

# A!

Aalto University  
School of Business

# Organizational Communication: Theory and Research Perspectives

*28.10.2022*

# A couple of words about the groupwork

- **New members to groups?**
- **Inform Pekka about (at least) initial target organization for your work by Fri 4.11.**
- **Absolutely OK and fine if one of you works in the target organization**

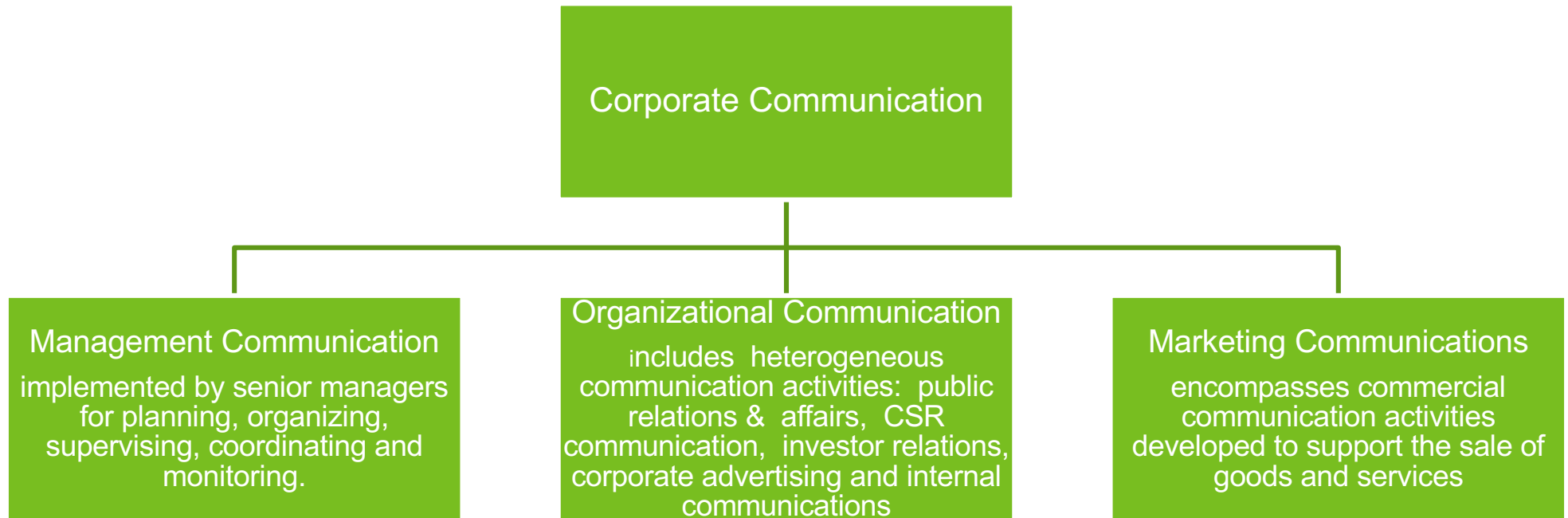
# Agenda

- 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)





**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 form, messages are assumed to stay the same and be the same for all**
- Human relations school (e.g. the Hawthorne studies in 1920's and 30'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)
  - When encountering uncertainty, unexpected events or ambiguity, people seek to understand these events through interpretation and active authoring of the events; **role of communication: sensemaking is a communicative process**
- (Originally sociological) practice theories
  - Different approaches sharing the idea that 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 <b>public speaking book</b> specifically <b>aimed at business men</b> , 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 <b>Academic Teachers of Public Speaking</b> is formed and holds its first convention the following 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 <b>Business and Professional Speaking</b> .
1937	W. Charles Redding publishes an article titled “ <b>Speech and Human Relations</b> ” 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: <b>1) who, 2) said what, 3) to whom, and 4) with what effect.</b>



## Some milestones 2/2

---

1945	University of Denver holds the first graduate-level seminar in <b>industrial communication</b> .
1949	Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver publish <b>The Mathematical Theory of Communication</b> , which provides the first major model of human communication ( <b>source, message, receiver, noise</b> ).
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) <b>informal and formal channels of communication</b> and (2) <b>superior-subordinate relationships</b> .
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 <i>Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach</i> . This edited book further solidifies the <b>importance of interpretive research methods</b> in organizational communication.
1987	Fredric M. Jablin, Linda L. Putnam, Karlene H. Roberts, and Lyman W. Porter publish the <i>Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective</i> .
1993	Dennis Mumby puts forward a research agenda for critical organizational communication research in an article titled “Critical Organizational Communication Studies: The Next 10 Years” in <i>Communication Monographs</i> .
2001	Fredric M. Jablin and Linda L. Putnam publish <i>The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods</i> .
2001-	A proliferation of approaches to organizational communication: many of them in close relationship to <b>organizational discourse analysis</b> , Mats Alvesson’s and Dan Kärreman’s article <i>Varieties of Discourse: On the Study of Organizations through Discourse</i> , published in <i>Human Relations</i> 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)

