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Theory and Research of Organizational Communication
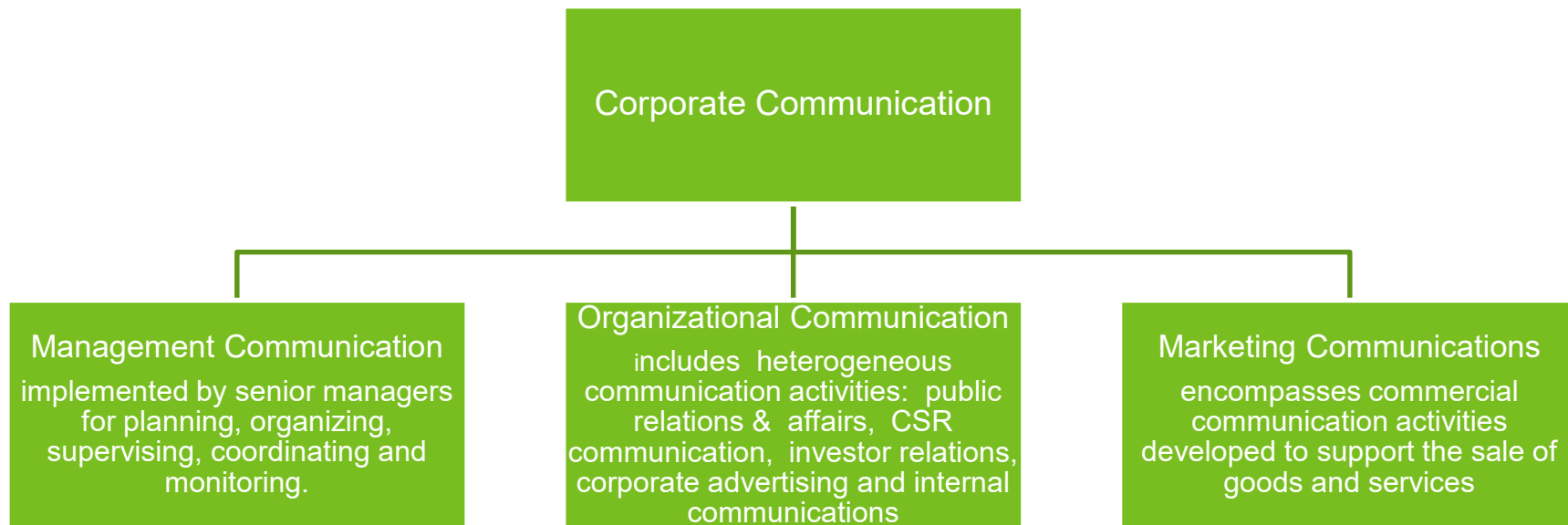
11.9.2020

Agenda

- Neighbouring fields and academic field names

- Historical review of OC

- Paralleling trends and developments within organizational sciences

- Objects of study, possible objects of study and their practical implications

Concepts – academic fields and their characterizing features

Name	Relation to organizational & management sciences	Relation to marketing	Practical or academic orientation	Area	Internal/external
Organizational communication	Close	Relatively loose	Both but more academic	Strong in North America	Both
Business Communication	Relatively loose	Relatively close	Both but more practical	Strong in Europe and non-English speaking countries in particular	Both but more on external
Marketing Communication	Relatively loose	Close	Both but more practical	No specific "homebase"	External
Management communication	Relatively close	Loose	Both but more practical	Strong in North America	Both but more internal
Corporate Communication	Relatively loose	Close	Somewhat academic but clearly practical	Strong in Europe	More external
Public relations	Relatively loose	Relatively close	Somewhat academic but clearly practical	Strong in the UK, US, Australia	More external

Other types of categorizations (example classification by van Riel, 1995)

Corporate Communication

Management Communication
implemented by senior managers for planning, organizing, supervising, coordinating and monitoring.

