BRANISLAV KOVAČIĆ

# 1 New Perspectives on Organizational Communication

New approaches to organizational communication—the topic of this book—pursue two interrelated interests. First, they are trying to understand from the communication point of view *intersections* between *the local organizational communication structures, processes, and practices,* and *large social structures and processes in the form of globalization* (for conceptualization see Mills 1959; Antonio 1991; Lemert 1991). Second, the new approaches are *practical* in that they are *taking seriously theorizing about communication in existing organizations in current conditions.* The same cannot be said for the "old" approaches to organizational communication which found inspiration only in the intellectual mines of various related disciplines. The "old" approaches to organizational communication—presented in five handbooks—were in the form of either philosophy and conceptual analysis as substitutes for theory, or the "conceptual grafts" generated by cross-tabulating perspectives on human communication with perspectives on organizations (Putnam and Pacanowsky 1983; McPhee and Tompkins 1985; Thayer 1985; Jablin, Putnam, Roberts, and Porter 1987; Goldhaber and Barnett 1988).

In order to contrast the "old" to the "new" approaches to organizational communication, I will (1) briefly adumbrate recent intellectual currents, (2) outline globalization processes, (3) elucidate intersections between the two developments and their implications for new approaches to organizational communication, and (4) present a

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critical review of the new approaches articulated by the contributors to this book.

The book offers a three-pronged vision of new approaches to organizational communication: (1) it probes into the relationships between new information/communication technologies and organizational structural configurations and processes, (2) it subjects organizational communicative practices to radical/critical inquiry, and (3) it articulates organizational communication from a postmodernist point of view. Although issuing from different philosophical and theoretical wells, these new approaches are "united" in their departures from old perspectives on organizational communication, and in their interest in current conditions. Boundaries between the new approaches are fuzzy. The new approaches to organizational communication, although forming relatively distinct clusters, share some philosophical assumptions, conceptual articulations, methodological preferences, and practical consequences. For example, the contributors do not discuss intrinsic properties of new information/communication technologies. Rather, they argue that attitudes toward technology and its use, and its real use, depend upon dominant interest groups and cultural and interactional patterns of particular organizations. Such conceptualizations of technologies meander between technological determinism and voluntarism: they explicitly reject both conceptualizations of technologies as "autonomous agents" in the form of "causes/independent variables" and as "observable manifestations of deeper social forces" in the form of "effects/dependent variables" (see Kinsella 1993). Critical/radical theorists—both radical humanists blaming oppressive and privileged discourses/languages, and radical structuralists accusing monopolies of power as well as all other structural configurations characterized by inequality—throw into sharp relief the limitations of current organizational arrangements (Putnam 1982; Mumby 1987, 1988; Daniels and Spiker 1991; Deetz 1992). Not unlike their critical/radical brethren, postmodern theorists focus on the hidden rather than the overt power of inherently political meanings of the micro practices of organizational daily life. However, postmodern theorists approach ideology/culture, hegemony, and domination in terms of nihilism, skepticism, ambiguity, and multiple meanings (see Eisenberg and Goodall 1993). What all three clusters of new approaches to organizational communication have in common, then, is alternative conceptualizations of organizational communicative practices as links between human/organizational agency and social/organizational structure.

In addition to new philosophical and theoretical articulations in general, the contributors to the volume proffer three new, and impor-

tant, conceptualizations of organizational communication in particular. *First*, they reformulate standards used to evaluate organizational communicative practices. At least three clusters of criteria are used to evaluate relationships between: (1) organizational communication practices and/or organizational survival, (2) new information/communication technologies and organizational structural arrangements, and (3) organizational communicative practices defined as configurations and organizational networks of power. *Second,* the contributors sketch new vital mechanisms of organizational communication. And, *finally,* the contributors more or less explicitly spell out practical consequences of the evaluative criteria and new mechanisms of organizational communication.

The manuscript, however, is silent on "interpretive," "cultural," or "process" theories, and on important advances in traditional topics such as network analysis, managerial leadership, organizational innovation, communication climate, and so forth. Because the contributors intended to sail new theoretical waters, they used work by ethnographers, semioticians, and conversational analysts as points of departure rather than navigational maps.

## Intellectual/theoretical developments

The first source of new approaches to organizational communication is current intellectual/theoretical developments in social disciplines. Contemporary intellectual streams have shifted from the modernist "dream of reason" revealed as faith in science, evolution, optimism, and progress, to poststructuralism/postmodernism, to the extreme antimodernist "nightmare of reason" embodied in irrationalist conceptions of antiscience, directionless processes, pessimism, and impossibility of betterment (see Alexander 1990).

### Contemporary intellectual shifts

Major intellectual shifts have occurred in philosophy, art, psychology, and social engineering (see Alexander 1990, 1991; Antonio 1991; Lemert 1991; Richardson 1991; Seidman 1991a,b). I will briefly summarize intellectual development in each domain.

