for transmission (oral, written), and the direction of flow (vertical, horizontal, informal). Research consistently finds that original messages change or are distorted in the serial transmission process. Information is lost from or added to the message, the interpretation of facts changes, and new interpretations develop.

These distortions in serial transmission are brought about in part by perceptual differences among people, differences influenced by role and status. A manager may view a change in work hours as much less important than do the employees, who believe that no one was concerned about them when making the decision. The manager sees the change as necessary to accommodate a new schedule, whereas the workers are convinced the company never takes them into consideration. These perceptual differences affect the amount of attention given to the message and the interpretation of its meaning. They also influence the ability of the manager and members of the group to transmit the message to others. In addition to role, status, experience, values, and personal style, numerous other influences contribute to perception and how individuals knowingly or unknowingly distort organizational messages.

Finally, the very language of the message is subject to distortion. Definitions of terms and concepts vary throughout the organization. An excellent example of this phenomenon occurred in a small East Coast manufacturing company involved in introducing computer-assisted manufacturing processes. The president of the company announced the “entry of Cooper Manufacturing into the information age.”

Training classes were scheduled for all personnel working in areas where the new systems were being installed. Instead of the expected positive response, management was amazed when the director of personnel reported employee concern that the training programs were designed for people to fail and were really a way to push them out of jobs.

### **The Functional Approach: Summary of Essential Characteristics**

The Functional approach helps us understand organizational communication by describing **message function** and **structure**. Based on a view of organizations as complex communication systems, the Functional approach identifies **organizing, relationship, and change functions** for messages and describes message structure as the movement of messages through formal and informal **networks**. Network members use diverse **channels** that transmit messages in lateral, vertical, and less structured **directions**. The **load** of these messages on the networks is the capacity measure of the organizational communication system. Finally, the Functional approach suggests that all messages are subject to numerous and predictable types of **distortions**, distortions that affect both message movement and meaning.

Can you now answer the questions asked at the beginning of the chapter? Could you use the Functional approach to help advise Bill Drake about Coronado Manufacturing?

More important, can you describe your school as an organizational communication system?

## THE MEANING-CENTERED APPROACH

The second major approach for understanding organizational communication is the **Meaning-Centered approach**. This approach asks what communication is, not how and

### Meaning-Centered approach

Way of understanding organizational communication by discovering how organizational reality is generated through human interaction. The approach describes organizational communication as the process for generating shared realities that become organizing, decision making, sensemaking, influence, and culture.

why it works. The Meaning-Centered perspective is concerned with how organizational reality is generated through human interaction. As such, message purposes (functions) and message movement (structure) are secondary to understanding communication as the construction of shared realities (human interaction). Specifically, the Meaning-Centered approach describes organizational communication as the process for generating shared realities that become organizing, decision making, sensemaking, influence, and culture. Figure 2.3 summarizes key assumptions of the Meaning-Centered perspective.

Think back to Coronado Manufacturing. Proponents of the Meaning-Centered approach would have Bill Drake ask questions about which human interactions contributed to the shift away from the company's quality culture. They would encourage him to discover why his perception of the values of the company seem not to be shared in either manufacturing or sales. They would advise him to understand his present problem by reviewing Coronado's organizing and decision-making activities.

### FIGURE 2.3 Key Assumptions of the Meaning-Centered Approach

1. All ongoing human interaction is communication in one form or another.
2. Organizations exist through human interaction; structures and technologies result from the information to which individuals react.
3. Shared organizational realities reflect the collective interpretations by organizational members of all organizational activities.
4. Organizing and decision making are essentially communication phenomena.
5. Sensemaking combines action and interpretation.
6. Identification, socialization, communication rules, and power all are communication processes that reflect how organizational influence occurs.
7. Organizing, decision making, and influence processes describe the cultures of organizations by describing how organizations do things and how they talk about how they do things.
8. Organizational cultures and subcultures reflect the shared realities in the organization and how these realities create and shape organizational events.
9. Communication climate is the subjective, evaluative reaction of organization members to the organization's communication events, their reaction to organizational culture.

## Communication as Organizing and Decision Making

### Organizing

In Chapter 1 we described **organizing** as bringing order out of chaos and organizations as the products of the organizing process. The Meaning-Centered approach to organizational communication describes communicating and organizing as almost synonymous processes. Decision making, or the process of choice from among uncertain alternatives, also is viewed as essentially a communication phenomenon and part of the organizing process.

#### Organizing

Bringing order out of chaos with organizations as the products of the organizing process; described as almost synonymous with the communication process.

What do we mean when we say that communicating, organizing, and decision making are essentially similar processes? Karl Weick, in his important book, *The Social Psychology of Organizing* (1979), provides helpful insight for answering our questions. Weick proposes that organizations as such do not exist, but rather are in the process of existing

through ongoing human interaction. In other words, there is no such thing as an organization; there is only the ongoing interaction among human activities, interaction that continually creates and shapes events. As previously discussed, all ongoing human interaction is communication in one form or another.

The Weick perspective suggests that Coronado Manufacturing can be better understood as fifty years in the process of evolution rather than as an organization that was founded and structured fifty years ago. Bill Drake's father and uncle initiated the ongoing process, and Drake is part of the continuing stream of interactions. Put another way, the Weick model contends that organizations do not exist apart from the human interactions of members. As Weick has described, communication is "the substance of organizing."

Weick focuses on the organizational environment as the communication links and messages that are the basis of human interaction. He is not as concerned with the physical or technical structure of organizations as he is with the information to which individuals react. Weick contends that human reactions "enact" organizational environments through information exchanges and the active creation of meanings. This creation or enactment of organizational environments differs among individuals, resulting in multiple and diverse meanings and interpretations. Weick explains that organizational members use rules and communication cycles to continually process what he calls "equivocal" messages or messages susceptible to varying interpretations. Organizational rules are the relatively stable procedures or known processes that guide organizational behavior. In Coronado's case, the processing of a sales request has some fairly specific procedures for internal communication response. These rules (procedures) can be used as guidance for most inquiries. The defects problem is not as well defined. Communication cycles—conversations among those involved with the problem—become important to reduce the equivocality of the Coronado problem. Weick describes the use of rules and communication cycles as "selection" processes or the use of selected information to reduce uncertainty. Selected rules and communication cycles, however, will vary in their effectiveness for actually reducing equivocality. When the selection process is effective, Weick proposes individuals engage in "retention" to literally save rules and cycles for future guidance. Weick describes this retained information as causal maps used to make sense of future equivocality. Weick concludes that the main goal of the process of organizing is an attempt to reduce equivocality—ambiguity—in order to predict future responses to organizational behaviors.