Organizational Communication
includes heterogeneous communication activities: public relations & affairs, CSR communication, investor relations, corporate advertising and internal communications

Marketing Communications
encompasses commercial communication activities developed to support the sale of goods and services

and Development of Organizational Communication in brief

Organizational theories informing research on communication in organizations

- "Classical theory" (e.g. F. Taylor, The principles of scientific management; M. Weber, The theory of social and economic organization)
  - Organizations as "machines", **role of communication: one-way, up–down, orderly and structurated form, messages are assumed to stay the same and be the same for all**

- Human relations school (e.g. the Hawthorne studies in 1930's)
  - Organizations as systems that adapt to their environment, emphasis on the relationships between people and organization, **role of communication: two way (also bottom-up), mediating the relations between people, groups and organization**

- (Organizational) sensemaking theory (e.g. Karl Weick, Sensemaking in organizations)
  - People make sense of their environment based on the cues in that environment; **role of communication: sensemaking is a communicative process**

- (Originally sociological) practice theories
  - Different approaches, sharing the idea that in order to understand some specific phenomena in organizations, we should look at the practices it consists of and what people *really* do within those practices; **role of communication: practices involve people and their communication**

Some milestones in the development of OC, 1/3

1908	A. E. Phillips publishes the first **public speaking book** specifically **aimed at business men**, Effectively Speaking.
1910	The first meeting of the Eastern Public Speaking Conference is held. The association changed itself to the Speech Association of the Eastern States in 1950 and then to the Eastern Communication Association in 1973.
1914	The National Association of **Academic Teachers of Public Speaking** is formed and holds is first convention the following the year.
1929	William Phillips Sandford and Willard Hayes Yeager are the first speech scholars to publish a public speaking book aimed at business professionals titled **Business and Professional Speaking**.
1937	W. Charles Redding publishes an article titled "**Speech and Human Relations**" in the academic journal The Speaker. Redding is widely considered the father of organizational communication.
1941	Paul F. Lazarsfeld publishes the first review of the discipline of communication based on his and others' research at the Bureau of Applied Social Research and determines that communication could be broken into four categories: **1) who, 2) said what, 3) to whom, and 4) with what effect.**

Some milestones 2/2

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1945	University of Denver holds the first graduate-level seminar in **industrial communication**.
1949	Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver publish **The Mathematical Theory of Communication**, which provides the first major model of human communication (**source, message, receiver, noise**).
1961	Lee Thayer, a speech professor with an interest in communication in businesses, publishes Administrative Communication which is the first true textbook in organizational communication.
1963	The Journal of Business Communication is started by the American Business Communication Association.
1967	The first "Conference on Organizational Communication" is held at Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Alabama. At the conference, Philip K. Tompkins reviews the state of organizational communication and divides the types of research into two categories: (1) **informal and formal channels of communication** and (2) **superior-subordinate relationships**.
1973	W. Charles Redding publishes his book Communication with the Organization: An Interpretive Review of Theory and Research. In this monograph he poses 10 basic postulates of organizational communication.

Some milestones 3/3

1983	Linda L. Putnam and Michael E. Pacanowsky publish Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach. This edited book further solidifies the **importance of interpretive research methods** in organizational communication.
1987	Fredric M. Jablin, Linda L. Putnam, Karlene H. Roberts, and Lyman W. Porter publish the Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective.
1993	Dennis Mumby puts for a research agenda for critical organizational communication research in an article titled "Critical Organizational Communication Studies: The Next 10 Years" in Communication Monographs.
2001	Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam publish The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods.
2001-	A proliferation of approaches to organizational communication: many of them in close relationship to *organizational discourse analysis*, Mats Alvesson's and Dan Kärreman's article Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse, published in Human Relations in 2000 being one of the seminal papers in the field. Also the North American CCO approach (Communicative Constitution of Organizations) gaining foothold
2010-	New issues and approaches and methodologies start to raise their head as regards "big data" and AI, other issues including e.g. virtual collaboration or computer-mediated communications

Big long-time trend in research and practice in organizations

Research and teaching emphasis
One-way communications
Acts and behavior of the sender
Skillful and effective, formal directive messaging
(To some extent, interest on the acts and behavior of the receiver, such as how to listen or how to give feedback)

Two-way communications
and dialogue
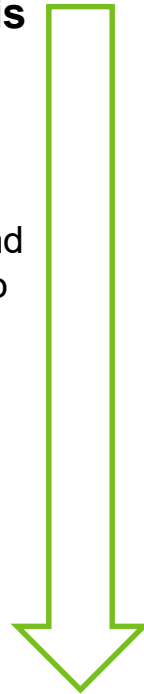
**Organizational practices (and communication practices) VALUES**
One-way communications
Acts and behavior of the sender (individual or organization) who sends messages, informs his/her audience, may command and control, is formal and directive

Two-way communications, involvement, informal and discussing tone, creating a sense of community

MODELS OF COMMUNICATION AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO HOW COMMUNICATION IS CONCEIVED OF, STUDIED, OR TAUGHT

