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Applied Organizational Communication

Theory and Practice in a Global Environment

THIRD EDITION

Thomas E. Harris
University of Alabama

Mark D. Nelson
University of Alabama

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To Shelia Harris, Tom’s wife, for her support and insights regarding organizations and communication. Her sense of humor and perspective, endless patience, and love during the long hours required to write this book were remarkable. This book could not have been written without her assistance.

To Jean and Ed Harris, Tom’s parents, for their unconditional love and lifelong curiosity.

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Organizational communication is a fascinating subject that is constantly evolving. The second edition of this book was published in 2002 and I noted that organizations had changed substantially from the first edition. This edition reflects the significant changes since 2002 while retaining the in-depth discussions of critical organizational communication concepts. In addition, Dr. Mark Nelson has agreed to co-author this edition, making the coverage even more complete. We have added important insights concerning critical perspectives and the reader will note extensive updates, revisions, and current examples. The majority of the original chapter titles have remained, because they allow the reader to quickly access specific information. In every chapter, change, diversity, and the digital age are examined.

In addition to providing extensive resources, this text reflects my own 35 years of experience as a teacher and an organizational consultant. In organizations ranging in size from Bristol Myers Squibb, Georgia Pacific, and IBM, to local and regional volunteer groups such as the Easter Seals, I have introduced, developed, and expanded the understanding and effective utilization of applied organizational communication concepts. As the reader discovers, each chapter presents an extensive analysis of selected topics, coupled with current and broad-based research. Hopefully, my own enthusiasm for a communication approach to understanding organizations shows in every chapter. Nelson’s experiences reflect my own, and our combined research and experience are reflected throughout the text.

The book unfolds in the following manner.

The first three chapters are concerned with the perspectives necessary to understand the relationship between communication and organizations. Chapter 1 grounds the text in current and future changes, explains the transactional communication perceptive, and offers a systems perspective as a viable means for understanding organizations. Chapter 2 links perception with understanding communication and organizations. Chapter 3 provides an extensive discussion of the current organizational and management theories that have set the stage for the modern organization.

Organizational communication is a complex topic. Chapter 4, on verbal communication, presents an organization’s eye view of how language functions and malfunctions. Chapter 5, on nonverbal communication, draws from the broad research available and applies the relevant information to organizations. Chapter 6 focuses on networks and channels, which are the means by which individuals, groups, and organizations connect. Symbolic behavior is
examined in chapter 7, which develops the clear link between communication and organizations.

Chapter 8 is devoted to understanding listening. Chapter 9 explores interpersonal communication, and discusses transactions and problems including conflict and superior–subordinate relationships with new information on interpersonal skills development. Chapter 10 highlights how groups and teams are fundamental to any organization; this chapter has been updated to include a discussion of the contemporary approaches to group development. Chapter 11 offers the key concepts regarding leadership, including feminist perspectives on power and contemporary theories of leadership. As is fitting, new communication technologies are examined in chapter 12, which provides comprehensive insights into the benefits and challenges presented by new technologies at all levels in organizations.

This text is intended to be comprehensive, clear, interesting, current, and accessible. We have made a great effort to avoid a single, parochial view, because our consulting experiences have indicated clearly that a broad theoretical understanding is more useful to the individual and the organization. The most exciting aspect of our own careers has been the application of academic theories to actual organizational communication situations and returning to the classroom with examples to explain these theories. Throughout this text, we have tried to offer the same opportunity to the reader.
Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation to the numerous organizations and individuals who have provided insights into the organizational communication processes as we have functioned as facilitators, change agents, consultants, and trainers.

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Adopting a Perspective

Realities
Anyone planning a career faces three realities. First, organizations permeate almost all aspects of our adult lives from providing careers to controlling our choices in goods and services. Even the smallest independent group of highly creative individuals must have some form of organization. We must interact with all sizes of organizations, ranging from Microsoft with its predominance in the electronic world to the local coffee, pizza, bagel, Internet café, or grocery store. This omnipresence in our postbaccalaureate careers means understanding organizations is synonymous with the pursuit of rewarding employment and achieving our goals. Except for the unusual and most likely unemployable individual, the need to operate effectively with and within organizations is as real a skill and an occupational necessity as knowing how to find a job or learn a vocation.

How we interact leads to the second reality. Later in this chapter and throughout this book, we demonstrate the importance of communication. For now, it is sufficient to state that communication is both a primary perspective for understanding how organizations function and a guide for how we should behave in organizations if we are to advance and enjoy our careers. Changing organizations are the third reality and we focus on these changes shortly.

The key concepts covered in this chapter include:

- The ever-changing world of organizational communication—the digital age, change, diversity
- Communication in organizations—importance to the organization, leaders, individuals
- Understanding organizational communication
- Perspectives—communication as process, transactional perspective
- Organizations as systems
- Complex systems—second-order change, learning organizations, sense-making, self-organizing

The Ever-Changing World of Organizational Communication
The changes impacting organizations are the third reality. As you will discover, organizing and communicating involve ongoing changes. “Change is
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a ubiquitous phenomenon in organizations, and communication is a central process in planning and implementing change” (Jones, Watson, Gardner, & Gallios, 2004, p. 735). Although change has always existed, the speed, breadth, and impact of change are truly different as we travel through the new millennium. The Internet and globalization force innovation requiring organizations to be more efficient and “rewiring them for creativity and growth” (McGregor, 2006, p. 64). The dynamic nature of organizations is examined throughout this text. At this point, we will consider three forces—the digital age, speed of change, and diversity.

Digital Age
First, we are in the digital age. The massive growth in electronic communication has created a revolution easily as great as the Industrial Revolution that began in the late 1800s. The rivers of electronic 1s and 0s that computers create, move, process, store, retrieve, shape, and reshape are the basic elements of the postindustrial age. This information revolution reaches through innumerable circuits criss-crossing cyberspace. “In the 21st century, information technology will drive economic wealth. The innovations developed by the computing, telecommunications, consumer electronics, and electronic media industries will affect every business large and small—and dramatically change our home lives as well” (Katz, 1997, p. 1). Over the past 25 years, the Information Revolution has boosted productivity by almost 70% during that period (Mandel, 2005). The technology of information, or infotech, makes knowledge a vital commodity requiring the effective utilization of the distinctly human elements of an organization such as communication, culture, and leadership (Colvin, 1997). Google is so ubiquitous that it has become its own verb (Weise, 2005). In October 2005, for example, of the 5.1 billion Internet searches, 2.4 billion used Google, which, in many cases, “is taking the place of not only a trip to the library, but also a call to Mom, a recipe box, the phone book and neighborly advice” (Weise, 2005, p. 1D). However, as many individuals have found with the online Wikipedia, not all Internet information is correct because much of the available data is supplied by users who may not be experts on the topic (Weise, 2005). Another impact of the digital revolution is that we no longer depend on others to do many of our everyday tasks. “With digital cameras, we print our own photographs. With ATMs, we do the work bank-tellers used to do for us. We track online the packages we ship” (Toffler, 2006, p. 8). You can add numerous other web-oriented activities such as college registration, paying income taxes, doing searches, and so on.

This is a relatively new phenomenon. Integrated circuits have been around for about 40 years and microprocessors for a little more than 30 years. During those 30 years, microprocessors’ performance has multiplied by a factor of more than 10,000. The first PC (1974) operated at 2 MHz and contained
256 bites of RAM. Today’s newest PCs run at 500 MHz+ and have 3 million times as much RAM.

Consumer electronics worldwide include 2 billion mobile phones; 1.5 billion TV sets; 820 million PCs; 190 million Game Boys; 70 million iPods; 50 million PDAs; and 3.2 million BlackBerrys (Conlin, 2006, p. 27). There are multibillions of microchips in coffee-makers, clock radios, calculators, cars, and computers and they are used to control airplanes, switch phone calls, watch weather systems, and track our bills or college grades. Computers control the power grids, the water plants, and a plethora of other utilities and public services that work seamlessly to keep homes and offices running. Last year more microchips were produced (and at a lower cost) than grains of rice (Conlin, 2006). As important as the internal combustion engine or the electric motor were as innovations, the microchip amplifies our intellect. Automobiles allow us to travel greater distances in less time with less strain. The computer and other digital devices free the mind, increase our ability to connect with others, and enhance our information resources.

The Internet, originally created to enhance national security and academic research, is now a mainstay of life for many people and organizations and impacts every age bracket as shown by this breakdown of who is online: 19–29 = 88%; 20–49 = 84%; 50–64 = 71%; 65+ = 32% (Conlin, 2006). “The Internet has become ubiquitous, so companies can connect with talent anywhere in the blink of an eye, inside or outside the company. Open-source software can be plucked off the shelf to become the foundation of new software programs or Web sites (Hamm, 2005, p. 71). The World Wide Web (WWW) became a player in 1989. The Internet moves stand-alone computers from being text-processors and number-crunchers to communications devices, which change the way we use them, and begins “to alter in bold new ways how we work and live” (Spear, 2000, p. 90). “Technology has sped up economic and social life with inventions that take off with lives of their own, such as e-mail or gene manipulation” (Issak, 2005, p. 22). In fact, there are some legitimate misgivings regarding the digital impact. “The time for human communication is cut shorter; the means more homogeneous: the mode, cooler: Computer, fax and cell phone interactions replace face-to-face conversations and the charm and nuances of body language” (Issak, 2005, p. 27).