Supervisors reduce equivocality for their employees by the organizing of work assignments and the communication of task requirements. The supervisor gives an employee an assignment (desired action); the employee attempts the assignment (response); the supervisor evaluates the assignment (feedback). This interaction reduces equivocality for both the supervisor and the employee. The supervisor understands what the employee believed the assignment to be by evaluating what was accomplished. The feedback to the employee (often in the form of rewards or punishment) reduces uncertainty about the adequacy of the performance. This cycle—repeated at all organizational levels—is the organizing process.

Bill Drake is processing equivocal messages. He is attempting to determine if the consultant's report is accurate. He is more concerned with the effect of quality defects than specific technical problems. Even if assembly-line improvements are needed, it is through human communication that problems will be identified and solved. Drake does not understand how the company values of quality and customer service have changed. He is uncomfortable with the equivocality (ambiguity) of his interactions with sales and manufacturing management. He needs to figure out what his alternatives are and what to do next.

### Decision making

Process of choosing from among numerous alternatives; the part of the organizing process necessary for directing behaviors and resources toward organizational goals.

### Decision Making

The process of choosing from among numerous alternatives—**decision making**—is the organizing process of directing behaviors and resources toward organizational goals. Decision making, as with other organizing efforts, is accomplished primarily through communication. Decision making is the process in which Bill Drake and his staff must engage.

A practical example helps to illustrate decision making as an organizing process. When you work with a group of students on a major class project, one of your goals may be a high grade from your instructor. There are numerous ways to approach this goal. Choosing from among these alternatives (decision making) is the first step toward assigning individual responsibilities within the project and deciding what resources the group will need (organizing). This choosing or decision making results from the communication interactions of the group. The quality of the group's decisions will influence the quality of the project and whether the group reaches its goals.

What influences the way this decision making occurs? Each member of the group brings different experiences, abilities, and expectations to the group. Each member operates with a set of premises or propositions about what he or she believes to be true. Decision making is the attempt to merge these individual premises into more general ones (shared realities) that most members of the group can accept.

Think for a moment about a group of students working on an assignment. One student may operate from the premise that group projects are not worth much time and effort. Others may believe that the project is important for the course grade and needs careful planning and attention. Another may believe that his or her idea for the topic is superior. These premises (propositions about what is true) influence individual behavior and the types of alternatives the group will consider. Also, some members may identify (experience a sense of "we") with the efforts of the group, whereas others may feel no sense of belonging or commitment. Those individuals who identify with one another are more likely to attempt a

decision that most members of the group believe is appropriate than are those members who identify elsewhere.

Organizational decision making is the process that sets in motion much of the “doing” of the organization. Decision making reduces message equivocality by choosing from among numerous alternatives. These choosing activities occur through human communication.

## Communication as Influence

### Influence

Organizational and individual attempts to persuade; frequently seen in organizational identification, socialization, communication rules, and power.

The Meaning-Centered approach proposes that **influence** is a necessary process for creating and changing organizational events. In other words, who and what are viewed as influential, the way people seek to influence others, and how people respond to influence all contribute to organizing and decision making. Questions about the influence process in organizations focus on how individuals identify with their organizations, how organizations attempt to socialize members, how communication rules

emerge to direct behavior, and how power is used. Identification, socialization, communication rules, and power all are essentially communication processes that help us understand how organizational influence occurs. From the Meaning-Centered perspective, the influence process is fundamental to the development of shared organizational realities and ultimately to creating and shaping organizational events. Indeed, it is fair to say that from a Meaning-Centered approach organizational communication is the process through which organizational influence takes place.

## Identification

### Identity

Relatively stable characteristics, including core beliefs, values, attitudes, preferences, decisional premises, and more that make up the self.

### Identification

Dynamic social process by which identities are constructed; includes perceptions of a sense of belonging. Usually associated with the belief that individual and organizational goals are compatible.

We all come to organizational experiences with a sense of self, or our personal **identity** or identities. Our identity can be described as relatively stable characteristics that include our core beliefs, values, attitudes, preferences, and decisional premises. We are more likely to be receptive to influence attempts in organizations with which we identify or have a sense of “we” or belonging. **Identification** or the lack of it results from the identity or identities we bring to our organizational experiences and from a variety of organizational relationships (supervisors, peers, employees). As such, identification can be understood as an active process to which both individuals and organizations contribute.

Most organizations encourage members to identify with the organization. Chances are that when you entered school you were encouraged to join various organizations, attend sporting functions, and oppose your school’s most important rivals. Although most of these activities are enjoyable in and of themselves, they also develop a sense of “we” with the school. This sense of “we” means that our school’s interests become our own and are influential in choices.

It is likely that when people perceive the goals of an organization as compatible with their individual goals, they identify with the organization. The person who identifies is likely

to accept the organization's decisional premises or reasoning. We can therefore say that the person who identifies is more likely to be positively influenced by the organization. An employee, for example, is more likely to be persuaded that a need for operating changes is favorable if the employee identifies with the organization and his or her supervisor. On the other hand, the employee who does not identify with the organization may view the same decision with resistance and suspicion. As organizations face increasing challenges to change, the issue of identification as influence takes on particular importance. Specifically, all organizational members must be concerned not only with the positive aspects of identification but also with the potential limitations of identification if influential relationships contribute to a suspension of critical thinking. Practically speaking, we can all see how identification works by looking at our personal and organizational lives. The chances are that we are more likely to be influenced by individuals and groups with whom we feel a strong sense of "we" than by those with whom we feel no such relationship.

## Socialization

### Socialization

Active organizational attempts to help members learn appropriate behaviors, norms, and values.

### Anticipatory socialization

Pre-entry information about the organization and the anticipated work role.

### Encounter socialization

Early organizational experiences reducing uncertainty about all aspects of organizational life.

### Metamorphosis socialization

Initial mastery of basic skills and information and adjustments to organizational life.

Closely associated with identification is the influence process of **socialization**, or active organizational attempts to help members learn appropriate behaviors, norms, and values. The socialization process attempts to help new members understand how their interests overlap with those of the organization.

Socialization efforts frequently are categorized in phases or stages: **anticipatory socialization**, **encounter socialization**, and **metamorphosis socialization**. Anticipatory socialization begins before individuals enter organizations and results from past work experiences and interactions with family, friends, and institutions such as schools, churches, or social organizations. Anticipatory socialization is shaped by pre-entry information about the organization and the anticipated work role. Anticipatory socialization is the readiness an individual brings to the "reality shock" of organizational entry. Anticipatory socialization also includes what individuals learn about particular organizations prior to entry. The employment interview is an important example. Organizational representatives conducting interviews provide important socialization information while assessing the potential fit of the candidate to the organization. In addition, interviews are important opportunities for individuals to determine whether their expectations match their perceptions of the expectations of the organization.