How communication is conceived of in the traditional sender-receiver (or transfer) model (Shannon-Weaver, 1949)
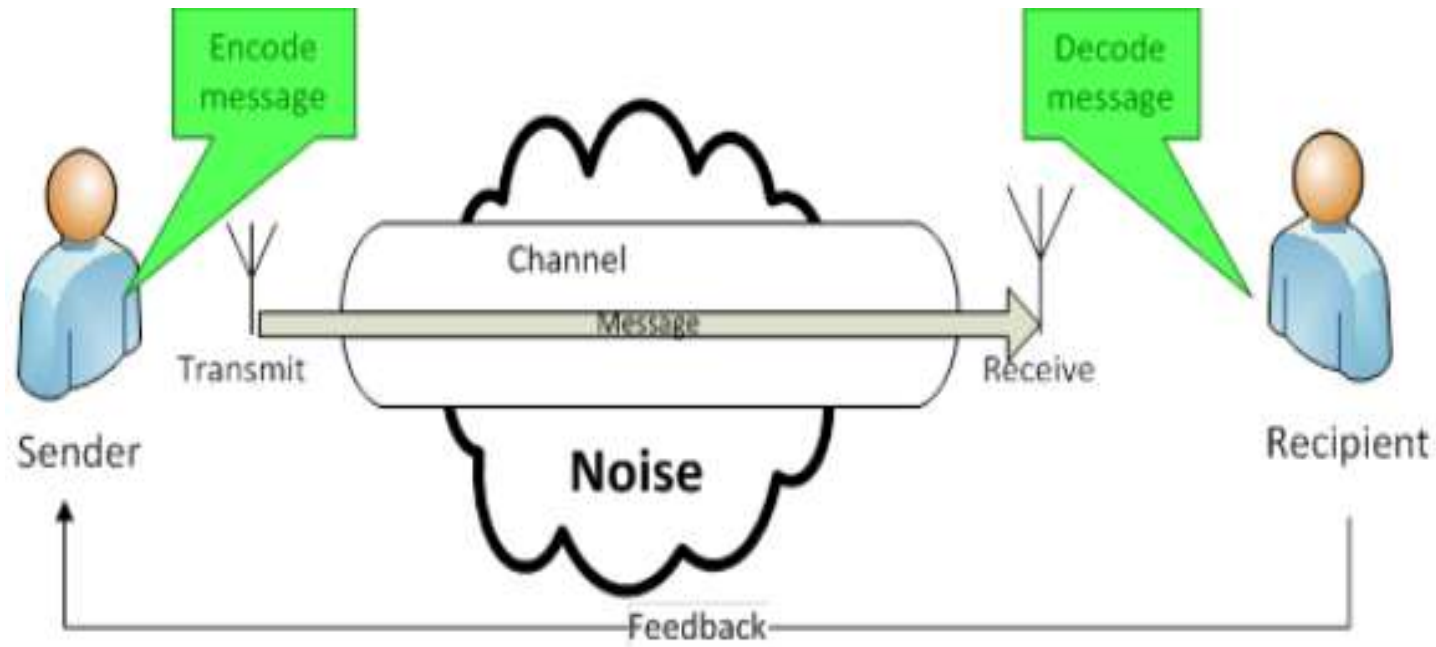
Model basically suggests that an intended message stays the same when received

She says, he thinks (sender encodes receiver decodes)
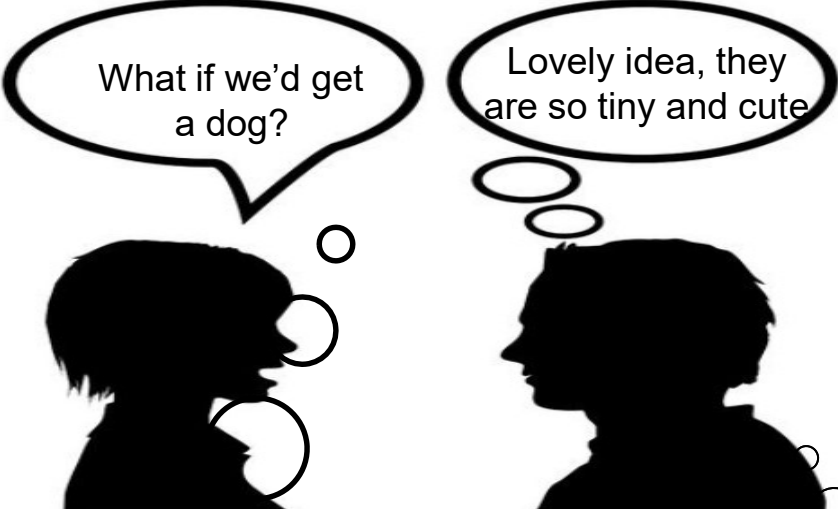
How to fix (or learn to fix) problems in communication – based on transfer model

- For the original Shannon-Weaver model, "the problem" was with **noise**, because of it, message gets distorted, is not heard etc.