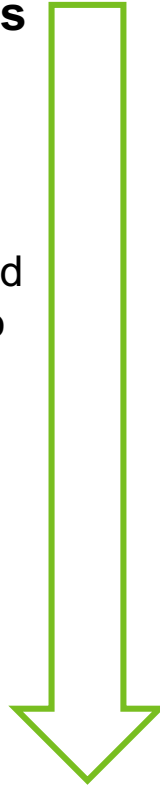
Two-way communications and dialogue

## 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

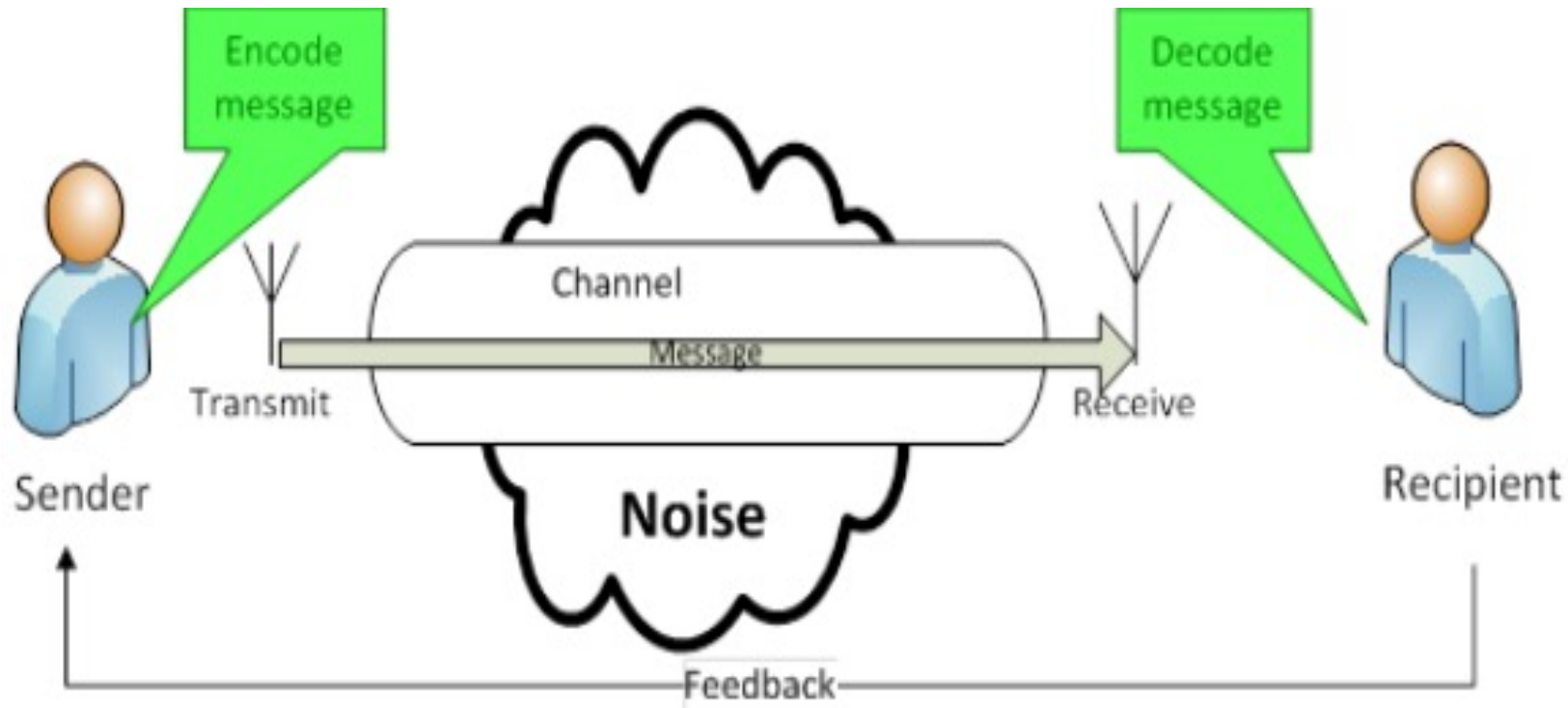




Aalto University  
School of Business

# 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

# 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)?

# She says, he thinks (sender encodes receiver decodes)

What if we'd get a dog?



Lovely idea, they are so tiny and cute



# In real life, people do not transfer but they work on and work towards (shared) meanings...

- **In the next slide, there's an example of two senior managers (Insurance company) talking about their new strategy which has as a strategic objective of “making better use of employees skills and knowledge”**



- Pate: Well then, what skills people have. I've myself done for example a property manager's degree in the past. So if we have, people who have, let's say a property manager's degree, that's quite good, could be useful ((mumbles something unclear, eats sandwich while speaking))...
- Esa: Exactly. And, this ties into what I've heard from IBM, as they develop these fancy tools for searching skills. But it's just that there has to be the basis for categorizing the competence ... Would be great if you could search for, a property manager or then search for, let's say, I need, like, a nurse or something like that. So it'd be insurance decision requiring special knowledge. Say, a hip bone issue. And there you'd find, OK, this is the guy.
- Pate: Someone just asked [me], was it French or some other language but for someone who speaks the language. That is what I've been talking about for a long time that we should have a register of people with special skills. As an example I've had that if I, as the CEO, get a letter in Spanish and I should be able to know if it's spam or a real bid. Then I'd walk over to some "Sari" saying that I've heard you you know Spanish so would you be kind enough to have a look at this.
- Esa: Yeah. And, in a way, would be fruitful that there would be a bank of skills and trainings and other things too, so categorization on the basis of French and Spanish et cetera, so that we know the person's got this and this kind of training that she knows French like this. Or has done aa property manager's degree in the past ha-ha.
- Pate: Yeah. Documenting the education path is an excellent idea...

# 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, Osrick 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

# 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:
  - *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 fields**
  - 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
  - Use of technologies, role of technologies in organizations
- **Stress on the communication or the communicative aspect of them, or the communicative constitution of them**

# Over to you

- First, individually: take a few minutes to think about a possible research topic (some organizational phenomenon or activity) that you would see as interesting
  - What is the "phenomenon of interest" (in a broad view)?
  - How your phenomenon of interest could be studied from a point of view of communication?
  - What new understanding could be gained from studying the topic (from a communicational point of view)?
- 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")