The encounter stage for socialization involves new employee training, supervisor coaching, peer groups, and formal organizational documents. Newcomers learn tasks, develop relationships, and reduce uncertainty about most aspects of organizational life. The encounter phase includes social activities, messages about performance proficiency, and other experiences that contribute to learning about the organization.

Finally, the metamorphosis phase of socialization occurs when the newcomer begins to master basic organizational requirements and adjusts to the organization. The phases, however, should be considered only general descriptions of the socialization process with

full realization that differences in individuals and influence attempts generate very different socialization experiences.

Generally speaking, during socialization processes individuals learn role-related information and organizational culture information. Presumably, as with the identification process, the greater the degree of socialization, the more likely individuals will respond favorably to organizational persuasion. In fact, little doubt remains that socialization relates to organizational commitment, decision making, perceptions of communications climate, and overall job satisfaction.

## Communication Rules

### Communication rules

General prescriptions about appropriate communication behaviors in particular settings. Thematic rules are general prescriptions of behavior reflecting the values and beliefs of the organization, whereas tactical rules prescribe specific behaviors as related to more general themes.

**Communication rules** are general prescriptions about appropriate communication behaviors in particular settings. Rules operate to influence behavior, are specific enough to be followed, and occur in particular contexts. In other words, communication rules are informal norms about what type of communication is desirable in a particular organization. Rules tell us, for example, whether disagreement is encouraged or discouraged, how we are expected to contribute our ideas, and whether we should ask for a raise or never mention the subject of salary in a particular situation. Rules aid in socialization and are therefore likely to be used by those high in organizational identification, those who want to exhibit a sense of “we” with the organization. Generally, rules are

learned through informal communication such as organizational stories, rituals, and myths.

Communication rules are of two general types, thematic and tactical. Thematic rules are general prescriptions of behavior reflecting the values and beliefs of the organization. Tactical rules prescribe specific behaviors as related to more general themes. Several tactical rules may evolve from one general thematic rule. A major Midwest computer company has a strong thematic rule of “Communicate your commitment to the company.” Several tactical rules have developed that relate to that theme, such as “Come in on Saturday to finish up, but make sure you tell someone,” “Complain about how tough the challenge really is,” and “Use the term *family* to refer to the company.” These examples illustrate the contextual nature of thematic and tactical rules. Although the preceding statements are not only acceptable but also desirable in one particular company, they make little or no sense outside that context. Compliance with thematic and tactical rules indicates that an individual has received socializing information and identifies, at least to some extent, with the organization.

### Structuration

Production and reproduction of social systems via the application of generative rules and resources in interaction.

Marshall Scott Poole and Robert McPhee (1983) and Poole, David Seibold, and McPhee (1985) add the dimension of **structuration** when they contend that structurational rules theory provides a dynamic view of communication rules where diverse rule sets emerge through complex formal and informal interactions. Structurational theory further proposes that rules not only influence behavior but also are influenced by members’ conceptions of appropriate behaviors. Poole and McPhee (1983) explain:

Structuration refers to the production and reproduction of social systems via the application of generative rules and resources in interaction. For example, the status hierarchy in a work group is an observable system. The structure underlying this system consists of rules, such as norms about who takes problems to the boss, and resources, such as a special friendship with the boss or seniority. The status system exists because of the constant process of structuration in which rules and resources are both the medium and outcome of interaction. Members use rules and resources to maintain their places or to attempt to rise in the hierarchy; the structure of rules and resources thus produces the status system. (p. 210)

We expand our understanding of communication rules when we discuss communication as culture.

## Power

### Power

Attempts to influence another person's behavior to produce desired outcomes. The process occurs through communication and is related to resources, dependencies, and alternatives.

An additional communication dynamic that influences behavior is the use of power. In its most general sense, **power** has been defined as an attempt to influence another person's behavior to produce desired outcomes. As such, *power* is a neutral term subject to positive use as well as abuse. The power process occurs through communication and relates to resources, dependencies, and alternatives.

A resource is something owned or controlled by an individual, group, or entire organization. Resources are materials, information, knowledge, money, and a variety of other possible assets. Either owning or controlling resources allows individuals or organizations to influence interactions with others. A manager may control budget allocations within a department. Individual department members control important technical information not known to the manager. Both are resources influential in interactions between the manager and employees. Resources are closely linked to alternatives. A resource is more valuable if few alternatives to the use of the resource are available. Generally speaking, the individual controlling scarce resources is in a more influential (higher-power) position than the individual who controls resources with ample alternatives.

Although it is an outmoded notion, many believe power is a fixed commodity rather than a process of human interaction. In other words, many individuals behave as if the more power they have, the less is left for others. In reality, power is not a commodity but an influence process that permits all involved to gain more power, lose power, or share power. Therefore, when influence attempts result in abuse, evidence suggests that we will seek other alternatives and lessen our dependency on the power abuser. Communication between supervisors and employees can illustrate this phenomenon. Supervisors and employees both have resources. The supervisor has the formal authority established by the chain of command. The supervisor controls information flow and performance evaluation. Employees control technical performance and have vital firsthand information about the progress of work. Both are dependent on each other; the supervisor directs, but without compliance and performance, no work is accomplished. If the supervisor becomes abusive in directing the work, an employee group may seek other alternatives by withdrawing from interaction with the supervisor or withholding information the supervisor needs to make good decisions. At an extreme the employee group may complain to others in management, transfer to other

departments, or leave the organization. Power is one of the central issues we discuss in the Emerging Perspectives section of this chapter.

## Communication as Culture

### Culture

Unique sense of the place that organizations generate through ways of doing and ways of communicating about the organization; reflects the shared realities and shared practices in the organization and how they create and shape organizational events.

Organizing, decision making, and influence processes, when taken together, help us describe the **culture** of organizations by describing how organizations do things and how they talk about how they do things. Put another way, organizational culture is the unique sense of the place that organizations generate through ways of doing and ways of communicating about the organization. Organizational culture reflects the shared realities and shared practices in the organization and how these realities create and shape organizational events. Organizational culture is the unique symbolic common ground that becomes the self-definitions or self-images of the organization.