In *philosophy* there was a shift from logical positivism to self-referential poststructuralist/postmodern orientations. Logical positivism assumes transcendental reason in charge of the universal, rational, objective, impersonal, and detached knowledge in the form of rational mathematical models of the external reality. It privileges the

logico-empirical epistemic code. At the other end of the intellectual continuum, poststructuralist/postmodern positions postulate an arbitrary relation between words and objects, epistemic suspicion of "external" realities outside theoretical discourse, the annihilation of referents, and particular, interpretive, subjective, personally "constructed" knowledge. They privilege the narrative code favoring connections between particular events.

In *art* aesthetic orientations have shifted from functionally coherent form to one rooted in ambiguity, complexity and inconsistency. Form and representation were the first cut loose. This required the disintegration of object/image by the Impressionists and Postimpressionists, the deconstruction of space by the Cubists, and the creation of the objectless abstraction by the Suprematists and Formalists (see Gambrell 1993). A few decades later, however, postmodernism rehabilitated a "free play of images" (see Jencks 1987).

In *psychology* conceptualizations of individuals have shifted from the rational to the irrational. The rational actor is defined as an objective, impersonal, detached, unified, fixed, and unchanging self across all times and places. The irrational actor is characterized by the fragmented self—a mosaic of multiple, unstable, fluid, and ever-changing gender, racial, ethnic, class, sexual, and ability-based identities circumscribed by temporal and spatial boundaries/settings.

In *social engineering* positions have shifted from models of the world which is amenable to rational planning and control—based on knowledge undistorted by power, on pure social science which, uncontaminated by ideology, prevents power from being corrupted—to models of the fragmented world which resist planning and control in terms of abstract criteria and transcendental principles.

New approaches to organizational communication have been influenced more directly by an interplay of major intellectual shifts in organization studies and communication theory.

In *organization studies* conceptions of organizations as systems with a single, coherent rationality have been replaced by conceptions of organizations as systems with composite, contradictory rationalities. Organizations are conceived as shifting alliances of different stakeholders such as stockholders, managers, workers, consumers, suppliers, "partners," and representatives of the wider society. Not only that stakeholders have conflicting interests and various degrees of different types of power, but also alliances of stockholders, managers, and suppliers seem to be more stable and more powerful than alliances of workers, consumers, and representatives of the wider society. Leadership in such conditions is a political and symbolic struggle over the

definitions of organizational reality. In circumstances of rapid change leadership is impossible without a specific, temporary, future vision that relies on—as the necessary but not sufficient conditions—flat organizational hierarchy, flexible structures, and people empowered through multiple types of teamwork. Organizational teams made of both "internal" (i.e., managers and workers) and "external" (i.e., stockholders, suppliers, customers, partners, and representatives of communities) stakeholders cannot be controlled by top-down mechanisms of coordination and integration. Rather, it is necessary that stakeholders negotiate and then mutually enforce performance standards. Such new organizations are produced, maintained or changed through new communication technologies, strategies, systems, and processes (see Clegg 1990; Blunt 1989; Cooper and Burrell 1988; Jacques 1989; Scott 1992).

In *communication* there was a proliferation of conceptions of the "interaction order" as the mediating link between the cultural and social/structural (economy and politics) realms. The "interaction order" is viewed as (1) a problematic "mix" of the routine everyday verbal and nonverbal communication practices which *reproduce* economic, political, and cultural dimensions of social order (see Goffman 1981, 1983; Chriss 1992), and communicative practices which *produce* new, emergent/unexpected consequences; (2) the micro level lifeworld where both strategic/instrumental and communicative (noncoerced, nonconformist, voluntaristic) action take place (see Habermas 1984, 1987; Burns 1992; Chriss 1992; Sciulli 1989); (3) the "order without rules"—local, contextually situated language games/practices based on heterogeneous systems of rules which form discrete, incommensurable, and/or incoherently linked social spheres/realms (Wittgenstein 1958); and (4) a continuous "discourse shifting"—a movement from one language game to another (Rorty 1982).

*New conceptions of theory*

In addition to foundational/empiricist and "institutional" conceptions of theory, there has been developed a new poststructuralist/postmodernist view of (anti)theory (see Seidman 1991a,b; Agger 1991; Alexander 1991; Antonio 1991; D'Andrade 1986; Lemert 1991; Richardson 1991).

*Foundational/empiricist conceptions* demand from theory in the natural scientific mode to formulate the master categories/concepts and universally valid regularities—explanations. Reflection theory provides universal truth conditions in which transcendental reason—

scientists who strictly follow "objective" and "impersonal" methodological rules and procedures—establishes a representational truth based on unproblematic and direct observations of "external" realities. Social scientific community and managerial elites are the intended audience for this type of theory.

"*Institutional*" *conceptions* of theory stress that the traditions and institutions of social scientific community—created and reproduced by the personal and interpersonal actions and experiences of scientists—are the root of reason itself. Based on the institutionally established criterion of truth, social scientists rhetorically redeem—in the form of explanation and interpretation—both the validity of observations and postulated regularities. In addition to social scientific community and managerial elites, the primary intended audience also includes workers/employees and the learned general public.