The Y2K (Year 2000) problem offers a clear example of computers’ influence in most aspects of our lives. A great deal of time and energy was spent in the last few years of the old millennium attempting to correct the millennium bug, which had the potential to paralyze computers once January 1, 2000 arrived. Early programmers used only the last two digits of the year (e.g., 80 or 91) instead of all four numbers (e.g., 1980 or 1991) when designing the clocks that monitor and run computers. At the time, the memory required to store these additional two digits for all potential transactions would have been too expensive to commit or nonexistent. However, this meant that if the oversight
was not corrected, January 1, 2000 (01.01.00) would be read by the computers used by banks, air traffic controllers, military defense or at home as 00 meaning it would be 1900 or the beginning of the last century. In theory, this could have shut down many organizations. The final cost of correcting this glitch surpassed $122 billion in the United States and $282 billion worldwide (International Data Corporation, 2000). As organizations rushed to correct Y2K, they discovered to their chagrin that billions of embedded microprocessors or microchips controlling factories, mixing fuel in automotive engines, automatically flushing some toilets, and operating digital televisions, smart phones, or video games could also create havoc. Even if an organization corrected its Y2K problems, it was still connected with numerous other computer-controlled devices that may not have been corrected by the year 2000. A programming decision made many years ago had the potential to impact almost everyone. For our purposes, Y2K underscores the wide-ranging impact of the digital age and the interdependency of organizational communication systems. We discuss interdependency later in this chapter and book.

By their very nature, electronics flatten corporate pyramids, change the competitive picture, redraw communication channels, and alter the traditional pathways for success (James, 1996). Electronic communication channels are overtaking memos and other written formats.

Internets, Intranets, CNN, and many other electronic media can connect almost all employed individuals. Students conduct information searches for papers, businesses seek competitive information, Web surfers visit chat rooms and discover unusual sites, and almost everyone in an organization can have digital connections. We have become an electronic global village. Organizations and organizational communication exist in a wired world. “Between 2000 and 2004, total global Internet usage grew 125%” (Friedman, 2005, p. 198). During the same time period, “Google went from processing roughly 150 millions searches per day to roughly one billion searches per day, with only a third coming from inside the United States” (Friedman, 2005, p. 198). However, these forms of digitized communication can be over-utilized. “Fully 25% of executives at large companies say their communications—voice mail, e-mail, and meetings—are nearly or completely unmanageable. That’s according to a new McKinsey survey of more than 7,800 managers around the world. Nearly 40% spend a half to a full day per week on communications that are not valuable” (Mandel, 2005, p. 62). As the last observations support, the digital world has created significant forces for change, our next issue.

Change

Second, organizations are changing at a rate unforeseen only a few years ago. The question is no longer do organizations want to change, but how quickly can effective changes be inaugurated (Charan & Tichy, 1998). Corder (1999) reports the results of interviews with 100 senior executives in companies with
1,000 or more employees. “Change has become such a way of life that 73% of the executives in this survey said that their organizations have gone through tremendous transformations during the past 2 years” (p. 13).

The catastrophic events of September 11, 2001 involving the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and airline highjacking provide previously unimaginable support for the impact of change on organizations. Predictions regarding future courses of actions, how to configure offices, and priorities concerning spending were forced to change. Struggling to survive, organizations responded by questioning their abilities to use information, downsizing, and reexamining how information and services are provided. For example, airlines and travel-related industries laid off massive numbers of employees, suffered significant losses, and began changing the way they conducted their business. Eastman Kodak, the world’s largest photography company, reported a 77% drop in third-quarter earnings (2001) caused by the drop in leisure travel. Weyerhaeuser, the world’s number one paper-maker, had profits fall 54% due to less demand for magazines and catalogues (Yen, 2001). Later in this chapter, you will have the opportunity to understand systems thinking; these events provide unquestionable support for the importance of considering the interdependence of systems. In addition, consider the following changes: information and service industries, downsizing, mergers, and globalization.

Information rich industries are creating a demand for knowledge workers and transforming the world economy from a dependence on manufacturing to services and technology-based organizations (Griffin, 2005). Knowledge workers require continued training to keep their skills from becoming obsolete. “It has been suggested, for example, that the ‘half-life’ of a technical education in engineering is three years” (Griffin, 2005, p. 464).

Currently, more than 75% of the jobs in the United States are service-related jobs accounting for well over half the United States gross domestic product (Colvin, 2005). Service means individuals are not engaged in making a product but instead they are providing services ranging from medical care to fast food restaurants. The shift away from a manufacturing-based economy means that knowledge and service work is replacing manual labor. In 1990, 1 out of 5 workers were employed in manual labor. “By 2010, no more than 1 in 10 workers will be engaged in making or moving things” (Boyett & Boyett, 1998, p. 321).

Change has not impacted all groups of workers equally. “The average hourly wage of rank-and-file workers—a group that makes up 80% of the work force—is slightly lower than it was four years ago, once inflation is taken into account” (Leonhardt, 2006, p. C12). Thomas, Cooper, and Blake (1999) estimate “that by the year 2020, a high-tech, well-to-do group will monopolize more than 60% of the income earned in the United States” (p. 184) but this group will hardly comprise the majority of workers. As an overview, “United States is in the midst of a transition from an industrial society … to
a brain-driven, knowledge-based economy. In other words, you create more value in the coming society through creative thinking and planning than in rote manufacturing” (Toffler, 2006, p. 7). By any measure, having a strong back and a willingness to work will not serve to guarantee a financially rewarding future.

**Downsizing**, which is purposely becoming smaller by reducing the size of the workforce or shedding entire divisions or businesses, continues with as “many as 25 percent of U.S. workers (being) affected by merger or acquisition in the 1990s while worldwide merger and acquisition activity grew to $3.5 trillion in 2000” (Pepper & Larson, 2006, p. 49). The overall impact has been job insecurity created by uncertainty over who will become unemployed. **Mergers and acquisitions** (M&A) are another major force contributing to downsizing. “In 2002, for example, over 6,900 M&A deals worth $458.7 billion were conducted in the United States; globally, over 23,500 deals worth $1.4 trillion were registered” (Cummings & Worley, 2005, p. 454). Among various strategic arguments, one important force for M&A is the cost savings generated by moving from two human resources or accounting departments, for example, to one central department. One consequence is the involuntary lay-off of personnel.

Major organizations are combining to form **international megacompanies**. This absorption of one organization by another includes almost all types of businesses. A cursory examination of the changing names for department stores, banks, and grocery chains offer ever-present proof. In every field, the large corporations are getting larger, reducing the potential for an upstart organization to enter a market. “Indeed, 300 multinational companies account for 25% of the world’s assets” (Issak, 2005, p. 74).

Although larger organizations receive the brunt of attention, smaller companies provide the most job creation and opportunities. In the early 1970s, one in five American workers drew a paycheck from a Fortune 500 company. By the early 1990s, that ratio had fallen to 1 in 10. Of the 5.8 million U.S. employers, 89.1% are organizations with fewer than 20 workers. Only 0.3 percent have 500 or more (Mullins, 2003). The mid-1990s witnessed some 25 million Americans working as units of one, still highly dependent on the environment, but unencumbered by working with others in an organizational setting (Ussem, 1999). Companies with fewer than 500 employees “account for half the nation’s economic output and 60 to 80% of all new jobs” (Lohr, 2006, p. E10).

**Globalization** impacts on every aspect of organizational life as organizations work with foreign subsidiaries, enter global markets, create international coalitions, and engage in multinational enterprises. The interconnectedness between economies has reached an unprecedented level. In the 1960s, only 6% of the U.S. economy was exposed to international competition. That percentage skyrocketed to more than 70% in the 1980s and continues to grow
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(Rothwell, Prescott, & Taylor, 1999). For example, the best-managed firms venture into the international marketplace and routinely earn from 25% to nearly 100% of their total revenues by reaching beyond their national borders (McClenahen, 1998). Larger corporations often maintain foreign offices in more than 100 different countries. Most of us enjoy Colombian coffee; use Sony, Panasonic, or other Japanese equipment for entertainment, wear clothes sewn in an Asian country; or buy gas from BP (British Petroleum) or Shell (Dutch). Overseas, people recognize and enjoy Pepsi, Coca-Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald’s, and purchase numerous U.S.-based products. For all practical purposes, Microsoft has defined how worldwide business will be conducted for many organizations. More specifically, “succeeding in today’s economy requires fast reflexes and the ability to communicate and collaborate across the globe” (Mandel, 2005, p. 60).

The euro represents a dramatic example of interconnectedness. The January 1, 1999 adoption of this common currency by 12 countries changed the buying habits of 292 million residents. Only Britain, Denmark, Sweden, and Greece failed to adopt the new currency, although each country reserved the right to join later (Sancton, 1998). This represents “the biggest and most complex peacetime logistical operation in history” (Fairlamb, 2001, p. 48). These types of regional alliances have the potential to entirely reshape the competitive picture.

The digital revolution, mergers, and world competition forcing even greater demands for change in individual organizations spurred globalization’s impact. Stewart (1993) concludes: “Paradox: Although it’s hard to imagine a more macroeconomic subject, globalization is intensely parochial. Globalization’s strongest effects are on companies” (p. 67) requiring organizations to embrace change, use different communication and distribution systems, and devote more attention to diversity. For the foreseeable future, organizational change or discontinuity will be normal and continuity will be abnormal (Cummings & Worley, 2005). Changes are occurring in every national and international aspect of business and organizations. One of the most significant issues is diversity.