Metaphors help us understand the differences between the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches to organizational cultures. Metaphors are ways of describing the likeness of one concept or person to another concept or person by speaking of the first as if it were the second. We say “She is the life of the party” or “He is the salt of the earth.” Managers are referred to as quarterbacks, coaches, or lions in battle, with organizational decisions described as game or battle plans. These metaphors give us underlying assumptions for understanding behavior or concepts based on our knowledge of what we say something is like. We use our knowledge of what quarterbacks do, for example, to understand what managers do (a common metaphor supporting a bias toward male managers). We use the metaphor of a string quartet to explain excellence in teamwork based on the varying talents of individual contributors. Organization-wide metaphors used for the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches work in much the same way.

When we described the Functional approach to organizational communication, we talked about communication systems with inputs, throughput, and outputs. We described subsystems, suprasystems, and boundaries to external environments. We were using the organic metaphor of the dynamic system taken from the study of biology for conceptualizing or understanding organizational communication. The systems metaphor provided a distinct and descriptive set of assumptions about the way organizational communication works. Culture, in the systems metaphor, is one of many organizational variables.

In the Meaning-Centered approach the cultural metaphor replaces the systems metaphor of the Functional approach. This culture metaphor describes communication as culture rather than describing culture and communication as separate entities. The culture metaphor promotes understanding communication as a process for generating shared realities and practices that in turn we call organizational culture.

When culture is used as a metaphor for organizational communication, we attempt to understand communication by understanding the uniqueness or shared realities in particular organizations. We explore how organizations use language, the symbols, jargon, and specialized vocabulary used by people working together. We examine behaviors exhibited in rituals and rites of organizational life and listen for the general standards or values of the organization as described in stories, legends, and reminiscences. We focus on how communication activities generate uniqueness or symbolic common ground. There is a danger,

however, in oversimplifying culture as a single set of commonly held values, beliefs, actions, practices, rules, and dialogues mutually supported by all organizational members. In reality, organizations commonly reflect subcultural consensus and even lack of consensus about values, beliefs, actions, practices, rules, and dialogues. Embedded in this notion of culture as a metaphor for organizational communication is a view of organizations as dynamic, continually changing, and meaning-producing bodies.

Members of organizations working together communicate to create the activity and practice of the organization and to interpret the meaning of that activity and practice. Observing who is involved in important decisions, how influence takes place, and how people treat one another helps in understanding the “uniqueness” of an organization. Words, actions, artifacts, routine practices, and texts are the regular communication interactions among organizational members that generate uniqueness or culture(s). Differences in the cultural knowledge organizational members possess can lead to subcultures and use of cultural information for personal benefit. For example, longer-term organizational members may provide cultural information to newcomers, or they may choose to withhold that information making organizational entry difficult. Communication provides organizational members with similar experiences and realities (if not similar levels of agreement and values about experiences and realities). In this dynamic view of culture as communication, these realities are constantly subject to change as organizational members react to new information and circumstances.

Whether personal, task, social, or organizational, rituals help define what is important or the values of the culture and provide a communication process to transmit those values. Awards ceremonies, Friday afternoon get-togethers, graduation, and numerous daily routines are all rituals that both provide regularity and signify importance in organizational life.

Organizational storytelling infuses passion or interest into everyday activities. Stories generate a sense of history about organizational existence and identify values through descriptions of success and failure. In the Coronado case, stories about the founders transmitted important information about the Coronado values of quality and customers. The Meaning-Centered approach suggests that Coronado’s manufacturing problem partly can be described in terms of a shift in culture or values.

Bill Drake must understand the communication interactions that have contributed to a change at Coronado in terms of what constitutes quality. Stories about his father and uncle have not been sufficient to maintain the earlier focus on customers. Can you suggest ways he might find out? How can his perception of the values of Coronado be different from that of others in the company? What should Drake do to determine what the culture of Coronado Manufacturing really is?

### **Communication climate**

Reaction to the organization’s culture; consists of collective beliefs, expectations, and values regarding communication that are generated as organizational members continually evaluate their interactions with others.

### **Communication Climate**

The culture of an organization describes the unique sense of the place, its practices, and how that organization describes itself. The reaction to an organization’s culture is the organization’s **communication climate**.

We are used to thinking of climate in geographic terms. We think about temperature, humidity, winds, and rainfall and react somewhat subjectively to what we believe is a desirable climate. So it is with a climate for communication. The climate is a subjective reaction to organization members' perceptions of communication events. The subjective reaction is shared to a great extent by either individual groups or the entire organization.

Think for a moment about the culture of your school. By now you probably have learned the ropes and know how things are supposed to work. You know who holds power, what some of the rituals are, and how socializing generally takes place. You can describe the unique sense of the place to others, but your description does not necessarily tell whether you think it is a good place. Your attitude—climate evaluation—is your reaction to the culture, not a description of the culture itself.

Identify the organizations of which you are a member. How would you describe their climate? How does a positive view of climate influence your behavior? What are the differences when your view is negative?

### **The Meaning-Centered Approach: Summary of Essential Characteristics**

The **Meaning-Centered approach** to organizational communication understands communication as a complex process that creates and shapes organizational events. As such, communication is **organizing, decision making, influence, and culture**. Organizing is viewed as an ongoing process of human interactions attempting to reduce message equivocality. Decision making is part of organizing and is the process responsible for moving individuals and resources toward accomplishment of organizational goals. Influence is the process in which individuals and organizations engage to generate desired behaviors and is therefore closely related to organizing and decision making. Culture, as a metaphor for organizational communication, is the unique sense of a place that reflects the way things are done and how people talk about the way things are done. Finally, communication climate is the subjective reaction to the communication events that contribute to uniqueness or culture. The Meaning-Centered approach makes only limited distinctions among organizing, decision making, influence, and culture. All are seen as processes of communication, and all help us understand how organizations create and shape events through human interaction.

Now return to the beginning of the chapter. Can you answer each of the questions about the Meaning-Centered approach? How does it differ from the Functional approach? What are the similarities? Earlier you described the communication system of your school. Now describe the culture of your school. Are there particular stories or rituals that come to mind? What are the communication rules?

## **EMERGING PERSPECTIVES**

Emerging Perspectives for organizational communication critique and challenge many of the basic assumptions and interpretations found in the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches and provide important value propositions for our consideration. In the next

section of this chapter we introduce the concept of communication as a constitutive process and describe three approaches—postmodernism, critical theory, and feminist theory—as important perspectives for the study of organizational communication.

The rising interest in postmodernism, critical theory, and feminist theory can be understood when we consider the magnitude and rate of change in almost all aspects of our lives and the failure of more traditional approaches to guide our uncertainty. Organizations are increasing in size and complexity, with communications technologies changing even the most basic of organizational processes. Globalization both influences organizing processes and changes the very nature of work itself. Almost simultaneously we experience the influence of mass culture and the fact that fewer and fewer of us use similar information sources. In addition, our awareness of issues of diversity, difference, and marginalization grows. Put simply, this current time of turbulence and rapid change has given rise to a contemporary context in which new questions and new challenges are important for understanding our organizational lives.