A new poststructuralist/postmodernist view of (anti)theory consists of two conceptual clusters. *First*, its radical, extreme, and thoroughly anitscientific cluster substitutes storytelling for interpretation and explanation. Since all knowledge is self-referential or reflexive— "referents" are either systematically "constructed" ideological knowledge distorted by power or simple "simulacra"/illusions—ranking of knowledge is all but impossible. *Second*, although driven by epistemic suspicion, its less radical cluster views theory as a "narrative with a moral intent." It emphasizes the subjective, personal, nature of knowledge of the particular regularities within temporal and spatial settings/boundaries or contexts. Since theory takes the form of literary and political narratives, its internal standards and external/social effects are "rationally" evaluated by the set of social and linguistic conventions of a given community. The intended audience includes social scientific community, the learned public, and individuals and groups with high stakes in particular social agendas.

## Processes of globalization

The second source of new approaches to organizational communication is global transformations—multidimensional processes of social change which, through definite, patterned temporal and spatial sequences, make the entire world a single place. Global transformations—unfolding through novel, emergent stages, and involving economic, political, and cultural dimensions which often display divergent, disjointed logics—can be evaluated only by complex evaluative standards. Global transformations in the form of the con-

tinuous and ever faster redrawing of economic, political, and cultural boundaries and their intersections are molding the world into an increasingly dense and complex network of interorganizational relationships. As a consequence, we are faced with the relative decline in the economic, political, and cultural importance of the nation-state which has become "too small for the big problems of life, and too big for small problems of life" (Bell 1987, 1967; Harvey 1990; Nowak 1990; Sztompka 1990).

At this point it is useful to delineate three analytical dimensions of organizational environments within which global interorganizational relationships/practices take place. *First,* there are three spheres of social/organizational action, each with its own logic/rationality: (1) economic/wealth, (2) political/power, and (3) cultural/symbolic (for the conceptualization of the spheres, see Arnason 1990; Beyer 1990; Etziony-Halevy 1990; Featherstone 1990; Hannerz 1989; King 1990 a,b; Lash and Urry 1987; Morgentau 1967; Sklair 1991; Wallerstein 1990 a,b). *Second,* geographic reach/scope of interorganizational environments can be ranked in an ascending order: (1) subnational, (2) national, (3) international, and (4) global (see Bell 1987; Giddens 1990; Sklair 1991; Nowak 1990; Gill and Law 1988; Worsley 1990). *Third,* complexity of interorganizational relationships can also be ranked in an ascending order: (1) dyadic or pairwise organizational relationships, (2) organization/action sets or a focal agency's dyadic relationships with other organizations (see Hall 1991; Merton 1957; Evan 1966; Caplow 1964; van de Ven and Ferry 1980; Aldrich 1979; Aldrich and Whetten 1981), and (3) interorganizational networks or groups of organizations linked by a particular type of a relationship in the form of teamwork (Aldrich, 1979; van den Ven and Ferry 1980).

I operationalize globalization processes in two interrelated ways. *First,* globalization is operationalized in terms of: (1) the ever faster increasing number of international and global organizations (geographic reach/scope of interorganizational environments), (2) their ever-increasing interconnectedness (complexity of interorganizational relationships), and (3) their ever more weighty influence on the global scale within economic/wealth, political/power, and cultural/symbolic spheres (logic/rationality of social/organizational action). *Second,* globalization is operationalized in terms of the increasingly interconnected processes/flows that link or cut across the three spheres. Put differently, globalization is operationalized as an always shifting configuration of logics/rationalities of social/organizational action, geographic reach/scope of interorganizational environments, and complexity of interorganizational relationships.

*Processes of globalization within the three spheres*

In the *economic/wealth sphere,* which relies on *instrumental rationality,* multinational/global corporations seem to simultaneously rely on and use all types of organizational interactions available (see Clairmonte and Cavanagh 1982; Kegley, Wittkopf, and Rawls 1988; UN Commission 1991). They range from: (1) free-market, competitive business transactions (Johnston and Lawrence 1988) to (2) different types of interorganizational (sub)contracting (Dore 1983) or teamwork labeled as value-adding partnerships (Johnston and Lawrence 1988), quasifirms (Eccles, 1981; Bradach and Eccles 1989), a "virtual" organization (Morton 1991), global strategic linkages (Nohria and Garcia-Pont 1991), and strategic alliances (Collins and Doorley 1991), to (3) hierarchies of common ownership (Johnston and Lawrence 1988). Consequently, multinational corporations may simultaneously engage in free-market competitive transactions—based on conflicting interests and hoarding of information—and interorganizational subcontracting—based on cooperation, communication/sharing of information, and making implicit or explicit binding agreements—with the same corporate entities.

In the *cultural/symbolic sphere,* which revolves around value or substantive rationality, globalization processes are operationalized in terms of: (1) the ever faster increasing number of subnational, national, organizational, and professional cultures of the nation-state, and international and global cultures of international and global organizations (geographic reach/scope), (2) the ever faster increasing number of interactions between these clusters of cultures (complexity of relationships), and (3) their ever more weighty influence on the global scale (logic/rationality of social/organizational action).