Diversity

Finally, diversity within and between organizations presents significant challenges and opportunities. “Diversity exists in a group or organization when its members differ from one another along one or more important dimensions” including gender, ethnic origin, age, and many other factors (Denisi & Griffin, 2005, p. 509). The entire make-up of the organizational world has been changing and this will continue with substantial increases in participation by traditional minorities and dramatic changes in demographics, multicultural backgrounds, and interests. The growth in female, African American, Hispanic, and Asian workers means the end of the traditional dominance by white males. Clearly, diversity encompasses more than gender or ethnic background.
Age, physical characteristics, educational level, living arrangements (including single, traditional, dual-income, divorced, and same-sex), all provide an increasingly diverse organizational make-up (Cummings & Worley, 2005).

All workforce segments will increase as a percentage of the total workforce (except white males, whose numbers declined from 46.4% to 38.4% by 2005). There is a much greater likelihood we will be working with individuals who are not from the groups we traditionally associate with, than with such a group. Add the internationalization of many organizations and we are likely to be reporting to superiors, working with colleagues, and directing subordinates from different countries. This trend is unlikely to decrease because, nationally and internationally, “companies promote diversity primarily because it makes good business sense” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 153).

The workforce changes are important. “For four decades, the number of women entering the workforce grew at a blistering pace, fostering a powerful cultural and economic transformation of American society” (Porter, 2006, p. A1). In 2000, “some 77% of women in the prime ages of 25 to 54 were in the workforce” (Porter, 2006, p. A1). However, there has been a leveling off of women in the workplace due to the increasing difficulty of balancing home- and family-related responsibilities with work demands (Porter, 2006).

By the year 2050, the U.S. population will increase by 50%, with immigration accounting for almost two thirds of that growth, which will create an increased need for multicultural understanding (Griffin, 2005). “By then, about half of all Americans will belong to what are now considered minority groups” according the U.S. Department of Labor’s 1999 report (Associated Press, 1999, p. 5B). The 2000 census revealed that 3 in 10 people in the United States are minorities; 6.8 million people identified themselves as multiracial; Hispanics make up 12.5% of the population, exceeding the African American population of 12.1%; and Asian Americans make up 3.6% of the population (Kasindorf & El Nasser, 2001). “By 2050, 21% of Americans will be claiming mixed ancestry” (Kasindorf & El Nasser, 2001, p. 2A). A USA Today/CNN/Gallup Poll revealed that 64% of the 1,015 respondents felt it “would be good for the country to have more Americans thinking of themselves as multiracial rather than belonging to a single race” with 24% viewing this possibility as a bad outcome (Kasindorf & El Nasser, 2001, p. A1). Three quarters of the respondents in the 19–29-year-old age group greeted a multiracial country positively.

The new economy fostered by rapid change, globalization, and the digital age “favors workers who excel in manipulating information and solving problems. And, as it turns out, the biggest pool of workers with that skill set is women” (Farrell, 1999, p. 35). The Women’s Research & Education Institute of Washington reports that U.S. women have been obtaining higher education degrees at a rapidly increasing rate and for the first time “the group of women between the ages of 25 and 35 have more education than their male counterparts” earning the majority of associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees.
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(Farrell, 1999, p. 35). However, these demographic increases are not reflected in promotions or positions. In 1998, members of minority groups represented only 12.4% of the officials and managers (Johnson, 1998). This is unfortunate, as an American Management Association and Business and Professional Women’s Foundation study of more than 1,000 executives found that “management diversity is directly correlated with superior organizational performance” (“Diversity boosts,” 1999, p. 5). Three key results of the study were: (1) Diversity breeds success because of the mixture of genders, ethnic backgrounds, and ages in senior management teams; (2) hiring diverse newcomers from the outside boosts performance; and (3) organizations that include senior managers under the age of 40 show a greater success pattern than those with exclusively older top executives.

Two-career families are becoming the norm, more individuals in the workforce are over 65 than in their teens, and women and people of color will outnumber the past majorities represented by white males. Once again, these shifts present new issues, challenges, and opportunities. “Today, in nearly four out of five couples—compared with one out of five in 1950—both partners are in the labor force, with women working nearly as many hours as men” (Hunter, 1999, p. 39). We have already indicated that some women are choosing not to work due to other commitments. However, the impact on couples where both are employed is undeniable.

Generation Y, numbering around 67 million and aged 20–29 (Fisher, 2006), comprise the second largest group of individuals to be entering the workforce. They are outnumbered only by the baby boomers who are discussed shortly. They seek flexibility, mobility, and different incentives than the security presented by earlier employment situations. An even more focused analysis includes the 42 million 16-to-25-year-olds who are also known as millennials or echo boomers (Jayson, 2006). This group shows great potential (having grown up with diversity and multiculturalism as facts of life), is more educated, faces fewer gender or ethnic barriers, and has a strong technological literacy. However, they have come of age in a globally competitive world where the path to the middle class is no longer a high school diploma (Jayson, 2006). In fact, “we live in a knowledge economy. What you know is beginning to count almost as much as who you know. Educational degrees are slowly becoming mere driver’s licenses when looking for a job and moving from one job to the other. What you know and specialize beyond the credentials is what counts” (Issak, 2005, p. 214). Not everyone in this age group strives to be a high achiever.

Social scientists have identified an additional subgroup, twixters, who are adults who still live with their parents, feel free to job hop, and generally seem to be going nowhere (Grossman, 2005). “The percentage of 26-year-olds living with their parents has nearly doubled since 1970, from 11% to 20%” (Grossman, 2005, p. 44). Although this group may seem directionless, many sociologists
attribute this apparent aimlessness to an attempt to choose the right path and to the willingness of family and society to accept the lifestyle. When contrasted with the same age bracket 40 years ago, “researchers found that by age 30, a much smaller percentage today (46% or women and 31% of men) have finished school, left home, gotten married, had a child or reached financial independence” (Jayson, 2006, p. 2D). For organizations depending on a youthful infusion, this technologically literate but somewhat unsettled group could present a challenge in terms of recruiting, retention, and motivation.

Sandwiched between these two groups are the 40 million Generation Xers (Fisher, 2006), which are the smallest group. As the first generation of “latch-key” kids with “no stay-at-home” moms, and with nearly 3 in 10 children being products of divorce, Gen-Xers’ views regarding the role of work in their lives are different from their elders (Zemke, Raines, & Filipcak, 2000). Along with Gen Ys, they are technologically literate, well educated, and they accept change as part of everyday life. Known as the baby bust, Gen Xers “are unambiguously the smallest generation since the Great Depression” (Fisher, 2006, p. 49). Xers underscore that “work attitudes have shifted, and workers are more willing to leave jobs to gain time for leisure or family” (Denisi & Griffin, 2005, p. 516). Sixty-two percent of American workers say their job activities and responsibilities are increasing, many are foregoing their full vacation time, and they see no end in sight—it is no wonder that this group of workers might opt for a less stressful life (Schwartz, 2004).

At the other end of the age spectrum, there are 69 million workers aged 40 to 59 as of June 2006 (Fisher, 2006). As opposed to earlier predictions, 44% these baby boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, plan to work well past their 64th birthday (Fisher, 2006). To put this group in perspective, every “seven seconds, somebody becomes 60 in our country” (Willoughby, 2006, p. 1).

Gen Y and Gen X will face different challenges than the boomers. For example, a “young American today with at least two years of college can expect to change jobs at least 11 times before retirement” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 16A). Part of the reason might be the need “to put in your time” in some organizations. Another problem is a developing Gray Ceiling. Boomers are putting off their retirement, meaning many “twenty-, thirty-, and even forty-something managers are in trouble. In addition, The Society for Human Resource Management reports that 55% of big U.S. companies are “giving managers the tools to increase retention of baby boomers, including flexible or reduced schedules and retention bonuses” (Fisher, 2006, p. 50).

Essentially, the workforce includes the over-55 baby boomers, the time-squeezed midcareer employees, and the under-34 group (Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006). As we have discovered, special considerations may well be necessary to adjust to this increased diversity in needs and attitudes (Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2006).
An intervening factor for many individuals is the increasing time demands that are creating strains on many families and individuals. The increase in knowledge-based occupations, where individuals take work home, respond to a 24/7 schedule, or worry about issues that have become a central part of their jobs, increases stress (Schwartz, 2004). In addition, business has moved away from traditional employment with 4 out of 10 Americans working on non-standard time (no more 9-to-5 workdays). The odd hours include evenings, nights, rotating shifts, and weekends to meet the demands of global supply chains and customers in every time-zone (Schwartz, 2004).

Stress, often created or increased by occupational demands, is a neutral concept. For example, it can motivate someone to study for an exam or do their best work. Stress “is a person’s adaptive response to a stimulus that places excessive psychological or physical demands on him or her” (Denisi & Griffin, 2005, p. 492). Although negative stress can create numerous work related issues, “most stress-related health problems are a far cry from the phenomenon known in Japan as karoshi, or ‘death from over-work’” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 16A). However, long hours or varying schedules, family pressures, increased technology, downsizing, rapid business expansion, and outsourcing and the other changes we have already discussed can lead to a sense of being out of control or stressed. In addition, all increase stress. Finally, complicated and creative work that cannot be easily reduced to a set of instructions is increasing, especially for the better educated employees (Farrell, 2005). Our point is that the ongoing diversification, combined with change and globalization, often leads to increased stress.

Race, gender, ethnicity, age, physical abilities, sexual orientation, social and economic class, access to education, disabilities, and other dimensions represent ongoing and significant areas of change (Reece & Brandt, 2005). With few exceptions, an enlightened and proactive approach to increasing diversity leads to excellent results (Denisi & Griffin, 2005; Reece & Brandt, 2005).