### Communication as Constitutive Process

#### Constitutive process

Communication seen as a process of meaning development and social production of perceptions, identities, social structures, and affective responses.

Stanley Deetz (1992) helps us understand the concept of communication as **constitutive process** when he suggests: “Communication cannot be reduced to an informational issue where meanings are assumed to be already existing, but must be seen as a process of meaning development and social production of perceptions, identities, social structures, and affective responses” (p. 4). Deetz suggests that we move beyond Functional concerns for message production and transfer and the Meaning-Centered

issues of “realities” and cultures to a fundamental view of communication that constitutes or brings about self and social environments. Communication is not synonymous with organizing, decision making, and influence but is better understood as the process that literally produces organizing, decision making, and influence.

This view of communication as a constitutive process and the call for more participative communication processes can be seen in each of the three approaches to the study of organizational communication that follow. Additionally, we describe emerging discussions of institutions, global cultures, and technology as they relate to organizational communication. We begin with the postmodern perspective.

### Postmodernism and Organizational Communication

#### Postmodernism

Theoretical perspectives representing an alienation from the past, skepticism about authority structures, ambiguity of meanings, and mass culture.

The term **postmodernism** has been variously defined and hotly debated in fields as diverse as architecture, film, education, philosophy, sociology, and communication. Generally referring to perspectives that reject former notions of authority and power, stability of meanings, and concepts of effectiveness, postmodernism has become known as theoretical perspectives that represent an alienation from the past, skepticism about authority structures, ambiguity of meanings, and mass culture. Historical

modernism is viewed as preceding postmodernity in time and experience, with postmodernism presenting challenges to the established traditions of modernism.

Postmodern theorists reject the claims of the Functional and Meaning-Centered perspectives as overly simplistic and lacking in understanding of a world characterized by rapid change, multiple meanings, and pervasive ambiguity. The notion of grand master narratives—stories with broad application and explanatory power (e.g., principles of scientific management or prescriptions for strong cultures) are replaced by the micronarratives of individual organization members. Postmodern theorists look at individual behaviors without implying relationships to underlying values, assumptions, and rationales. In particular, postmodern organizational communication seeks to understand how multiple meanings and multiple interpretations of organizational events influence multiple and diverse behaviors.

### **Deconstruction**

Refers to the examination of taken-for-granted assumptions, the examination of the myths we use to explain how things are the way they are, and the uncovering of the interests involved in socially constructed meanings.

**Deconstruction** is the method of postmodern analysis. Put simply, deconstruction refers to the examination of taken-for-granted assumptions, the examination of the myths we use to explain how things are the way they are, and the uncovering of the interests involved in socially constructed meanings. The value base of postmodern organizational communication rests with shared power, concepts of empowerment and interdependence, and multiple interpretations of everyday events.

Postmodern analysis challenges traditional notions of rationality and, as such, rejects many of the tenets of the Functional approach as well as the emphasis on shared realities in the Meaning-Centered perspective.

What can Bill Drake learn from the postmodern perspective? Are individual behaviors in his management team contributing to multiple meanings about what he should know or about what should be communicated between sales and manufacturing? Has he been taking for granted the assumption that his team agrees that the customer is number one? Does he need to deconstruct his own myths about how things are? Although admittedly complex in its propositions and concepts, postmodern organizational communication analysis provides additional useful ways for Bill Drake to ask questions about the communication in Coronado Manufacturing.

## **Critical Theory and Organizational Communication**

### **Critical theory**

Focuses attention on studies of power and abuses of power through communication and organization.

**Critical theory** focuses our attention on studying power and abuses of power through communication and organization. As Deetz (2001) explains:

The central goal of critical theory in organizational communication studies has been to create a society and workplaces that are free from domination and where all members can contribute equally to produce systems that meet human needs and lead to the progressive development of all. (p. 26)

### **Hegemony**

Process of control based on a dominant group leading others to believe that their subordination is the norm.

The critical theory approach depicts organizations as systems in which power is hidden from ready observation and examination and is maintained through legitimate controls over employees. This notion of pervasive power that is not visible or overt and is generally accepted based on our myths of “how things came to be” is called **hegemony**.

Hegemony is a process of control based on a dominant group leading others to believe that their subordination is normal or the norm. Hegemony implies to some (but not all) critical theorists that certain people in organizations are oppressed even when they do not recognize their experience as such. This perspective is in direct contradiction to both the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches, which rely heavily on overt communication actions and practices.

For critical theorists, power and communication are closely intertwined. Power is exercised through communication and power influences communication rules and structures. Dennis Mumby (1987) characterized organizational power controls as domination based on getting people to organize their behavior around particular rule systems. Legitimate control emerges through stories, myths, rituals, and a variety of other symbolic forms. These forms in turn become the rules that prescribe appropriate behavior. This “legitimate” yet hidden exercise of power can contribute to the suspension of critical thinking.

As Deetz (2001) describes:

While organizations could be positive social institutions providing forums for the articulation and resolution of important group conflicts over the use of natural resources, distribution of income, production of desirable goods and services, the development of personal qualities, and the direction of society, various forms of power and domination have led to skewed decision making and fostered social harms and significant waste and inefficiency. (p. 26)

Critical theory helps us ask questions about how we can change and reform organizational practices to better represent a variety of stakeholders with competing interests.

Distinctions between postmodern and critical approaches generally focus on differences in approach to organizational understandings. Specifically, postmodern approaches emphasize deconstruction and the unmasking of myths and assumptions to open up the possibility of new understandings and new processes. Critical approaches, on the other hand, use value-laden ideological critiques to demonstrate domination and to produce opposition.

What questions should Bill Drake ask using critical theory? Are there hidden power struggles contributing to the defects problem? Is someone or a group of people attempting to silence others in order to keep problems from Drake? How can he know? Is there something wrong in the organization that is more important than the defects problem? Bill Drake would be well advised to think about potential power abuses as he evaluates the problems he faces.

## Feminist Perspectives and Organizational Communication

### Feminist theory

Focuses on the marginalization and domination of women in the workplace and the valuing of women’s voices in all organizational processes.

**Feminist theory** focuses on the marginalization and domination of women in the workplace and the valuing of women’s voices in all organizational processes. Although diverse in perspective and approaches, feminist theory generally attempts to move our society beyond patriarchal forms and social practices by critiquing power relationships that devalue women.