- Subsequently, for the different and still dominant transmission models, "the problem" is with the choice of right media (channel of communication) and the skillful use of the media

Thinkpoint: Fix the noise source and/or choose the right media. Easy fix for all communication problems (in organizations and in life in general)?

Abandoning the transmission model – but what would be the alternative views…?? 1/3

- **Dialogical theories of communication**
  - Meanings are always negotiated between people
  - Dialogue focuses on how we understand together, not about how I and how you..
  - Applied to organizational research: research has shown that dialogue gives birth to new meanings and novel understandings
    - *E.g.*
      - Gergen KJ, Gergen MM and Barrett F (2004) Dialogue: Life And Death Of The Organization". In: Grant D, Hardy C, Oswick C and Putnam LL (eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Discourse*. London: Sage, pp. 39-60.
      - Tsoukas, H (2009) A Dialogical Approach to the Creation of New Knowledge in Organizations. *Organization Science* 20(6), 941-957
  - Also applied to specific organizational practices, such as strategy work
    - Mantere, S., & Vaara, E. (2008). On the problem of participation in strategy: A critical discursive perspective. *Organization Science*, 19(2), 341–358.

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Abandoning the transmission model – but what would be the alternative views…?? 2/3

- **Social constructionist models of reality (and communication)**
  - What is, is, but whenever we start to talk about it, we begin to socially construct meanings of that reality (citing freely Kenneth Gergen, 1999, Invitation to social construction)
  - Meanings are created through language and social interaction
  - Meanings are "meanings-in-use"
- **In terms of organizations and organizational phenomena:**
  - Organizational phenomena are produced through communication, organizational reality is "talked into being"
  - Strong ground in Organizational Development theorizing and application, and Learning Organization theory

Abandoning the transmission model – but what would be the alternative views…?? 3/3

- **Cognitive theories of communication**
  - Connecting the how and what we communicate to (what we know about) mental structures/cognitive theories of how the brains work
  - Acts of communication and language in general inform us about the deeper psychological structures and states of the "speaker"

  - Organizational importance/applications:
    - *Practical: how to "use" and "read" nonverbal cues*
    - *More academic: how certain structures of language (e.g. metaphors and their source fields) are indicative of an organization, some specific org. practice, or employee group…)*

What has been studied (in OC)?

- **Huge variety of topics, but some examples of the topic <u>fields</u>**
  - Strategic planning and execution activities in organizations
  - Organizational changes
  - Ethics of communications, ethical communicative behavior (CSR communication in particular)
  - Leadership
  - Social network (in organizations)
  - Decision-making in organizations
  - Learning in organizations
  - Use of technologies, role of technologies in organizations
- **Stress on the communication or the communicative aspect of them, or the communicatvie constitution of them**

At the crossroads of researching organizations and communication

- Theoretical idea shared widely among organizational, management, and communication scholars who study organizational phenomena from the standpoint of *discourse:*

  - "Organizations are created and recreated in the acts of communication between members. (Iedema, R., & Wodak, R. 1999, Introduction: Organizational discourses and practices. *Discourse and Society*, 10.)

  - "…communication and organization are equivalent, discourse is organizing; it is the paint and the canvas, the figure and the ground" (Jablin & Putnam, 2001, Preface, *New handbook of organizational communication*).

At the crossroads… cont'd

Why a firm handshake between organizational studies and organizational communication studies?

- The rise of qualitative research in studying organizational phenomena
    - E.g. using narratives or conversations, or texts, as data sources (linguistic data)
- Addressing organizational phenomena through discourse ontologies
    - E.g. understanding what strategy is by looking at the language of strategy

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Over to you

- First, individually: take a few minutes to think about one or two possible research topics that you would see as possibly interesting and belonging to the field of organizational communication
  - What is the "phenomenon of interest" (in a broad view)?
  - Any initial ideas of the possible theory-base (of organization or of communication)?
  - What new understanding could be gained from studying the topic?
- Compare your ideas within a small group, let everyone explain her/his idea and discuss it
- Choose one idea and prepare to present it briefly (a short "pitch")

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