The digital age, change, and diversity underscore the importance of understanding organizational communication. The goal of this book is to provide an understanding that will be useful to you throughout your involvement with organizations. Although we could focus on managerial communication or leader-centered behavior, this unnecessarily limits your options as you choose and develop your career or careers. Different positions require different skills and understanding, and during your progression through any organization you will be alternatively both in charge and a relative newcomer. Therefore, your repertoire of knowledge and skills is more important than any one procedure. As you read the various chapters of this text, you will understand a great deal about managerial behavior, which leads you to be a better supervisor or manager. During this learning, you will also recognize the critical skills needed as a leader. Finally, you will understand how to use communication as a neophyte in a particular organization, during your transitions from one
position to another and throughout the various organizational activities in which you will engage.

Communication in Organizations
Communication is one of the most dominant activities occurring in any work setting. The need to study, understand, and effectively use organizational communication has been, for many individuals, an after-the-fact enlightenment. As such, individuals in various occupations refer to the inability of others to communicate well, the lack of listening skills displayed by their colleagues, or the unwillingness of subordinates to follow instructions. At times, we all contend that other people fail to communicate and we are almost mystified that others do not hear us in the manner we intend. Over the years, experts in management theory have preached the need for improved communication. Unfortunately, being aware of the need for improved communication does not always translate into better understanding or use. A recent survey found that 14% of each 40-hour work week is wasted because of poor communication between staff and management, which equals a staggering number of seven work weeks of squandered productivity a year (Armour, 1998). The move to knowledge, information, and technology-dependent organizations spawned by the digital age only underscores the increasing importance of effective organizational communication (Jones et al., 2004).

Importance of Communication to the Organization
Earlier in this chapter, we examined numerous changes impacting organizations. Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of 531 U.S. organizations that had recently undergone change efforts were asked to identify one thing they would change about their efforts. Overwhelmingly, they pointed to the communication process (Larkin & Larkin, 1996). OfficeTeam, a leading staffing service, surveyed the Fortune 1000 firms and found that communication and people skills “will be subject to their severest test during the next millennium, thanks to the technological transformation of the workplace” (“The Challenges,” 1999, p. 6). General Electric (“Survey: GE,” 1984), in their study of 10,000 employees, found a direct link between good communication with the employee’s immediate supervisor and job satisfaction in the specific categories of general problems, feedback, salary discussions, career counseling, and performance appraisal. Organizations listed in “The 100 Best Companies to Work for in 2006” see effective two-way communication as an underpinning to employees’ motivation and the organizations’ success (Colvin, 2006). “Look closely and you’ll find that these companies (Best Small and Medium Companies to Work For) include their employees in the loop. They communicate well” (Pomeroy, 2004, p. 54).

For individuals, “the importance of communication skills for those who seek to gain employment or advance in their career fields is well documented”
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(Kinnick & Parton, 2005, p. 431). But, many individuals enter the workplace ill-equipped to be effective organizational communicators. For example, “business schools have been criticized for not adequately teaching the communication skills and competencies needed in today’s service-oriented, team-oriented, and decentralized environment” (Kinnick & Parton, 2005, p. 432). Reinsch and Shelby (1997) found that “management communication classes might be enhanced by giving significant attention to oral communication, particularly in dyadic, work group, team meeting, and presentation settings, and by giving significant attention to issues of conflict, of persuasion, and of interaction across organizational boundaries” (p. 21). The endorsements for more organizational and business communication training in higher education and the impetus for these observations are based on the impact of inadequate communication. “There is mounting evidence that poor communication between hospital staff and surgeons is the leading cause of avoidable surgical errors” (Landro, 2005, p. D1).

During my own consulting work with various companies, one of the tools used to determine the direction for training and development is a needs analysis given to members of the organization. The typical analysis involves 40 question areas, which are translated into 10 specific categories in need of additional training. In the last few years, the analysis has been given to one of the top 20 U.S. banking corporations, two plastic manufacturing companies, the headquarters of an international moving company, a steel manufacturing company, a large regional medical center, and several specialized companies. In every case, communication is ranked as first, or sometimes second, as the area in need of improvement within the organization. Invariably, the other top item is motivation, which also is discussed later in this text. These two items rank above many traditional organizational issues such as delegating, teamwork, time management, leadership, or job structure and planning. When people actually working are asked to decide where improvement needs to be made in an organization, they focus on communication. Boyett and Boyett (1998) conclude that inadequate information about organizations, customers, and individual performance is “the major cause of more than half of all problems with human performance. By improving the quality and timeliness of the information people receive, you can improve performance by as much as 20 to 50%” (p. 288).

Importance of Communication to Leaders

In addition to being important to organizations, communication is critical to the leader, manager, or supervisor (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997; see chap. 11). Gardner (1995) concludes: “a key—perhaps the key—to leadership … is the effective communication of a story” (p. 37). O’Toole (1996) and Covey (1991) point to the ability to listen effectively as a key to leadership.
A shocking 40% of the people hired to be managers fail, according to a study by Manchester Partners International (Elliott, 1999). Of those, 82% leave because of their inability to build good relationships with peers and subordinates. A 20-year longitudinal study of Stanford MBA graduates showed communication to be an important part of their success in business and organizations and “a clear dominance in the importance of oral communication over written communication” (Harrell & Harrell, 1984). The Stanford study also indicated that a large number of the MBA students had chosen to become entrepreneurs or work with small businesses and found their communication abilities to be a significant asset in their success. Responding to an apparent lack of effective communication skills, MBA programs are increasingly requiring communication courses (“The Trouble,” 2007).

Top executives, and those aspiring to become top executives, provide an equally important barometer of the need for better organizational communication. Any review of the top 10 best-selling, nonfiction books would include 2 or 3 dealing with the ingredients needed to be successful in business. These books almost universally draw the conclusion that behavior, which is manifested through communication with other members of an organization, is the key to executive success (Bennis & Goldsmith, 1997). The type of communication activity used by the excellent organizations and successful leaders is markedly different from the traditional types of managerial behavior.

Importance of Communication to the Individual

Not only is the ability to communicate effectively an important factor for organizations and leaders, it also is a vital skill for the individual (see chap. 9). From job interviews to relationships with coworkers or being promoted and becoming a leader, effective interpersonal communication stands out as a vital organizational skill (de Janasz, Dowd, & Schneider, 2002; Reece & Brandt, 2005). The continued growth in service, knowledge, and information jobs means that successful communication will dominate everyone’s activities. At various times in everyone’s career, the need to interview effectively, listen and gather information, lead others, work in groups and on teams, and respond to change makes effective communication skills a requirement for successful employment. At this point, we have established the importance of organizational communication.

Understanding Organizational Communication

In spite of the importance of communication in and to organizations, studying the subject seems to present a paradox for many individuals. On the surface, communication, especially in the nonprint areas, might seem to be too simple to really need to be carefully analyzed. After all, once we tell people that communication is important, and that “breakdowns” should be avoided, what else is there really to be studied? If employees should be listened to more
often, then some type of general directive or meeting should make all the supervisors and managers aware of the problem, leaving little reason to try and examine something so obvious. In fact, a perusal of current management magazines yields a variety of articles on communication (ranging from effective language use, to listening, to using e-mail) and generally, the articles will be two to five pages in length. The suggestions for improvement are usually to the point, but the manager often learns that implementing the suggestions is not as surefire as the article makes them appear.

The more we become aware of the ineffective uses of communication in organizations, the more the concept seems to be all-inclusive and difficult to study. For example, the well-meaning manager, using an ongoing program of Management by Wandering Around (MBWA), which means visiting various parts of an organization or department with a casual, information-obtaining and relationship-improving motive. Done well, MBWA could create a strong sense of identification between management and employees. MBWA, one of the characteristics identified in studies of excellent companies, refers to the willingness of the management team to wander through various parts of the organization in order to listen to employees in an informal setting. The process is intended to develop relationships, gather information, and break down barriers (Peters & Austin, 1985). Although well intended, to the employees the manager might be seen as too intrusive or overbearing, merely using a gimmick, or simply increasing an unwanted “policing” tendency. If the employees have not previously seen the manager except during formal tours, why would they suddenly find her or his presence reassuring?

The more we learn about communication, the more we understand that all behavior is potentially communicative. In the communication process, each individual is both an actor and a reactor to the communication events. We introduce our own interpretation of events. We apply our own perceptual and interpretative lens to other’s communication behaviors (see chap. 2). Because we simultaneously produce and respond to behaviors, the possible implications are truly astonishing. Each time we choose a particular behavior, the communication impact is highly dependent on a host of circumstances.

This seeming paradox can be resolved through a systematic study of organizational communication. For recent college graduates, for example, the merits of their job-related skills are often overshadowed by a lack of awareness of how to use communication in an organization, thereby slowing career development (Reinsch & Shelby, 1997).

Providing you with the knowledge necessary to be successful in your communication is the goal of this textbook and you will find this information useful to you throughout your career with any organization. This will be true in at least three circumstances. First, even when we are effective in our communication processes, we may lack the theoretical underpinnings to be able to explain why. When this happens, we cannot be certain of replicating our
successes. Second, if we do not succeed, it is equally important to be able to examine the situation to identify and correct, if possible, those factors that caused the failure. Finally, when we face new or different situations, we need to be able to predict, with some degree of success, what communication behaviors will be likely to produce the results we would like to have. Because effective communication is fundamental to an individual’s success, the systematic study of communication provided by this book gives you a significant advantage in your own career.

Perspectives
Two perspectives must be understood to develop our organizational communication skills: (1) communication is a process, and (2) organizations can be viewed most usefully as systems of behavior.

Communication as a Process
Identifying communication as a process is basic to developing our understanding of organizational communication activities. Early examinations attempted to provide models isolating the important factors in order to understand and quantify or qualify the impact of various communication behaviors. Three different stages can be identified in the model developing process.