Judi Marshall (1993) describes male forms as the norms to which organizational members adapt. She proposes that the male principle can be characterized as self-assertion, separation, independence, control, competition, focused perception, rationality, analysis, clarity, discrimination, and activity. The female principle is described as interdependence, cooperation, receptivity, merging, acceptance, awareness of patterns, wholes, and synthesizing. Although males and females can access both types of values, evidence exists that females in organizations adapt to male norms while being evaluated against female stereotypes. Marshall concludes, "The male domination of cultures goes largely unrecognized in organizational life and in mainstream organizational theory."

Patrice Buzzanell (1994) describes feminist organizational communication theorizing as discussing "the moral commitment to investigate the subordinated, to focus on gendered interactions in ordinary lives, and to explore the standpoints of women who have been rendered invisible by their absence in theory and research." Buzzanell discusses how gender is socially constructed and enacted in organizations with messages, structures, and practices becoming the contexts for gender construction and negotiation. Organizational communication is therefore the focal process for this construction and negotiation.

Buzzanell (1994) examines three traditional themes in organizational writings—competitive individualism, cause-effect/linear thinking, and separation or autonomy—and contrasts them to feminist organizational communication theory. The ethic of competitive individualism creates organizational winners and losers based on competition and a need to excel over others. This competitive ethic typically casts women in the role of the "other," whereas stereotypical expectations and behaviors cast women as "losers." Buzzanell contrasts the competitive ethic with the cooperative enactment of organizations in which opportunities exist to understand how women translate the cooperative ethic into talk and behavior. She calls for understanding how people communicate in cooperative-oriented and feminist-based organizations and contrasting that talk with how people communicate in competitively driven groups.

The second theme, cause-effect/linear thinking, is based on the superiority in traditional society of the rational, direct, and solution-oriented. Feminist organizational communication theory asks questions about alternatives and explores the double binds created for women who are negatively sanctioned for adopting the scientific male style and who also are devalued for choosing stereotypical feminine communication patterns.

The third theme, separation and autonomy, is based on socialization practices that urge men to become separate and autonomous through action, work, and status; women, by contrast, are socialized for nurturing, being attractive, following authority, and being well liked. Feminist organizational communication theory offers the potential to examine the consequences of these socialized differences for both men and women. Feminist theory explores the importance of integrating emotion in communication theory while promoting discussions of developing the authentic self.

When discussing the Meaning-Centered approach, we discussed organizational socialization or attempts by organizations to help members learn appropriate behaviors, norms, and values. Connie Bullis (1993) uses feminist theory to develop an alternative perspective. Bullis describes why it is important to consider how socialization practices can construct women as marginalized others. Bullis challenges us to think about voices marked as outsiders, unsocialized, uncommitted, disloyal, absentee, unemployable, or dropouts. In later

work, Bullis and Karen Stout (1996) raise important questions about socialization processes that function both to marginalize as well as socialize. Think for a moment about your own experiences. Have you ever considered yourself marginalized? If so, what were the communication experiences contributing to this feeling? If not, can you identify examples of times when others may have been excluded during socialization communication? We continue our discussion of important Emerging Perspectives in Chapter 3.

Feminist theory can assist Bill Drake in asking questions about whether all managers are being heard. Have important voices been discounted, contributing to his current problems? Has he mistakenly assumed that all good ideas and inputs were equally valued? Although we cannot know the answers without more details of the case, we can see how these questions give Bill Drake additional ways to understand Coronado's problems.

## Institutions and Organizational Communication

### Institutions

High-prestige organizations; process, practice, or groupings of similar organizations that are prominent parts of our environments; relatively stable traditions, practices, standards, customs, rules, and laws.

Both the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches have been criticized for focusing too intensely on single organizations without adequate regard to influences in the larger environment. A discussion of **institutions** and organizational communication has begun as a partial answer to this criticism. The definitions of institutions vary. The word *institution* is sometimes used interchangeably with the term *organization*. A particular high-prestige organization may be referred to as an institution in its field. Institution sometimes refers to what John Lammers and Joshua Barbour (2006) describe as

supraorganizational entities or governing bodies such as the economy, the state, or a religion. A given level of aggregation has been said to be the institutional level (e.g., contrasted with the individual, group, or organizational levels). The traditional professions, such as medicine, law, and clergy, are sometimes referred to as institutions. Institution has also been used to describe specific customs and practices (e.g., the institution of marriage) as well as rules and laws (e.g., the institution of criminal justice). (p. 358)

In other words, institutions provide our environments relatively stable traditions, practices, standards, customs, rules, and laws.

If institutions are more permanent and established than individual organizations, the question becomes: how does an organization or groups of organizations, processes, or practices become institutionalized? Based on the work of Pamela Tolbert and Lynne Zucker (1996), Tim Kuhn (2005) describes a process of institutionalization which involves innovation, habitualization, objectification, and sedimentation. Organizational communication is fundamental in this description of the institutionalization process. Tolbert and Zucker and later Kuhn describe the process of institutionalization as beginning when an innovation or new understanding enters a field of practice, organization, or related group of organizations. In order for the innovation to be sustained, the habitualization phase must occur, whereby the innovation becomes part of patterned approaches to problem solving usually used by a limited set of individuals who have contact with each other across organizations.

The Internet provides a useful example. The needs in the scientific and military communities for the transmission, retrieval, and linkage across time and space of large volumes of information gave rise to what today we call the Internet. The communication and technological advances occurred over several decades with the initial protocols and uses of the emerging technology primarily reserved for academics, scientists, and a lesser number of military personnel. Once the introduction of the innovation was stabilized and habitualization among this somewhat limited group occurred, the objectification phase rapidly emerged.

The objectification phase is characterized by social consensus about the value of the innovation often based on limited knowledge about the specifics of the innovation but agreement that based on convincing arguments of merit the innovation has significant potential. Once this legitimacy has been established the sedimentation phase occurs. Sedimentation refers to the spread of the innovation and its persistence over time. Likely everyone reading this book would agree that the Internet has become an institution of our time and vital to the subject of our study, organizational communication.

In further explanation of the importance of institutions, Lammers and Barbour suggest institutions bring us observable routines that go across many settings or organizations. For example, the school you currently attend is in many ways unique; yet, many routine practices in your school can be found in similar schools throughout the world. Your school is part of the institution of education. Lammers and Barbour also suggest institutions manifest beliefs, which influence decisions and choices that individuals make. You probably have beliefs defining a good school based not only on the school you attend but also on what you know about the institution of education in general.