Because of the acceleration of these interactions and the continuous redrawing of symbolic boundaries, not only is the cultural continuity across generations—tradition—seriously threatened, but the distinction between the global and the local is also becoming very complex and dynamic (see Bauman 1990; Featherstone 1990; Bell 1976, 1987; Giddens 1990; Harvey 1990).

In the *political/power sphere,* which depends upon a specific combination of instrumental and substantive rationality, globalization processes are operationalized in terms of: (1) the ever faster rising number of states, and interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational organizations (geographic reach/scope), (2) the ever increasing number of interactions between them (complexity of relationships), and (3) the ever more weighty influence of interstate, transgovernmental, and transnational organizations on the global scale (logic/rationality of

social/organizational action) (see Gelb 1992; Hoffmann 1992; Keohane and Nye 1988; Osmanczyk 1985).

The disjointed world as a single place is created and only temporarily reproduced by the unrepeatably complex interplay of institutions and their practices not only within, but also between the three spheres—the economic/wealth, political/power, and cultural/symbolic.

## Processes of globalization between the three spheres

Globalization processes between the three spheres are operationalized in terms of five flows which form a disjunctive crisscross pattern. These are flows of: (1) people (tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, and guestworkers), (2) technology (the machinery and plants controlled by national and multinational corporations and government agencies), (3) money (in the currency markets and stock exchanges), (4) images and information in mass media (newspapers, magazines, television, and film), and (5) the Western Enlightenment images of democracy, freedom, welfare, rights, etc.). Consequently, the world becomes a single place, though not in a stable, orderly, rational, and clearly defined way (see Appadurai 1990; Featherstone 1990; Mongardini 1990).

To conceive the world as a disjointed, single place, is not to empty it of moral visions ensconced within cultural/symbolic configurations. Such emptying was suggested by three theoretical models of the present condition. *First,* the industrial convergence theory incarcerated the mankind in the world depicted as a single modern society/social structure without cultural differences. *Second,* the postindustrial theory described the world as a place in which instrumental techno-rationality replaced cultures/ideologies. And *finally,* the information society theory offered the vision of the world in which information technology subjugated the whole cultural realm (see Giner 1987; Archer 1990).

Despite the recent upsurge of nationalism in Eastern and Central Europe, social and political control/integration within the nation-state in the form of nationalism's strong bonds of normative consensus, national sovereign political authority, and national economy has been undermined in the currently decentered, postindustrial, postmodern world by both local and international/global organizing principles and "language games" as forms of communication (see Curson 1986; Derrida 1976; Halal 1986; Lash 1988; Lipietz 1987; Lyotard 1984; Offe 1985).

Currently, the single, world capitalist economic system—with the North American, Pacific Asian, and West European regional markets/trading blocks—intersects the international political regime, and the contradictory, fluid and ever-changing pattern of global cultural

interactions/flows. The international political regime is currently poised between a global empire (hegemony of the United States) and a new, multistate balance of power/terror, and with no world state or global leviathan in sight (for conceptualization, see Gill and Law 1988).

My conceptualization and operationalization of globalization processes attempts to capture the intersection(s) of two basic levels of relationships between organizations as social agents. *First,* organizations as organized social subsystems of roles are produced and reproduced by concrete, immediate/direct, and contextualized face-to-face interactions in the form of interpersonal and small group communicative practices based on role expectations/explicit norms. *Second,* anonymous, selfless agents—through mediated communicative practices—act in terms of their preferences within abstract, distant/indirect, de-contextualized, and nonorganized subsystems of interdependence (for conceptual distinctions, see Boudon and Bourricaud 1989). In this view, organizational communicative practices *link* organizations as organized role subsystems to their environments/ nonorganized subsystems of interdependence.

Organizational communicative practices are deployed by organizational decision-makers to coordinate internal and external activities. This is achieved by three basic types of cooperation. *First,* different activities occurring at the same time and at the same place are fitted together through *synchronization* based mainly on the face-to-face communicative practices. *Second,* different activities happening at the same place but at different times are fitted together through *sequential linking* based regularly on both the face-to-face and mediated communicative practices. *Third,* organizations are devoting more and more effort to coordination of activities across time and space (at different places at the same time, and at different places at different times) based mainly on mediated communicative practices (for conceptualization, see Blau 1993). Globalization processes require that organizations simultaneously use all three types of cooperation/coordination and/or rapidly switch from one to another.

## *Intersections between new intellectual developments and processes of globalization: Implications for the new approaches to organizational communication*

To many organizations globalization processes represent turbulence in the form of an ever *increasing uncertainty.* Organizations are faced

with managing their own slice of the fast-changing configuration of (inter)organizational linkages/interdependencies. In such conditions, organizational communicative practices exploit strategically new information/communication, transport, and production technologies to create new, temporarily advantageous forms of organizations. New approaches to organizational communication, in order to conceptually articulate these processes, deploy new types of theoretical forms/genres and theoretical accounts.