The first models of communication were linear in nature and involved tracing a one-way flow of messages with the speaker or sender developing or encoding a message that would be sent over a channel or channels to be received by a listener or receiver. These models were simple in form and effective in drawing attention to certain aspects of the communication process while largely ignoring the importance of feedback.

As you probably can predict, this model is not very valuable in an organizational setting. If you cannot receive feedback regarding your communication, then you have no means for finding out if the message has been received correctly. In human communication, the idea that we can put something into a clear message that will be understood by other people is an ideal rather than an everyday reality.

The limitations of the linear model for depicting the communication process led to the interactional models of communication that took into account the critical importance of feedback and focused on the reciprocal message exchanges that occur between senders and receivers. From this perspective, feedback was any kind of signal or message that told the sender what was happening at the receiving end of the process. By accepting the importance of both participants in the eventual success or failure of the communication process, the interactional approaches were better able to explain the dynamic nature of human communication. The computer is based on this model. But, this model still assumes an interactive nature somewhat similar to a Ping-Pong game where the messages are exchanged rather than simultaneously shared.
A fundamental problem with the linear and interactional models is that they lead to misnomers, and therefore misunderstandings, regarding the actual event called communication, presenting an incomplete explanation of the communication process. The simplest means of demonstrating the problem is to use a popular notion, the communication breakdown. When we fail to achieve our goals in an operation, procedure, or relationship, we frequently say that we have a “communication breakdown” or a “failure to communicate.” This assumption is based on either a linear or a step-by-step depiction of communication. Somewhere in the process there is a breakdown. Naturally, if we could find the breakdown, we could correct the communication problem. The linear model would examine the sender’s techniques or approaches. The interaction model would trace the sequence of events. Although both of these explanations have an appeal because of their simplicity, the dynamics of the communication process are not as easily explained. In the communication process, senders and receivers are simultaneously sending and receiving messages and neither person nor element in the communication activity can fail to communicate. This view of communication leads to the conclusion that one cannot not communicate once a transaction has occurred between individuals (Watzlawick, Beavin, & Jackson, 1967). This does not mean that everything that happens is communication, as is explained shortly.

Communication is a process where there is a mutual assignment of meaning, simultaneous responses by all persons in the transaction, ongoing giving and receiving of multiple messages, circularity, and numerous channels of communication (Berlo, 1960). Any form of human communication is an attempt to create meaning as long as it is purposeful. This view of communication as a transaction leads to three conclusions (Adler & Towne, 2003; Harris & Sherblom, 2005). First, the process is complex and dynamic. Transactions are contextual and therefore irreversible, unique, and unrepeatable. We interpret communication based on the circumstances and once it occurs that particular set of events cannot be repeated in the identical form. Second, as a process, communication has no necessary beginning or end, so labeling participants as senders and receivers is an arbitrary, although sometimes useful, distinction. We can assign the role of sender in a given situation, but almost all organizational communication occurs in the context of ongoing activities, relationships, and goals. Third, everyone can be simultaneously affected and can affect every other member of the transaction. In other words, we are sending and receiving at the same time. Consider for a moment how adopting a perspective that sees communication as complex, dynamic, irreversible, ongoing, contextual, and simultaneous can enhance your understanding of organizational communication.
Two important premises underlie these conclusions. First, human beings behave toward each other and, as living organisms, cannot not behave (Bateson, 1972). You might be concerned that this perspective leaves everything we do within the realm of communication and this issue has lead to some interesting academic debates.

However, the second premise is that the behavior, as we already have mentioned, must be meaningful to at least one of the participants. This is a powerful perspective. Clearly, it explains why seemingly innocent actions can elicit very negative responses. In addition, when we add this limitation, we free ourselves from including all behavior and we also free ourselves from the expectation that the intended message will be the one received.

Why would we opt for this broad-based, multiple behaviors perspective? A transactional approach can be a great asset for enhancing our understanding of communication (Adler & Towne, 2003). Difficulties arise in the communication process when there are incongruencies in the meanings in a transaction. You are probably familiar with the problem you have in responding to someone who gives different, and perhaps contradictory, messages. A classic example of this problem in an organization is the request by management for suggestions from employees regarding the organization. All too often, some suggestions are not responded to, met with indifference, or lost in some bureaucratic review process. Others are implemented. Employees are left with conflicting messages between management’s stated desires and actions. Ironically, management often means a little, or a lot, of both messages and therefore continues the confusing behaviors.

Many organizations now refer to employees as associates, partners, team members, or consultants, to name a few, which can be a wise symbolic move. However, if this new title does not carry with it any more power, responsibility or decision making, employees might see a contradiction between the new title and the reality that nothing has really changed. Once again, the problem arises out of the confusion or incongruence within the transaction because the language and the actions contradict each other. Our earlier example of the manager who attempts to use management by walking around (MBWA) but finds the interpretation by employees is quite different from his or her intended meaning provides another illustration of this communication characteristic. It also could be that he or she lacks the savoir-faire or knowledge of how to effectively use the technique and it comes across as a stratagem or trick rather than a sincere attempt at better management.

Communication is based on the meaning attached to behavior by the participants. So, even when good intentions are behind certain activities ranging from soliciting suggestions to MBWA, we respond to the behaviors we can observe. To extend our example, the manager might react to employee cynicism by eliminating the practice of MBWA. However, the communication transaction already has begun, so the manager now will experience
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an important corollary to one cannot not communicate. Once a transaction has begun, although you can stop giving expression, you cannot stop giving off expression because meaning can be attached to any change in behavior. So, employees might be able to justify their initial distrust by observing the cessation of MBWA. The manager is not necessarily between the proverbial rock and a hard place in this example. With experience in using communication effectively, new behaviors need not come across as insincere.

In summary, communication is transactional. As an ongoing process, communication is the study of behaviors that elicit or produce meaning between and within individuals, groups, or organizations.

Organizations as Systems

Organizations are systems and subsystems or cosystems of behavior that are interrelated, interdependent, and interacting rather than chartable, linear, or static structures. You are familiar with the systems approach to understanding but may never have considered the reasoning. For example, the human body is a living system with numerous parts all interacting to maintain life within a larger ecosystem. In simple terms, a headache can influence many other parts of the body and hitting our funny bone or spraining an ankle makes the interconnected nature of our bodies all too apparent. This leads to the overall concept: A system is composed of regularly interacting or interdependent groups of activities that form a whole. A change in one aspect can affect change in other aspects.

Organizations are dynamic, living entities that have been put together to accomplish some type of purpose—they are goal oriented. The number and variety of parts to an organization can be truly astonishing. In an attempt to provide order, organizations establish many of the rules, roles, and behaviors that individuals follow to maintain their organizations. An organization’s structure, tasks, and methods evolve out of the history of the organization’s transactions with its changing members and environment. For our purposes, how these components work in relationship to each other is the vital question (Brache & Rummler, 1997). The arrangement of the interrelated parts creates the system.

The systems perspective is potentially seductive for looking at organizations because a “systemized pattern of behavior” is practically a synonym for the concept of organization. More properly, an organization should be viewed as a system because it is the sum total of the various parts and how those parts interact determine the output and growth of the process. Be warned, that “systems thinking generally requires a radical shift in how (organizational) members view the world: from seeing parts to seeing wholes; form seeing linear cause–effect chains to seeing interrelationships; from seeing static entities to seeing processes of change” (Cummings & Worley, 2005, p. 504). At the beginning of this part of the chapter, we mentioned the human body. As we
engage in a fuller discussion, you might find using the human body as a relevant example of systems thinking. An obvious example could be the “freshman 15” weight gain that often occurs when students enter college, which reflects the impact of changing eating behaviors or input into the system.

First, the organization as a system is a perspective or framework toward organizations and not necessarily a theory (Katz & Kahn, 1978). Our consideration is with the integrated whole of the organization, which is made up of interacting and interrelated parts. Thus, the whole can range from individuals engaging in a business or interaction with others to Microsoft. Our goal is to understand the interacting parts of this system. The benefit of this view is it relieves us from looking at certain subgroups, such as managers, supervisors, marketing, operations, or sales, for understanding thereby preventing a myopic view of what actually occurs in the organization. To focus on a relationship with one colleague, for example, neglects the critical influences of other parts of the organization. The systems view of organizations provides a framework for looking at the organization as a whole in terms of process-related subsystems. Each subsystem in an organization—whether it is departments, job categorizations, or promotions—is separate and definable, but it is also interrelated and interdependent. All organizations are conglomerations of many subsystems, ranging from the annual company picnic organizing committee to the board of directors or trustees. If we are looking at an organization as part of an entire industry, we could have the system (the organization), the subsystems (components of the organization), and suprasystem or the industry as a whole (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977). For example, your university or college bookstore could comprise the system, the people working there would make up some of the subsystems, and the university or college would be the suprasystem because it owns the property and operates the overall higher education facility. You can add any number of other subsystems such as suppliers or textbook providers. When you frequent the bookstore, you become part of the system and customers are integral parts of the successful operating of any service industry. Systems are arranged hierarchically, so every system is a suprasystem for systems contained within it and a subsystem for systems containing it. In this case, the bookstore is a system to the college or university suprasystem.

The Tragedy of the Commons demonstrates the interrelated and interdependent nature of systems. In the 1800s in England, villages created a common grazing area in the middle of the village for everyone to use—this increased security for the livestock and convenience for the owners. Some villagers, seeking greater wealth or status, added to their livestock beginning a cycle where other villagers also added livestock. Soon the commons was overgrazed, making the commons unusable. Essentially, the villagers ignored the systems nature of the commons, the interconnectness of their futures, and focused on their individual success.
Interconnectedness of subsystems can be demonstrated by examining the current issue of global warming. Scientists noted the impact of global warming more than 10 years ago and the consensus among scientists regarding the reality of global warming has now solidified to rival the medical consensus on the dangers of smoking (Linden, 2006). “Precipitation patterns, the change of seasons, storm intensity, sea ice, glaciers, temperatures under tundras—all are in flux” as a result (Demos, 2006, p. 136).

