Organization-Communication: Emerging Perspectives I
Lee Thayer, editor
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In the Introduction, Lee Thayer justifies the series title—People, Communication, Organization—by emphasizing its central philosophy: organizations cannot be understood apart from the communication that both creates and is created by them, and that neither can be adequately studied if divorced from the people who are the organizations. Emerging *Perspectives I* is a collection of 14 essays focusing on the interdependence of the above-mentioned three components and is the first in a projected series designed to questions assumptions about organizations and how communication researchers and practitioners think about them.

The essays by Canadian and American communication scholars have been subsumed under three major categories—Changes and Challenges, New Perspectives, and Toward the Future: Tomorrow's Perspectives—but it may be more useful for the reader to look at the book in four sections, according to subject matter as Thayer outlines in the Preface.

The first section addresses some of the changes occurring in organizations as a result of new technologies. An overview of current trends in office technology is followed by the impact of these new technologies on the people who are directly influenced within organizations. Tom Carney argues that the crises provoked by the development of informatics, the impact of Japanese Management Theory, and a paradigm shift in social science research provide an opportunity for new directions in the study of organizational communication. The implications of these points on organizations give rise to a number of predictions which, he admits, are mere speculation but which, nonetheless, are thought-provoking and interesting. In arguing that new media dissolve traditional boundaries and barriers of social structures within organizations, Benjamin Singer specifically discusses how changes in communication channels lead to "the breakdown of social organization and the authority based upon it." Ultimately, he concludes, the new organizational communication "generates an inertial force toward social disassembly" which may have negative results such as social isolation and group breakdown.

Glen Hiemstra claims in his article that it is in the organizational setting that the impact of new technology is most pronounced. He advocates a qualitative approach to study this impact and the resultant changes in communication in organizations, since most research has been conducted, inadequately, from an engineering perspective. James Taylor discusses the "fusion" occurring between three previously distinct aspects of the communication process—document production, transport, and storage. Taylor states that the changes brought about by technology force questioning of "the fundamental modes of organizational existence" and the assumptions on which these practices are based. Taylor's analysis of Harold A. Innis's contribution to theory about communication technology and

organizational structure is a welcome addition to a growing awareness by communication scholars of the important and largely ignored work of this seminal Canadian theorist.

Section two examines the changing workforce and asks what the changes might mean for organizing and managing places of work. This section is more practical than philosophical, in that suggestions are offered to the communication practitioner on how to deal most effectively with changes. Martin Meissner argues that the current organizational communication practices of men, particularly those in authority serve to reinforce the subordination of women. He discusses the sexism inherent in the institutional climate and shows how women are prevented from full participation in the organizational culture despite their increasing involvement in different and higher levels of organizational hierarchies. Meissner concludes that "men have much to gain from undoing these practices."

Martha Glenn Cox also discusses the increasingly greater number of women rising to higher positions in organizations in her examination of "communication about, to, and by women as they seek to attain new status within organization." Cox argues that the way these communication mechanisms occur has great implications for whether women will be successful in their pursuit of these new roles. Frederick Williams provides an overview of new technologies and discusses how they will change organizational behaviour. Williams then offers suggestions for productivity improvement, aimed at communication practitioners. Powell Woods points out that despite massive research in human relations to design better work environments, North American workers express increasingly greater dissatisfaction with their jobs and employers. Woods argues that this dissatisfaction stems from a shift toward adolescent values in American workers. Woods concludes with practical advice for employers which stresses using communication to increase workers' sense of responsibility.

The third section is based on the assertion that one's perspective influences how one organizes and does things in organizations. Richard Ritti argues that the "world-view" *(a priori)* assumptions of the researcher limits what the researcher observes in organizations and that this in turn limits what organizations can become. Ritti invites communication scholars to challenge their assumptions about organizations. He concludes by advocating a return to case studies as a method for observing organizational behaviour. Mary Helen Brown examines some of the ways members of organizations socially construct their own realities through communication. She focuses on the use of symbolic forms of discourse—stories and myths—since, she argues, it is mainly through discourse that reality is created, transmitted, and reconfirmed. Linda Putnam also discusses the social construction of reality in her essay on the impact of contradictory and paradoxical messages on organizational change. Putnam makes these issues problematic by

asserting that contradiction and paradox have the potential to create positive change.

The final section asserts that different perspectives lead to different interpretations of problems. Donal Carbough argues that inquiry into organizations must focus on organizations as "cultural phenomena" and thus must study "context, meaning and form of speech, and the interrelationship" of these elements, from an ethnographic perspective to posit communication theory for that specific context. Astrid Kersten presents an overview of current perspectives, assumptions and practices in communication research and concludes that these overriding assumptions have restricted development of the field. She advocates the "critical-interpretive" approach with its emphasis on communication. Stanley Deetz discusses how reality is socially constructed and re-constructed through languages, particularly metaphors, and that metaphor analysis is a useful method to understand and describe an organization's social reality.

The thread tying this collections of essays together is the thesis that communication researchers must question their assumptions about organizations, communication, and people. Further, the authors assert that the perspective a researcher chooses to develop and accumulated knowledge will colour the investigative methods of that researcher, as well as the questions the researcher may ask and the answers that may reveal themselves. Furthermore, the emphasis on the social construction of reality throughout the book makes it clear that the researcher's perspective has profound implications for not only research and the development of theory, but for the practice of communication by those within the boundaries of any organization.

The role of this book is best observed at the graduate seminar level to guide students in the scholarly pursuit of a perspective from which to think, research, and write. It is at this stage in a student's academic career that a range of opinions and ideas—some in conflict with that status quo—must be presented and reflected upon.

Emerging Perspectives I is a valuable book for all communication scholars because it stresses that even the most deeply-held assumptions should be challenged, and that those who stand still on familiar ground, content to rely on taken-for-granted theories and methods will be left behind as the future emerges.

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