*New information/communication, transport,*
*and production technologies*

In order to cope with increasing uncertainty, corporations are putting many of their information/communication eggs in the basket of telecommunications systems. Whether public or private, worldwide telecommunications systems integrate—via wire lines, radio signals, and space satellites—the existing technical communication media such as radio, television, telephone, telegraph, fax machine, and computer. The purpose is to transmit large volumes of messages in the form of texts, videos, and voice at high speed over long distances. Nevertheless, it is estimated that roughly 70 percent of 400 billion paper documents, processed annually by 15 million U.S. business establishments, are not digitized. Many drawings, signatures, and images still cannot be translated into the computer alphabet of ones and zeroes (see Markoff 1992 a,b,c,d; Rifkin 1992; Saffo 1992; Schwartz 1992; Zachary 1992 a,b; Powel 1991).

These telecommunications systems form a backbone of three types of private, organizational information and communication systems: (1) management-oriented information and communication systems, (2) administration-oriented MIS systems, and (3) operation/production and service-oriented information and communications systems. These private organizational information and communication systems are pertinent to new forms of organizational design, and new organizational practices (see Berleur and Drumm 1991; Williams 1991; Culnan and Markus 1987; Rogers 1988; Tushman and Nelson 1990).

*New forms of work organization:*
*Voluntarism vs. structural constraints*

The integrative character of the new, *flexible* communication, transport, and production technologies can be translated into an expanding domain of voluntaristic action in the form of new types of

cooperative work organization, and an increasing choice between different technological solutions. Rather than creating a new universal model of work organization, new technologies tend to encourage a divergent organizational development in a number of different directions. Within the domain of expanded voluntaristic action, generative ability of the most successful organizations—their capacity to develop a number of different organizational patterns simultaneously and to change rapidly from one pattern to another—implies local creations of (in principle) an infinite number of patterns of organization rather than a "diffusion"/replication of a finite number of already proven organizational patterns.

For example, in Western industrialized nations new technologies, coupled with a shift of power in favor of management, enabled, since the 1970s, new forms of work organization—structuring of task interdependencies through teamwork—at the level of (1) workshops or departments, (2) establishments, (3) enterprises, and (4) industries and their respective markets.

Work organization on the shopfloor took the form of organization-specific combinations of the following design elements: (1) job rotation (workers periodically perform different jobs), (2) job enrichment (workers are given tasks of different quality), (3) job enlargement (workers perform an increased number of tasks), and (4) multiskilled work teams or autonomous groups. The overall establishment and/or enterprise organization—despite an ever wider range of organizational patterns—seems to have shifted from the *hierarchy* and its inward-oriented control based on formal positions to transitional forms composed of overlapping work teams or groups to the *"clotheshanger"* with most organizational tasks integrated on the production level by "internal" and "external" teams (see Grootings 1991; Gustavsen and Hethy 1991).

*Theoretical genres/forms and accounts deployed by new approaches to organizational communication*

New forms of work organization and organizational practices threw in sharp relief the inadequacy of the "old" approaches to organizational communication. These approaches provided two types of theoretical forms/genres—explanations and interpretations—and three types of theoretical accounts—economic, political, and cultural—of organizational structures, processes, and (communicative) actions. *Theoretical forms/genres* are configurations of concepts and propositions or general statements of relationships between concepts. While explanations consist of categories/concepts and relationships between them as postulated by theorists, interpretations are more complex in

that they include perspectives of multiple communicators on the relevant "texts" as well as perspectives of the interpreter(s)/theorist(s). *Theoretical accounts* specify the nature of the regularities—relationships between concepts—based on a particular type of rationality/logic governing the spheres of organizational action. I will briefly examine each type of theoretical account.

*The economic account* is based on the "undersocialized" (Wrong 1961; Granovetter 1985; Swedberg 1991; Zelizer 1978, 1983, 1985, 1988, 1989) conception of the atomized, utilitarian, self-interested actor/communicator. The actor's—individual, dyad, group, organization, network of organizations, industry, nation-state, and regional, international and/or global alliance—strategic and utilitarian action consists of a "rational choice" of the appropriate means—organizational (communicative) strategies, structures, and actions—to generating wealth (see Weber 1951, 1978; Parsons 1961, 1977; Schutz 1964; Pareto 1935; Boudon and Bourricaud 1989; Turner 1991; Eder 1990). Organizational communication is viewed as a straightforward use of coherent, unambiguous symbolic codes—whose relations to external reality are assumed to be unproblematic—in order to create economic wealth.

The "oversocialized" (Wrong 1961; Granovetter 1985) passionate actor/communicator who follows the dictates of generalized morality is assumed by *the cultural account*. The "oversocialized" actor/communicator allegedly acts coherently as a unit by simply implementing cultural definitions of substantive rationality—symbolic classifications/definitions of social bonds and practices in terms of moral strictures, religious commandments, and solidarity (see Mongardini 1990; Weber 1951, 1978; Parsons 1961, 1977; Habermas 1975). Organizational communication is seen as a simple use of ready-made symbolic codes expressing taken-for-granted cultural interpretations of social reality in order to acquire legitimacy.