Although public perception seems slower to respond, and political wrangling continues, “the last decades of the 20th century showed an unmistakable and extraordinary warming” (Linden, 2006, p. 248). From a systems perspective, changes in one part of the system in terms of emissions impacts other parts of the system as a result of interdependence.

Systems are composed of numerous constituencies. For example, there are other interests, perhaps an oil or coal producer, who do not wish to see a dramatic reduction in greenhouse gases for obvious reasons (Flannery, 2005). In some instances, government reports on the impact of gases have been altered by certain officials to lessen the impact of the evidence (Flannery, 2005). The journal *Science* concluded, after a review of the evidence, that unchecked global warming will lead to the destruction of our species (Hansen, 2005). Our point is the dramatic nature of a systems perspective. Rather than narrowly focusing on particular interests or demands, the systems perspective allows a broader view of the key issues and the impact of interactions.

In the past, many have seen our world as unidirectional leading to mental models that seek simple solutions to complex issues. Actually, we operate in a complex system with ongoing interconnection with intertwining loops of events and information, which are influenced by numerous parts of the organization (Senge et al., 1994). Remember our Y2K discussion at the beginning of this chapter. No single computer represented the entire problem, nor would fixing one subsystem guarantee an overall correction. We cannot simply focus on a single issue and assume that it is the cause for a particular event in an organization.

Second, all organizations exist within an environment and are both created and controlled by the environment. Organizations involve a pattern of recurrent activities of input, transformation, and output. Resources, or inputs (energy, matter, money, materials, personnel, or information) are imported from the environment. These are transformed or changed through various processes (means, methods, procedures, how-to-do-its, information, or techniques) in some fashion or another, and the resulting outputs (products, information, or services) are exported back into the environment. There are several important systems concepts worthy of additional discussion.

**Openness**

All human organizations function in varying states of openness or responsiveness to their environment, because their *boundaries are permeable and they*
constantly are engaged in interactions. When the organization tends toward isolation from its environment, it moves toward a closed status (Bertlanffy, 1968). Actually, organizations cannot remain isolated for long because they are highly dependent on the consumer, supplier, and often government for their growth, stability, or survival. Inputs or resources such as money, materials, and information are provided by the environment, which, in turn, receives outputs from the organizations—these outputs can be products, services, and revised information. Because this is an ongoing process, to the degree that the outputs respond well to the inputs, the system will remain open and growth will occur. No living system is ever totally open (boundary-less) or totally closed, but successful organizations do not ignore input from their environments. In contrast with closed systems, which are best demonstrated by classical Newtonian physics, open systems maintain themselves with a constant interchange with the host environment, so there is a continual exchange of energy between the system and its environment. Specifically, all successful organizations seek and utilize customer input in order to remain open to the environment.

Thus, an open system can be represented as a recurring cycle of input, transformation, and output. Both the input and output characteristics of the open system keep the system in constant commerce with the environment, whereas the transformation process is contained within the system. An effective open system requires a balance among the three stages of the cycle, with the input taking into account both environmental demands and the capacity of the system to absorb the flow from the input and moving to the output stage. This system is a vital model for organizational life because it is concerned with the elements of the system; the structure of the system, the interdependency of the elements of the system, and the way the system is embedded in the environment.

At all levels of an organization from individuals within the organization to the environment surrounding the organization, communication is the process used to connect and coordinate the system and its subsystems (Rothman, 1972). As you already may have concluded, there is an excellent fit between the two perspectives presented in this chapter. Both communication and organizations can be understood best as open, living systems that are dynamic in nature. This is true for communication between individuals, within teams, departments, or groups, or throughout the organization.

Feedback

In order to maintain a steady state, an open system needs adaptive processes to receive information about its activities, which is called feedback. Feedback represents the ability of the system to generate and utilize evaluative information. Without such information, the system is blind to itself and the consequences of its actions. Ford Motor Company drastically reduced its production for the second half of 2006, after closing several plants and offering buy-outs...
to current employees, due to a lack of sales of sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and other vehicles. This situation was due, in a large part, to not paying attention to earlier customer trends or feedback (Carty, 2006). On a broader scale, the high failure rate for new businesses often is traced to the unwillingness of the entrepreneur to obtain information or follow advice, which is feedback, regarding how to operate (Hisrich, 1990).

Two types of feedback are possible. When the feedback reinforces, accentuates, or adds to the direction being taken by the system it is positive. The feedback is negative when it corrects a deviation (Senge et al., 1999). This is a somewhat different description of positive and negative feedback from the common notion that positive feedback equals a compliment. For a system, feedback is the vital component that allows it to maintain a steady state. Negative feedback decreases the difference between the desired results (goal) and the actual results. Positive feedback increases the differences. To illustrate these two types of feedback, remember our manager who is trying to follow the advice of organizational consultants by practicing MBWA. Managers can employ MBWA as a system-maintaining mechanism to receive information (input) in order to increase their understanding (transformation) of their interrelated subsystems or, in this case, the employees, in order to be more effective managers (output). Hopefully, employees will feel free to reinforce current managerial actions (negative feedback), explain why some procedures are not working well in helping the department meet its goals (negative feedback), or call for fewer work rules and greater freedom in individual actions (positive feedback). Although the call for less control is not necessarily system-maintaining, the insightful manager still can use this information to make some decisions regarding current practices toward employees and, if a change in work rules appears to be helpful to the organization, the information could become negative feedback.

The manager also has the opportunity during the wandering to use both types of feedback. If some behavior is out of line with the expectations, the manager might correct the subordinates about the work they are doing. This most likely would be considered negative feedback because it would be system-correcting. If the manager wanted greater innovation by a group of individuals, then positive feedback could be used to reinforce the changes where the manager removes some constraints.

Obviously, both types of feedback have an important role to play in an organization. Too much negative feedback creates a loss of initiative because employees soon learn that doing it “by the book” will create the least amount of difficulty. Organizations must maintain a steady state, however, so the manager, team, or leader must impose some system-maintaining behavior. Too much positive feedback could result in people doing their own thing with no coordination or direction. Eventually, the department would be unable to “organize” its actions and slowly work toward entropy. Finally, when the
process of feedback is confined to the system itself, it would be considered closed, which, as we already have indicated, would be a destructive factor in an organization. When there is an interchange between the system and its environment through feedback, it is considered open (Senge et al., 1999). Essentially, a hotel that listens to customer comments would be open to feedback.

Entropy
Living systems tend toward entropy—disorganization, stagnation, or chaos. Human organizations are capable of resisting entropy because they can maintain and increase their supply of energy, information, and level of organization. In other words, disorganization can be resisted through the importing of external resources or providing additional support and structure to the existing subsystems. In addition, an organization must provide tangible and intangible outputs to its environment that enable it to receive the inputs necessary to its survival. Systems cannot survive in the absence of negative feedback or information (e.g., customer complaints) that enables them to detect deviations from course (e.g., excellent service). An organization maintains a dynamic equilibrium (steady state), which includes the basic “character” of the organization (manifested in recurring cycles of events). This steady state is highly stable even though the organization evolves over time in response to internal and environmental changes. Maintaining an organized structure is achieved through information processing. The processing is dependent on the interpretation (coding process) and how the information is filtered and passed on.

Organizational Subsystems
In all organizations, two internal subsystems continually operate. One consists of the groups within the organization and the other consists of the dyadic or individual relationships. The elements of these two subsystems are discussed in detail when we examine organizational communication concepts throughout the remainder of this text.

The system called the organization also has formal structure with definite lines of responsibility and authority. These often have been the basis for organizational charts, which define the formal lines of authority and responsibility within an organization. All organizations also have a much less easily defined informal structure, which includes emerging leaders, power politics, assumed authority, and so on. The formal structure outlines the authority, whereas the informal structure outlines the influence. At all times, these can be the same, different, or an interesting combination. The third-shift foreman or supervisor, for example, may have the authority to require the crew to skip their break time, but several recalcitrant members have the potential influence of voicing a grievance concerning the decision. If the recalcitrants are listened to, then temporary power or influence is shifted. What else comprises an organizational system?
Rational Objectives  Whenever people are gathered together in an organization, it is for some specific purpose. These objective goals, or “things to do,” are established by the mandate behind the organization’s existence and usually are divided into attainable subtasks or short-range targets. Within these subtasks are the specific tasks for each individual within the organization to accomplish. Frequently, these tasks are the reasons why someone was hired. Critically, all organizations have some rational objectives that provide the members with direction.

Methodology  Organizations also are structured around some ways of doing the tasks through training, tools, background, expertise, and procedures. This is, for all practical purposes, the definition of technology. In its narrowest sense, technology is the machinery—the physical things used ranging from cars to computers to cash registers for all occupations and organizations. But in its truest sense, the technological subsystem in an organization includes the way the tools are employed and how things get accomplished. These techniques are procedures developed from knowledge about and experience with the best ways to do a job at any particular point. The standard operating procedure establishes how a job is to be done and is part of the technological subsystem. When asked how something is accomplished in an organization, we are seeking information regarding the methodology.