Lammers and Barbour note that institutions are established through associations among people and are characterized by low rates of change with fixed and enduring qualities, often formalized with specific rules for conduct and specific prescriptions for rational purpose and how to get things done. This institutional perspective suggests that understanding organizational communication in specific circumstances must be informed by understanding the broader institutional context in which specific organizations and individuals find themselves. What does an institutional perspective mean for Bill Drake? Is it possible that his personal institutional influences differ significantly from others on his management team? In some respects Bill Drake must deal with the fact that “quality” is no longer as institutionalized at Coronado as he would like. How would you advise him using an institutional perspective?

### **Global cultures**

Regional or country-specific societal values and practices including core dimensions such as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation.

## **Global Cultures and Organizational Communication**

Most of us are aware of a myriad of changes, usually referred to as globalization, that emerging communications technologies have made possible for both individuals and organizations. Fewer of us have been exposed to the profound cultural differences influencing organizational communication for a global workforce. Robert House, Paul Hanges, Mansour Javidan, Peter Dorfman, and Vipin Gupta (2004) led a ten-year study of sixty-two societies to describe varying values and practices related to functioning in a world of global collaborations. This massive study included 170 social scientists and management scholars from

around the world with 17,300 participants in 951 organizations. It identified nine core dimensions of **global cultures**: uncertainty avoidance, power distance, institutional collectivism, in-group collectivism, gender egalitarianism, assertiveness, future orientation, performance orientation, and humane orientation. The differences here can be profound and create differences in how individuals and groups may approach global collaborations. For example, societies with higher uncertainty avoidance will have a tendency to formalize their interactions with others, exhibiting low tolerance for breaking rules and showing stronger resistance to change. On the other hand, societies with lower uncertainty avoidance tend to be more informal in their interactions with others, exhibiting tolerance for breaking rules and supporting more change. It is relatively easy to imagine how working with these differences can challenge collaborators across cultures.

The value of assertiveness provides another excellent example. Societies valuing high assertiveness tend to favor dominant, tough behavior with an emphasis on success and progress. Societies with low assertiveness values view dominant and tough behavior as socially unacceptable and favor people and relationships over success and progress. High-assertiveness cultures tend to value direct and unambiguous communication, whereas lower-assertiveness cultures favor speaking indirectly and emphasizing “face-saving.”

There is no innate right or wrong in the ranges of cultural values, but the differences have the potential to influence collaborations across cultures with particular emphasis on power relationships, treatment of others, and marginalization of voices lower in dominance. It is fair to say that global cultural differences affect all of the basic assumptions we use as we work in increasingly diverse environments. In our Coronado case, Bill Drake does not have to deal with global differences. Think for a moment how much more complicated his problem might be if his customers were global and his manufacturing units were in several different countries.

## **Technology and Organizational Communication**

Emerging communication technologies influence organizational structure, processing of information, interactions among work groups, interactions with customers, the speed of work, information security, individual privacy, networks for innovation, problem solving, decision making, and a host of other organizational experiences. Access to and control of technology are powerful communication influences changing the way work is performed, how people relate to each other, how power is exercised, and a host of organizational participation practices. We will discuss use of technology in greater detail in later chapters, but it is important to understand that the emergence of these technologies changes fundamental assumptions in all of the theoretical perspectives we discussed.

Think back to our discussion of networks in the Functional perspective. Will these new technologies challenge what we currently know about information flow? The Meaning-Centered perspective is focused on influence, power, and cultures among other issues. The virtual nature of work and the vast geographic distances over which work is performed among people of diverse backgrounds complicate a vision of organizations as composed of relatively homogeneous individuals with backgrounds that can be easily understood by coworkers.

Postmodernism, critical theory, and feminist theory ask important questions about how reality is constructed in organizations, however, these perspectives also face challenges from the increasing complexity of a technologically linked global work environment. Some of their assumptions about participation and power will be called into question by global cultural differences expressing very different values. Our purpose here is not to understand fully this complexity but to recognize its emergence as part of our individual and collective competency challenges. Think again of our Coronado case. Technology likely will be an increasing part of Bill Drake's environment. If he is not getting the information he needs now, what might a more technologically sophisticated environment bring in terms of benefits and problems?

### **Emerging Perspectives: Summary of Essential Issues**

Emerging Perspectives for organizational communication describe communication as a **constitutive process** and critique and challenge basic assumptions of message meaning and transfer, power and domination, and notions of rationality associated with hierarchical and patriarchal systems. Communication as a constitutive process brings about self and social environments. Communication literally produces organizing, decision making, and influence. **Postmodernism** rejects former (modern) notions of authority and power, stability of meanings, and concepts of effectiveness. **Deconstruction** is the method of postmodern analysis with its emphasis on the exposure of the myths we use to explain the way things are and the uncovering of interests involved in socially constructed meanings.

**Critical theory** shifts our attention to power and abuses of power through communication and control in organizations. Organizations are depicted as political decision-making sites with potential for both domination and codetermination. **Feminist perspectives** focus on the marginalization and domination of women in the workplace and how the valuing of women's voices contributes to an equality for differences rather than the equality of sameness characteristic of the Functional and Meaning-Centered approaches. Finally, Emerging Perspectives must include an understanding of the increasing influence of **institutions** and **global cultures** for organizational communication.

Return to the Coronado case presented at the beginning of this chapter. Examine how the Functional, Meaning-Centered, postmodern, critical, and feminist perspectives help us understand Bill Drake's issues. What are the differences? Where can you find similarities?

## **CHAPTER HIGHLIGHTS**

The Functional approach, the Meaning-Centered approach, and Emerging Perspectives for understanding organizational communication help us ask questions important for analyzing problems. You should now review summary sections for each perspective. Figure 2.4 identifies key questions from each perspective. These questions can be used throughout the text as we analyze a variety of organizational problems.

**FIGURE 2.4 Analyzing Organizational Problems***The Functional Approach*

1. How effective are organizing, relationship, and change messages?
2. What types of formal and informal communication networks exist? What network roles can you identify? Are they adequate?
3. Is channel use appropriate for effective communication?
4. Is the load on the communication system part of the problem?
5. What types of communication distortion exist?
6. Does the organization get good input communication from its environment? How effective is throughput and output communication?
7. Is the system open or closed?

*The Meaning-Centered Approach*

1. Do organizing activities help reduce message equivocality?
2. How effective is decision-making communication?
3. Do most organizational members identify with the organization? How do you know?
4. What attempts are made at organizational socialization? Are they appropriate and effective?
5. How does power relate to the problem?
6. Do organizational stories, rituals, and events provide important information?
7. What type of culture exists? Is it effective? How do you know?
8. How can the communication climate be characterized? Is that appropriate? What should change?