The actor/communicator whose main goal is the acquisition and/or preservation of power based on unequal distribution of political, economic, and cultural resources is a character privileged by *the political account* (see Mongardini 1990; Rueschemeyer and Rueschemeyer 1990; Morgentau 1967; Habermas 1975). The political actor/communicator is supposed to act coherently as a unit by following political rationality—ideally a coherent combination of the instrumental/formal rationality (i.e., realpolitik) and substantive/value rationality in the form of ethical principles and/or ideologies such as socialism, communism, anarchism, fascism, nationalism, liberalism, conservatism, and Islamic fundamentalism. Organizational communication is defined as a deliberate use of symbolic codes to acquire, preserve, and legitimate such unequal distribution of power.

The inadequacy of the theoretical accounts offered by old approaches to organizational communication is fundamental. Such accounts not only reduce the actor/communicator to a single, stable, coherent, and homogeneous motive and principle of action—the ecnomic, the political, and the cultural—but also eliminate any combination and/or conflict between the three dominant motives and principles of action. These ahistorical and context-blind accounts privilege one type of rationality under all conditions, and reduce communication to an unproblematic, simple, and perfect exchange of explicit information.

In contrast, as will become obvious in the following chapters, new approaches to organizational communication are rooted in a wide range of broader intellectual currents and alternative conceptions of theory, and disjointed globalization processes within and between the three spheres of organizational action. The new approaches to organizational communication stress rapid change, incoherence, fluidity, and only partial, transient and local organizational order. They share a loosely connected set of conceptual moves. *First,* narrative as a unique set of connections between particular events is legitimized as a third theoretical genre/form, as an alternative or addition to explanation and interpretation. *Second,* each of the theoretical positions articulated by the contributors to the book is a constellation of theoretical genres/forms. Although each position privileges a single genre/form, fluid boundaries between explanation, interpretation, and narrative stake out a considerable common "space." And *finally,* they all articulate their own version of the *"embeddedness account"* (Granovetter 1985) of organizational (commnicative) structures, processes, and actions. The actor/communicator—individual, dyad, group, organization, network of organizations, industry, nation-state, and regional, international and/or global alliance—is always embedded in concrete systems of relations/networks. Any particular interaction is defined as a complex conjuncture of economic, political, and cultural rationalities which are themselves fragile, problematic, and unstable. Interactions are inseparable from language and other symbolic systems which simultaneously constitute and express "external" realities in a complex and problematic fashion (for a critical analysis of theories of language, see Taylor 1981, 1992).

## Critical review of new theoretical positions

It is now time to put all the pieces of the theoretical mosaic together. In doing so, I will first adumbrate similarities and differences between theoretical positions formulated by the contributors to the book. Then,

I will present three major contributions of the book: (1) reformulated standards used to evaluate organizational communicative practices, (2) new vital mechanisms of organizational communication, and (3) practical consequences of the evaluative criteria and new mechanisms of organizational communication.

### Similarities and differences between new theoretical positions on organizational communication

The new approaches to organizational communication articulated by the contributors to this book can tentatively be classified according to three criteria. First, the contributors privilege a certain conception of theory. However, each general theoretical position offered in the book is more fruitfully described as a particular, dominant core delineated by fluid overlaps between foundationalist/empiricist, "institutional," and poststructuralist/postmodernist orientations. Second, although the authors subscribe to a single genre/form, fluid boundaries between explanation, interpretation, and narrative stake out a considerable common "space." And finally, they all articulate their own version of the embeddedness account in terms of a complex conjuncture of economic, political, and cultural rationalities which are themselves fragile, problematic, and unstable.

All of this singles out communicative practices in general, and organizational communicative practices in particular as the single most important source of temporary social order/patterned stability. Because the current condition is described as a major social—economic, political, and cultural—transformation, mechanisms of social regularities are unstable, heterogeneous rather than homogeneous, multiple rather than single, interdependent rather than independent, and subject to multiple and contradictory interpretations. This means that the consensus underlying "creative social action" becomes ever more important. Antecedents of social (communicative) action are relevant only insofar as they serve as temporary starting points. First, since cultures are unstable, fluid, and constantly overlap, socialization becomes highly problematic. Clusters of multiple, interacting heterogeneous rules cannot simply be followed—because stable rules are not available—to conduct purposive action. Second, social actors as fragmented selves—bundles of shifting identities—cannot simply rely on personal "values" or homogeneous intentions in the form of durable preferences as antecedents of the "undersocialized," "rational choice" action.