Management/System Integraters  All organizations have a subsystem that organizes and controls the other subsystems, causing them to interact and resulting in increased effectiveness of the total organization. Although the term most often applied to this concept is boss or supervisor, in a real sense, managers are those individuals who integrate the system and subsystems for the goals of the organization. They are the ones that control the output. In the most basic terms, power, authority, decision-making, and coordination all represent this ability to manage. Whenever power and authority are being exercised, resources are affected, or someone is directing people in their efforts toward a common goal, that process represents the managerial structure.

Interdependence  All of these factors tell us that to make a change in one subsystem requires that some consideration be made regarding the implications for the other subsystems. By examining the level of interdependence, or asking what effect the change will have on other subsystems (environment, people, structure, objectives, technology, and management), it is possible to be aware of the values, or lack of value of the particular change. In our earlier discussion of communication, we offered the same observation that changes in one part of a relationship would create changes in other parts.

Two additional concepts complete this initial examination of organizations as systems.
Nonsummative  The first concept is that the interactions between the systems in an organization are nonsummative, which means the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Often, this concept is labeled synergy with the popular explanation that 1 + 1 never equals just 2. The interactions between the various components of the organization create synergy, or increased energy, to the system. The interactions between the various parts of the system result in the end-product being different from what each of the departments, individuals, or groups originally contributed to the process.

Equifinality  In addition, a systems approach points to the principle of equifinality, which means the same end-product or outcome can be reached through a variety of conditions. In other words, there are numerous ways to accomplish the same goal or reach the same conclusion. This aspect of a systems approach explains why different organizations, departments, and individuals can achieve comparable successes without necessarily following the same route or process. One of the best examples of this concept lies in the development of general systems theory. The basic principles and elements of systems thinking were agreed on even though the scholars’ backgrounds ranged from biology (Bertlanffy, 1968) to economics (Boulding, 1977).

Both nonsummative or synergy and equifinality depend on communication between individuals and subsystems and are examples of the interlocking nature of communication and organizational systems. The perspectives of communication as a process and organizations as systems stem from the same philosophical base regarding living systems. As open systems, people and organizations are dynamic, ongoing, and ever-changing—not static entities. Our discussion of systems thinking up to this point has emphasized the concepts as they should function. Actually, organizations are complex systems with additional characteristics.

Complex Systems  Applied to a static example, a systems perspective obviously works. However, systems thinking and the dynamics involved provide a much more robust explanation regarding the impact of change in complex systems—which includes all organizations. Organizations are made up of various subsystems and units exhibiting mutual influence and interdependence. A change in one part of an organization or a department can impact on numerous other parts of the organization. Stata (1989) observes that “changes intended to improve performance in one part of the organization can affect other parts of the organization with surprising, often negative consequences” (p. 65). Essentially, the information used at a local level to make a change, which is often the only information available, can be counterproductive to the system as a whole.

Imagine an interstate highway as a dynamic and complex system. An accident during rush hour on any part of the interstate entering a metropolitan
area creates a snowballing effect based on the limited information available and acted on by the individuals passing the accident. Perhaps there is needless “rubber-necking,” lane changes, a ghoulish desire to see more, or debris on the road. The result will be a “domino effect” of slowed traffic that can take hours to resolve. Often, transformations occurring in an organization can be chaotic, uncertain, discontinuous, and disorderly for much the same reason. Add the dynamics of changes in the external environment ranging from natural disasters to shifting consumer preferences for a specific product or output and the importance of considering complex systems becomes apparent.

Second-Order or Quantum Change

Viable organizations are open to input from their environment and the internal subsystems. As parts of the organization interact, there are transformations. A first-order change involves a simple, specific change in procedure or process as a result of a discussion or a problem-solving procedure. Perhaps the department fails to schedule vacations effectively and a new method is developed. Because this is largely procedural, the department members or subsystems do not change themselves, their basic jobs, or the way they interact. Early attempts to apply systems thinking failed because they were trying to systematize or plot the organization to increase predictability and control rather than observing the interactions thereby focusing only on first order changes. Ironically, as we become more proficient at our jobs, we become less likely to consider second-order changes (Argyris, 1991). We impose the incorrect, but popular phrase, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it” which is the classic first-order, system-maintaining view. A popular expression is that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.

A second-order or quantum change involves the organization’s context, process, or dynamic. This is a fundamental change that impacts on how the organization functions. An obvious example is the shift by most high-performing organizations from controlling employees to treating everyone as a thinker and doer. Teamwork replaces rigid rules, isolated layers and structures are integrated in order to achieve synergy, and system openness occurs with the commensurate transformations.

Faced with important issues to resolve, groups and organizations attempt to adjust or fix what they are already doing or look for quantum changes. It is axiomatic in change that “more and more of the same will only provide more and more of the same.” Returning to our earlier discussion of the digital present and future, organizations are becoming wired with information technology creating a more agile, virtual, global, and cybernetic system requiring entirely new ways of organizing and communicating. Accepting this input into the organization’s operations promises second-order change.
What approaches are available to apply systems thinking to organizational communication and change? We examine three: learning organizations, sense-making, and self-organizing systems.

**Learning Organizations**

Senge (1991), among others, has forwarded the concept of learning organizations. Using systems thinking, Senge observes that organizations are constantly changing, as we noted earlier in this chapter. An organization must engage in self-renewal, questioning of processes, and sharing of information and meaning between people in order to remain viable. Unique to a learning organization is the capacity to think about what is being done as well as doing what must be done, which is called *double-loop learning* (DLL). Senge sees a clear link between communication processes, shared visions and meanings, and systems thinking.

When we learn a particular job or understand the procedures for doing something, we are engaging in single-loop learning (SLL), or adaptive learning. When we understand the principles behind a particular process, we are using DLL, or generative learning. Learning organizations, and living systems, can go beyond the routine and begin to develop creative and growth-producing processes. Effective DLL is concerned with how people think and reason about their behavior (Argyris, 1991). A simple analogy will demonstrate the difference between knowing how to do a job and knowing why we do a job, essentially the difference between skill and knowledge (Kim, 1993).

A thermostat that automatically turns on the air conditioning when a room temperature goes above 75 degrees is a good example of single-loop learning (SLL). If the thermostat could ask “Why am I set at 75 degrees?” and then explore whether some other temperature might be more economically viable, it would be engaging in double-loop learning (DLL).

Similarly, students memorizing information for a test are engaging in SLL. If these students were asking how they could add to the information they have learned, or why is this is the best way to approach the subject, they would be engaging in DLL. Imagine an organization that allows its employees to constantly seek ways to improve the ongoing processes by engaging in understanding the “whys” as well as the “whats.” DLL allows the organization to develop individuals and processes to resist entropy, create growth, and take advantage of change. Senge (1990) concludes: DLL “requires seeing the systems that control events. When we fail to grasp the systemic source of problems, we are left to ‘push on’ symptoms rather than eliminate underlying causes” (p. 8). Both second-order changes and double-loop learning offer insights into how organizations function as systems. People and organizations are adaptive, dynamic, ongoing, and ever-changing. Senge and his collaborators (1999) have collected diverse tales recounted by organizational change explorers based on a learning organization perspective. This applied approach includes initiating...
change, sustaining the transformation, and redesigning and rethinking during the process. This leads to a second important concept: sense-making.

Sense-Making
Organizations are complex and, for most individuals, not easily understood. Because we are not privy to the big picture, we engage in attempts to understand and make sense of our secular part of the organization (e.g., student, faculty, administration). To be sure, we often believe we understand because we are naïve about the organization. The chaotic and uncertain nature of the environment surrounding organizations, and the constantly changing subsystems within an organization, leads to a need to reduce uncertainty.

Weick (1979, 1995) provides important insights into a systems understanding of organizational behavior and the process of sense-making. Organizing, “the resolving of equivocality in an enacted environment by means of interlocked behaviors embedded in conditionally related processes,” is constantly occurring (Weick, 1979, p. 91). Each of the concepts in his definition deserves discussion. First, a system’s behavior continually influences the environment it experiences. We only experience being in a particular place because our own behavior led us there. Our being in that place and our past behaviors influence the nature of the place that we experience. Because of the mutual influence, there is circularity between the interactions of systems. The system’s behavior continually influences the environment that it experiences. Practically speaking, when we join a conversation in progress, the influence is mutual between the original participants and the new entrant in the system.

Second, there is always equivocality, or uncertainty in the enacted environment, because the outside world is complex and changing. Time does not stand still. When relationships form (patterns of interlocking behaviors), organizing occurs that begins to reduce the uncertainty in the environment—equivocality reduction. Weick made an important point when he suggested that the term organization is static whereas living systems are continually in the ongoing process of organizing. If these processes of organizing stop, entropy takes over and the organization begins to disintegrate. Because we cannot control the external environment, we must continually engage in organizing to prevent our own irrelevance to it.

So, organization, Weick concludes, is information that has been produced by processes that reduce equivocality. Living systems continually are trying to increase their certainty about the world in which they reside. Attempts to reduce uncertainty occur through the communication processes, sense-making and meaning.

Self-Organizing
Increasingly, organizations are discovering that too much organization can be counterproductive to successfully dealing with change and chaos. Gates (1999)
Applies Organizational Communication

observes that previous economic eras have been marked by short periods of industry-wrenching change leading to punctuated equilibrium. “Today the forces of digital information are creating a business environment of constant change. Evolutionists would call this punctuated chaos—constant upheaval marked by brief respites” (Gates, 1999, pp. 411–412). In response, several theorists (Epstein & Axtell, 1996; Waldrop, 1993; Wheatley, 1992) have forwarded versions of self-organizing systems thinking and chaos theory. In a nutshell, these approaches argue that the machine metaphor that helped design the traditional organization makes the wrong assumptions. Collecting information, taking measurements, and setting goals, as means for imposing structure from above are outmoded approaches. Instead, employees should be turned loose to function as independent agents who can find meaning and purpose. Living entities, from large organizations to individuals, exist in relationship to the networks of interactions surrounding them. So, utilizing the information available from the environment optimizes the potential for growth.