*Emerging Perspectives*

1. What are the hidden power relationships?
2. Are women and others marginalized?
3. Describe abuses of power.
4. Do stories, rituals, and events sustain hierarchical and patriarchal systems?
5. Is decision making characterized by domination or codetermination? How can change occur?
6. How is rationality conceptualized and presented?
7. How do institutions influence particular organizations?
8. How do global cultural differences influence collaboration and organizations?
9. Describe how technology influences issues of power, marginalization, culture, and participation in decision making.

**WORKSHOP**

1. Form groups of four to six members each. Using your school as an organization with which all class members are familiar, identify organizing, change, and relationship messages. Groups should compare lists. How much agreement exists? How much disagreement? What accounts for the differences?
2. In small groups, read either The United Concepts Advertising Agency Dilemma Case or The “Newcomers Aren’t Welcome Here” Case that follows and select from Figure 2.4 the questions

that best help you understand the problems in the case. Answer at least six questions and then prepare answers to the following questions.

**The United Concepts Advertising Agency Dilemma Case**

1. How would you advise Jane?
2. What would you tell Chris and John?
3. What would you tell Frank Donnell?

**The “Newcomers Aren’t Welcome Here” Case**

1. What should Joe and Henry do?
2. Could Bernie have handled the announcement in a manner that would not have alienated Joe and Henry?
3. What do you think is going to happen?

Groups should report to the class as a whole and compare and contrast questions selected and answers.



## THE UNITED CONCEPTS ADVERTISING AGENCY DILEMMA CASE

Jane Peters was having the best morning of her career. Since coming to United Concepts Advertising as an account executive, she had been successful in acquiring new business, but nothing as big as the Raven Furniture account. Raven was the largest chain of furniture stores in the West, and landing the account meant something not only in the West Coast offices of United Concepts but in Chicago and New York as well.

Jane knew that her creative team, John and Chris, was largely responsible. The close working relationship among the three was the best Jane had experienced in her fifteen years in the advertising industry. In fact, Jane began to think of ways to make John and Chris more visible to her boss, Frank Donnell. After all, Frank was pleased that the agency got the Raven account. Perhaps he could be persuaded to promote John and Chris to senior creative positions.

### THREE WEEKS LATER

Jane was exhausted. Getting the Raven account up and going was not only requiring long hours but was also complicated by the resistance of some of the top management at Raven. She had never imagined there would be resistance at Raven to changing agencies and considerable disagreement about the United Concepts proposal. In fact, dealing with the various people at Raven was taking too much time. Her other accounts were not getting the service they needed, and Chris had just made a major error in the Raven ad scheduled to run this weekend. Jane caught the mistake as it was about to go to the printer. Although it was costly to adjust the error at that point, she was relieved but shaken at how close they had come to a major problem. Jane considered approaching Frank Donnell for more help on the account.

### ONE WEEK LATER

The creative meeting wasn’t working. John and Chris were angry with each other and could not agree on an approach for Raven’s Christmas promotion. They complained that Jane was too busy to work with them the way she used to and blamed her for rushing the creative process. Jane was sympathetic but told John and Chris that they did not understand her current pressure. The meeting ended with the first real tension the group had experienced. Jane went to see Frank Donnell and asked for help, additional people and promotions to recognize the real efforts of John and Chris.

*(continued)*

**TWO WEEKS LATER**

Jane was angry as she read her memo from Frank Donnell. Yes, her request for one additional staff person would be honored, but no promotions for Chris and John. Company policy prohibited the creation of additional senior creative positions in the West Coast office. Jane began to draft an angry response. Raven people were just beginning to appreciate their work. How was she going to continue to motivate Chris and John? Would they resent the new person? Was the Raven account worth all this trouble?

**THE “NEWCOMERS AREN’T WELCOME HERE” CASE**

Joe and Henry have worked for Temple Air Conditioning and Heating for over twenty years. Both men are competent workers who were hired by Temple’s founder, Bernie Jones. In fact, Joe, Henry, and Bernie still have an occasional beer together on Friday nights after work. Bernie is always complaining that the good old days are over and that nobody should have so much paperwork to run a heating and air-conditioning business. Joe and Henry don’t think things have really changed all that much except that the houses keep getting bigger and fancier. Joe and Henry have worked as a team for the last fifteen years without a supervisor. They are part of the reason Temple has a good reputation for quality work and fast service. Joe and Henry don’t spend time with other installation teams and don’t see any reason why they should.

**EARLY MONDAY MORNING**

Bernie’s announcement was a blow. He was bringing in a college-educated person to supervise the installation teams. Joe and Henry could hardly believe what they were hearing. They should have known something was up when Bernie called everyone together before the trucks went out on Monday morning.

**Joe:** Who does he think he is, bringing in some college guy—what do we need another guy for?

**Henry:** Yeah, Bernie is losing it. He knows how this place got built—off our backs. I am not going to work for anybody, let alone somebody with a fancy degree.

**Joe:** I always looked up to Bernie—and I thought he felt the same way about us. Obviously we were wrong. After twenty years, to be wrong about a guy makes you feel stupid.

**Henry:** What do you think we should do?

**Joe:** How would I know?

**Henry:** Well, I’m not going to take this lying down. Are you with me?

**Joe:** Sure, we can make Temple fall apart.

3. Emerging Perspectives challenge modern notions of organizational communication. Add to the following list of myths any common assumptions you can identify about organizational life.

Myth List:       Men are stronger leaders than women during organizational crises.  
                       Women are more nurturing managers than men.  
                       Management must exercise control for organizations to succeed.

For each myth on the list, discuss the following questions:

1. How do notions of power contribute to this statement?
2. Does this statement marginalize men or women? What does it mean for other important differences people exhibit?
3. Describe abuses of power related to this statement.
4. How much genuine participation occurs in decision making if this statement is true?
5. What is the basis of rationality for the statement?
6. How are these statements viewed in different parts of the world?

Listen to the discussion. Is it difficult to deconstruct or critique myths of how things happen? Why? Why not?

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### TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

1. Identify several examples in which you believe you have been misunderstood. Take each of these examples and determine how you might have created more clarity with your message and the channels you chose for message sending. Ask for feedback about what others have understood you to mean when you send an important message.
2. Describe what is important to you in a working relationship. Ask others to describe what is important to them.
3. Learn to watch for individuals who do not participate in a discussion or project. Encourage them to participate by asking for their ideas and input.
4. Seek out individuals from cultures different from your own. Talk with them about your culture, and encourage them to share their experiences.
5. Pick out two countries you know little about. Use the Internet and other approaches to increase your awareness of these countries. Think about how you would communicate with a work colleague from each country.

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