Mead (1932) may be of help here. If social actors acquire meanings from historical/past sequences of communicative practices, future

goals compel the actors to modify constellations of these sequences. Consequently, standardized tasks with their standardized vocabularies give way to future visions and new tasks, and creative/new vocabularies. Such creative (communicative) social action can be described in terms of following of rules in a novel way (a temporary recombination of rules), and/or acting independently of the old rules. Communication thus becomes a means to form temporary alliances as institutional frameworks within which social actors negotiate specific sequences of communicative practices in order to forge temporarily the consensus necessary for the accomplishment of specific tasks, and to mint temporary personal and group identities. Organizational communicative practices that weave together economic/instrumental, political/power, and cultural/value rationales of organizational action—within the general condition of changing pluralism, difference, multiplicity, and disagreement—serve to create temporary unity, agreement, and consensus, and to accomplish specific tasks. Since historical antecedents give way to future visions and new tasks as sources of temporary social (communicative) regularities/orders, theorists become "conceptual strategists" who permanently reinvent these future visions/tasks. They resort to either incremental, short-term fine-tuning, or longer-term, transformational redefinitions of the future visions/tasks.

The contributors to the book offer alternative formulations of such new organizational communicative practices. Six chapters can be said to significantly contribute to new approaches to organizational communication within "institutional" theoretical orientation. These are contributions by Contractor (chapter 2), Yu (chapter 3), King and Cushman (chapter 4), Horvath and Fulk (chapter 5), Seibold, Heller, and Contractor (chapter 6), and Finet (chapter 7). Three chapters are innovative contributions within poststructuralist/postmodern conceptions of theory. These are contributions by Huspek (chapter 8), Deetz (chapter 9), and Natalle, Papa, and Grahama (chapter 10).

In a concluding chapter (11), Poole offers his views of the theoretical "territory" this book attempts to stake out.

Contractor's (chapter 2) conceptualization of organizations as self-organized systems undergoing sudden qualitative transformations implies context-specific combinations of rationalities—economic/instrumental, political/power, and cultural/value—organizational members can draw on while engaged in communicative practices. He privileges a mix of the genres/forms of a context-bound explanation and interpretation. On the other hand, Yu (chapter 3) privileges a combination of instrumental/economic and substantive/cultural rationality, and uses the genres of explanation and interpretation in tackling

the issues of success and stability of Japanese organizations. Navigating between the extremes of sudden transformations and organizational stability, King and Cushman (chapter 4) privilege instrumental/economic rationality at the expense of both political/power and substantive/cultural rationality by grounding significant organizational communication behaviors in organizational strategy which favors competitive advantage based on *speed of response*. They use the genre of explanation.

Horvath and Fulk (chapter 5) propose a *social-influence model of* computerized information and communication *technology use* in organizations. They favor a context-bound combination of instrumental/economic, political/power, and substantive/cultural rationalities, and use the genre of explanation. In a more concrete fashion, Seibold, Heller, and Contractor (chapter 6) privilege a flexible combination of instrumental/economic and cultural/substantive rationalities, and use the genre of explanation while examining Group Decision Support Systems (GDSSs)—a new generation of coordinating technologies—and their use by organizational work groups or teams.

Finet (chapter 7) privileges a combination of political/power and substantive/cultural rationality, and uses a mix of the genres of explanation, interpretation, and narrative while examining interest advocacy. Focusing on the power-resistance opposition, Huspek (chapter 8) privileges a combination of political/power and substantive/cultural rationality, and uses the genre of interpretation. His point of departure is a contradiction within political rationality between *liberal democracy* (civic life in liberal society) and *authoritarian* organization and control of workplace institutions (the wage-capital relation). In a related but more complex manner, Deetz (chapter 9) somewhat ambiguously privileges substantive/cultural rationality, the genre of narrative while articulating a vision of distortions induced by power inequalities within a self-referential, multilayered organizational discourse. Similarly, Natalle, Papa, and Graham (chapter 10) privilege a combination of political/power and substantive/cultural rationalities, but use the genre of interpretation. However, they examine a concrete dimension of the political environment of the American workplace—the ways the women's movement has been trying to transform organizations to become more responsive to women.

*Standards/criteria for the evaluation of organizational communicative practices*

The contributors to this volume propound three standards/criteria to be used for the evaluation of organizational communicative practices.

*First,* organizational communicative practices can be evaluated in terms of their contribution to organizational survival or some other type of success. The contributors articulate three such standards by evaluating contributions of organizational communicative practices to: (1) organizational survival in general; (2) economic organizational success in general; and (3) economic success of specific organizations.