Proponents of this perspective argue that people will self-organize and develop means for self-renewal if they are given the opportunity. For example, researchers in workplace learning found that workers organized themselves into “communities of practice” to accomplish jobs and they self-organized in ways that were invisible to supervisors and managers. In other words, a natural community was developed by workers without, or in spite of, any organizing from outside their group. Wenger (1991) explains: “Through exchanging questions, meeting in hallways, telling stories, negotiating the meaning of events, inventing and sharing new ways of doing things, conspiring, debating and recalling the past, they complement each other’s information and together construct a shared understanding of their environment and work” (p. 7).

Perhaps the most obvious example of this self-organizing principle is the Internet. This highly decentralized set of agreements on ways to communicate developed without overarching controls. Order emerged out of chaos through the process of self-organizing. Not only does the Internet show how systems can self-organize, it also functions as an ongoing source for communication, renewal, decentralized decision-making, information, and connections with outside sources. The Internet is “a decentralized anarchy of a zillion computers, all acting (on a good day, anyway) as a single, well-oiled megamachine” (“The Website,” 2001, p. 144). The fact that the Internet works demonstrates the holistic nature of systems.

Chaos theory, along with the various other approaches that fit within the same theoretical view, argues that the world will achieve organization without the extraordinary effort by a few members or entities. The underlying belief is that “relationships between many if not most naturally occurring phenomena demonstrate how small changes in the initial state of a system may lead to tremendously large differences in later states” (Coovert, Craiger, & Cannon-Bowers, 1995, p. 161). What appears to be disorderly can be fundamental
in the process of determining the best order. The apparently chaotic process evolves and takes on complex patterns. The turbulence, movement, and change appear unpredictable but actually have rules of their own. So, the patterns of communication and behavior are more or less constructive and may not be caused by any particular economic condition, person, group, or product. Remember that a living system seeks messages and information about what is working and not working through feedback. If the organization or any of its subsystems close feedback off to prevent possible disorganization and chaos, they could also eliminate or reduce important feedback leading to atrophy and possible death. New meanings can lead to the spontaneous emergence of new ideas, behaviors, and concepts. As living systems “receive ‘energy-rich’ input from the environment, the level of stress within the system rises—the system becomes increasingly chaotic” (Kirk, 1999/2000, p. 3). The key for an organization is to balance chaos with organization so that vital, but apparently foreign meaning and information can enter and assist in creating better solutions to problems and planning for the present and future. “The boundaries of a balanced system are relatively permeable; there is a constant flood of new information coming into the corporation from the outside world” (Kirk, 1999/2000, p. 4).

The apparently chaotic pathways of foraging ants have been studied in order to improve various processes at companies including Procter & Gamble, Ford, Unilever, Boeing, Southwest Airlines, British Telecom, and Texas Instruments (Bios Group, 2000). Naturalists observed the food hunting process used by ants and found the initial scouts left a trail of chemicals called pheromones recognizable to the other ants. The first ant to successfully find food returns to the ant heap leaving the pheromones twice. This double marking signals the best and shortest route to the food supply for the remaining ants. The ants self-organize to optimize the food gathering process. Bios Group “is a pioneering Santa Fe company that applies biological solutions to business problems” (Bios Group, 2000, p. 232P). It has created software using ant algorithms—rules that imitate the movement of ants—and applied them to supply chain issues. In 1998, these ant algorithms were used to help optimize the routing of British Telecom’s network and these same components have been applied to over 30 companies. Southwest Airlines, for example, redesigned its cargo operations based on the ant algorithms. “Bio’s thesis, furthermore, holds that as connections proliferate in the new economy, it begins to resemble a living ecology” (Bios Group, 2000, p. 232T). In this case, a science-based adaptive scheduling process has been successfully designed from supposedly lowly ants to enhance the operations of major organizations. To repeat a basic premise: a living system seeks information through feedback in order to self-organize and sustain itself. Applying the ant algorithms based on this principle to organizational endeavors offered a new approach to serious problems.
Strange attractors describe the complex set of influences that underlie these patterns. Although the influences of the strange attractors are clear—the unexpected interactions that create important changes—the cause of the influences frequently remains unidentified or unknown. Chaos theory’s much overused and clichéd analogy to describe the unknowability of the world’s infinite interdependencies is: “A butterfly flaps its wing in Brazil; a stock market in Tokyo crumbles,” or, our example of a tie-up on an interstate highway. In 1998, the El Nino weather system caused large increases in the bug population in the United States, creating a growth industry for termite protection companies. The Y2K crisis created new forms of international cooperation, provided unexpected efficiencies as a result of the upgrades used to resolve Y2K, and developed new skills for managing large, complex, computer-intensive projects (Maney, 2000).

In organizations, we are able to be more specific about the strange attractors and focus on the processes of influence rather than individual styles, pay rates, or other easily identified concepts that have little to do with the self-organizing process. Expanding our perspectives allows us to recognize the complexity of the interaction patterns, the communication processes, and systems operations. If this sounds abstract and somewhat fuzzy, you might be reacting with a linear need for clarity and structure. Chaos thinking is a deeper way of thinking about the communication and organizational processes. Fundamentally, self-organizing requires organizations to view the system and the ongoing processes such as communication as paramount to success. These three approaches—learning organizations, sense-making, and self-organizing—demonstrate the potential uses of systems thinking in the study of organizational communication. From these views, continuous change involving radical upheavals will force organizations to abandon long term planning in favor of developing effective processes (McKenna, 1997).

**Systems as Cultures/Cultures as Systems**

One of the most useful approaches for understanding the particular organizational system is to examine its culture. Every organization has a culture (Schein, 1990, 1999), which is based on the various interactions that occur or “the way we do things around here.” The type of culture operating is dependent on the organization’s environment and the interactions of the subsystems within the organization. The various communication activities are what keep the organization operating and provide the cultural foundation. These communication processes provide the behaviors that lead to “ … a pattern of basic assumptions invented, discovered, or developed, by a given group (or organization) as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in response to those problems” (Schein, 1985, p. 9). The assumptions
include the values, style, written and unwritten rules of conduct, plus the history, structure, past and present leaders, mission, goals and objectives, and finances (Senn, 1986). The way individuals, groups, and subsystems communicate provides the “primary vehicle(s) for the active creation and maintenance of cultures” (Sypher, Applegate, & Sypher, 1985, p. 17).

The cultural perspective is developed more fully later (see chaps. 3 and 7). An organizational cultural approach, as defined by this text, incorporates the various disparate views of how and why organizations do what they do. When we combine the study of communication as an analysis of the process of behaviors or the “way we do things around here,” with an understanding of the living systems nature of organizational cultures, we have an excellent basis for understanding how to develop our own organizational communication abilities. Rather than focus on isolated, although important factors, such as information or leadership, the cultural approach explains why behaviors become meaningful. Not only is there an interest in information, but we also can understand what happens to the information as it is processed by the various living systems in the organization ranging from individuals through departments to the organization as a whole.

Organizational communication is the study of meaningful behaviors within the system and subsystems of the organizational culture. These meaningful behaviors constitute the specific areas of study that we examine in this text.

Conclusion

We started this chapter by observing how important effective communication is to any organization. We then explained the dynamic changes occurring in every organization. Communication as a process and organizations as systems are derived from the same underpinning that focuses on processes not procedures. Communication is an ongoing, coactive process between individuals, groups, and systems. Organizations are interrelated systems of behavior that are interdependent. Both of these perspectives require further amplification through a specific discussion of the various communication processes in an organization, which is the focus of the remainder of this text. The organizational culture perspective is our means for unifying the two perspectives within the context of organizational behavior.

In chapter 2, we explain the impact perception and paradigms have on all the behavioral activities we engage in while we function in our job. Chapter 3 traces the development of management and organizations theories as a means of explaining current approaches to understanding organizations. Chapters 4 through 8 outline the principles that underlie communication in an organization, verbal, nonverbal, networks, channels, symbolic behavior, and listening. The titles of the chapters have been chosen arbitrarily to fit familiar categories in both the fields of communication and business and management. Each chapter, however, develops various approaches and insights to
the general concept drawing from current research. Chapters 9 through 12 provide pragmatic application of these principles to those areas most likely to require additional understanding. These include interpersonal communication, group communication, leadership, and new communication technologies. In the end, you will have a proactive capacity to both understand and effectively use organizational communication. Because you will have established a broad-based perspective regarding perception, communication, and organizational behavior, and you will have developed a basic understanding of the underlying principles of organizational communication, you should be able to deal with new or different issues as they arise.

Study Questions

1. What are the major implications of the digital age? Change? Diversity? Can you identify situations where these three issues are not important? Why?
2. Why is communication important to organizations? Leaders? Individuals?
3. Do you agree that studying communication can appear to be paradoxical?
4. Can you think of examples where a communication problem or challenge seemed to have a simple answer that did not work?
5. Distinguish between studying communication as a linear, interactive, and transactional process. Explain the transactional process.
6. Outline the fundamental elements presented when we view organizations as systems.
7. What is demonstrated by the Tragedy of the Commons?
8. Differentiate between openness, feedback, and entropy.
9. What are the key elements in an organization subsystem?
10. What are the differences between first- and second-order change?
11. Explain learning organizations.
12. Why is sense-making important to studying organizational communication?
13. What are self-organizing and chaos theories and how do they relate to systems thinking?
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