Contractor (chapter 2) argues that organizations—"selfish" self-organized systems—through communication import a large amount of energy from outside, and use this energy to renew their own structures (*"autopoeisis"*) and survive. Self-organized systems expel, rather than accumulate, the accruing disorder/entropy into the environment. Consequently, organizational communicative practices are evaluated in terms of their contribution to organizational rejuvenation and coherence at the expense of the vitality, stability, and predictability of their environments. In a less abstract fashion, Yu (chapter 3) posits that organizational communication practices be evaluated the Japanese way, that is, by their contribution to organizational size, scope, market share, and profit—all measures of organizational success. This means privileging interpersonal face-to-face communication over sophisticated information/communication technologies. Yu argues that there is an extremely high overlap between two levels of relationships between members of Japanese organizations. Face-to-face interactions (guided by still strong, stable norms), and "abstract" interdependencies (based on "anonymous" actors' preferences) are said to be at the minimal variance. High-context interpersonal communication, rather than sophisticated information/communication technologies, is evaluated in terms of its contribution to the transformation of intra- and inter-organizational interdependencies into interpersonalized relationships. This internal and external "interrelatedness" is what Yu labels human relationships. An alternative is to evaluate organizational communicative practices by their contribution to the formulation and implementation of strategies of specific organizations. King and Cushman (chapter 4) claim *speed of response*—rapidly getting products to market—is the crucial time-based, communication-oriented organizational competitive strategy.

*Second,* organizational communicative practices can be evaluated in terms of their impact on internal and external organizational structures and performance. The contributors outline two distinct arguments: (1) how to evaluate the effects of new information/communication technologies on organizational structures in general; and (2) how to evaluate the effects of a particular type of information/communication technology on small group performance.

Horvath and Fulk (chapter 5) take issue with theories that simply link the declining costs (labor, time, and information inaccuracy) of handling and communicating information of various kinds—information exchange and processing—to a shift from *vertical integration* toward *horizontal cooperation*. These internal and external transformations allegedly lead towards the new, counter-hierarchical organizational structure. Internally, hierarchies/bureaucracies (distinct and stable organizational, interunit, and power boundaries) are said to be transformed via adhocracies/integrated decentralism/distributed-networked organizations (distinct and stable organizational boundary, but blurred boundaries between organizational units) into organizations as markets (splitting of the firm into smaller units having only temporary, contractual relations with each other blurs the boundary between the organization and the outside world). Externally, two major types of transformations are said to be taking place. First, the hierarchy-to-market transition leads from hierarchies to networked-distributed organizations (internal organizational boundaries are blurred) to "biased markets" (the distinction between organizations and the outside world is blurred) and finally to traditional markets of individual, independent firms (the distinction between organizations and the outside world is erased). Second, we may be witnessing the evolution of the market from itself in the form of ever increasing level of "interrelatedness" of firms within the market/industry through horizontal cooperation among networks of competitors and among non-competitors making compatible/complementary products. Horvath and Fulk argue that the relationships between new information/communication technologies and organizational structural configurations are mediated and/or moderated by the *quality* of information defined not only in terms of its cost but also its qualitative distinctions. The quality of information is product of employees' evaluations or social constructions of the information/communication technology. Consequently, both the effects of the use of information/communication technologies, and the criteria for their evaluation, are organization-specific rather than general and/or universal. At a more specific level, Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS)—a new generation of coordinating, interactive computer-based/computer-mediated systems/technologies—are intended to be used for group collaboration. Seibold, Heller and Contractor (chapter 6) argue that, since collaborative group practices are more inclusive than a simple sharing of information, GDSS systems should be evaluated in terms of their contribution to group performance defined mainly as decision-making at meetings.

*Third*, organizational communicative strategies can be evaluated by political and moral standards. The contributors evaluate organizational communicative practices in terms of how they: (1) advance and/or eliminate competing views of legitimate organizational practices; (2) expose the internal contradictions of power as they relate to multiple subordinate groups; (3) help create a tentative organizational metacode necessary for a principled critique of organizational power and domination; and (4) help transform the underprivileged position of women in organizations.

Interest advocacy—a series of strategic efforts at normative influence—induces sociopolitical normative change (introduces competing views of what is socially good and appropriate) in organizational sociopolitical environments. Consequently, Finet (chapter 7) proposes that organizational communicative practices—interest advocacy—be evaluated in terms of who is more successful in struggles over social legitimacy—social movements/change advocates or business corporations/change targets—and why and under what conditions are they more successful? Social legitimacy is intrinsically related to power. Organizational communicative practices can thus be evaluated in terms of their contribution to unmasking of the internal contradictions of power, and power-induced inefficiencies and distortions. This can be done, argues Huspek (chapter 8), without privileging one set of values (resistance) over another (power). Documenting the very multiplicity of organizational communicative practices would reveal oppositional and potentially undermining values and norms, diminish power's expanse, and amplify the voice of resistance. Such relatively straightforward opposition between power and resistance is contested by Deetz (chapter 9), who argues that communicative practices in corporate sites result in the skilled production of chaos. Shattered normative hierarchies such as values (political/power rationality), money (instrumental/economic rationality), and the hyper-real production of signs/discourses (substantive/cultural rationality) commingle in such a way as to make almost impossible any principled critique of organizational power, domination, and inefficiencies/distortions. Productive organizational communicative practices cannot be grounded in a preexisting, common organizational communication metacode, not even in one split into its power and resistance poles. However, productive organizational communicative practices should provide a temporary ground for principled critique of organizational power and domination. In contrast to Deetz, Natalle, Papa, and Graham (chapter 10) argue that organizational communicative practices can be used to eliminate the inequality of power in cross-sex communication rela-