

Comunicación en las organizaciones: Contribuciones a las revistas académicas europeas

Communication and Organization: Contribution to a review of the European academic literature

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Resumen

Los estudios y los trabajos de investigación sobre la comunicación en las organizaciones, hasta hace quince años, habían permanecido marginales, pero en estos últimos años han cobrado fuerza y se han convertido en el objeto principal de investigación para muchos investigadores de la Información y Ciencias de Comunicación (CCI). Ahora se investiga con fundamentos teóricos propios, mientras que antes se investigaba con fundamentos de otras disciplinas, como la Sociología. Al principio, las investigaciones se centraban en el ámbito empresarial y del negocio, pero gradualmente se han abierto a organizaciones en general, como con clubs y asociaciones o ayuntamientos, por citar algunos ejemplos.

Palabras Clave: Investigación, Management, Organización, Comunicación, Relaciones Públicas.

Abstract

Studies and research work devoted to organizational communication had, until the last fifteen years or so, remained marginal, but during that period they have emerged to become a major focus for analysis by a growing number of researchers in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS). They occupy ever greater ground in theoretical debates relating to organizations that had hitherto been covered by neighboring disciplines such as sociology and/or management. Initially limited to the world of business, they have gradually opened out to organizations in general, meaning any established social unit that conducts a set of activities oriented towards defined goals, as with clubs and associations or local authorities, for example. They now address both communication processes observed and the strategic means employed. A large number of empirical studies have been devoted to the issue.

Key words: Research, Management, Organization, Communication, Public Relations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Although there is an abundant scientific corpus on the subject, it does not, however, benefit from a unified theoretical and methodological basis (even were such a project thought to be desirable). As with the Information and Communication Sciences to which it belongs, within which scientific issues mobilize a host of paradigms, theoretical references and investigative methods, the study of communication both within and by organizations constitutes a space of still fragmented problematics; here, research is being conducted into multi-dimensional explanatory models against a background of criticism and transcendence of the dominant models.

However, enacting a confrontation between works conducted in Europe over the last few years evinces a certain number of constant dimensions, such that the field of research that has emerged around these issues has become, over time, the locus for the articulation of a certain number of shared problematics.

In the present article, we shall review works covering organizational communication, focusing on the existing scientific literature on the subject and privileging those references that are likely to inform our thinking on the subject under consideration

We shall thus be led to re-direct our attention to the conceptual and theoretical origins of the communication and organization couple. We shall seek to give an overview of French language works in organizational communication taking a special interest in the underlying epistemological foundations. Our focus will deliberately be brought to bear on one of these aspects that the specialists concerned call “organizational communication”² relating specifically to the communicational phenomena that exist within organizations as this is indeed a recurrent theme leading to a growing body of scientific output.

2. COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION: A COUPLE OF AMERICA ORIGIN

Let us now return to the origins of this association between communication and organization and indicate the various works mobilized and/or recalled in contemporary French research.

All organizations need to have available to them useful and reliable information from various sources, both internal and external, on a permanent basis, with a view to shaping strategic decisions, the development of knowledge and the skills of personnel, preservation of the heritage and finally the very survival of the entity concerned. Due to this, communicational issues relating to the organization are multiple.

In organization theory (Rojot, 2005), “communication” (an already polysemic term) turns out to be a portmanteau word that has frequently been used, in their writings, by the researchers concerned, in much the same way as terms like “command”, “control”, “persuasion”, “propaganda”, “data processing”³, “negotiation”, “coordination”, “interaction” and “retroaction”.

Its study as an object and observable reality constitutes a phenomenon of Anglo-Saxon, mainly American, origin, that emerged shortly after the United States entered the Second World War. The years 1942-1947 are thus considered to be the years of gestation (Redding,

² French researchers have readily adopted a straightforward, literal translation of the term *Organizational Communication* as used predominantly in American works

³ Cf. in 1947, its place in the organizational behaviour theory of Herbert A. Simon (1916 - 2001), Nobel prize for economy in 1978 and recognized theoretician on organization, (Simon H., *Administrative Behavior*, New York, NY, Macmillan, 1947).

1985)⁴ during which the term “communication” appeared ever increasingly as such in a number of specialized publications.

With the war over, one of the main concerns of American companies and researchers working on organizations seems to have been to obtain an ever higher level of production at ever lower cost. One of the assumptions adopted at that time was that once employees are informed of business realities, they will co-operate, work harder and as a result be more productive. A number of articles, heavily influenced by the human relations current, were then published over the years 1946 and 1947 conveying the image of a rational, omniscient manager confronted by individuals to be managed, who are hierarchically dependent. As Roethlisberger explains (1945), in any organization there are two basic social processes, the first relating to accompanying the organization’s fundamental objectives and the second relating to “spontaneous” social processes called “*informal organization*”.⁵

In 1947, Herbert A. Simon, Nobel Prize economist in 1978 and recognized theoretician, considered that “*communication is the essence of organization*” in the theory of organizational behavior.

A few years later, in 1951, Bavelas and Barrett⁶ published an article entitled “*An experimental approach to organizational communication*” in which “*Organizational Communication*” became an issue for the first time, with the expression hinging around three dimensions, the message content, the techniques and the transmission channels or networks. This was to be followed by a first compendium of texts published under the title “*Management-Employee Communication in Action*” in which certain authors made a distinction between internal communication and external communication while others evoked organizational communication and interpersonal communication. In 1959, Sexton and Staudt⁷ published a review of the literature under the general heading of “*Business*

⁴ Redding W. C., *Stumbling Toward Identity: The Emergence of Organizational Communication as a Field of Study*. In R.D. McPhee, Tompkins P.K., *Organizational Communication: Traditional Themes and New Directions*. Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research. California, Sage Publications. 1985.

⁵ Roethlisberger F. J., *The Foreman: Master and Victim of Double Talk*, *Harvard Business Review*, 23 (Spring). 1945, pp. 89-107.

⁶ Bavelas A., Barrett M., *An experimental Approach to Organizational Communication*. *Personnel*. 27. 1951, pp.366-377.

⁷ Sexton R., Staudt V., *Business Communication: a Survey of the Literature*. *Journal of Social Psychology*. 50. 1959, pp.101-118.

Communication”, showing that out of the 178 titles listed, only one, however, used the expression “*Organizational Communication*”.

It was only in the 1960s that “*Organizational Communication*” adopted a marked tendency to seek to rely on “*objective*” empirical data and thus acquire a strongly assertive scientific status. Moreover, Redding considers 1967 to be the year the expression “*Organizational Communication*” was officially accepted as an emerging discipline (*Conference on Organizational Communication, 1967*) accompanied by a substantial specialized bibliography (Voos, 1967)⁸.

Then, a few years later, in 1968, Lee Thayer published a work entitled “*Communication and Communication Systems*”⁹ that, deriving inspiration mainly from the formulations of systems theory, was considered to be a thoroughgoing theoretical treatise on communication in organizations. The organization is henceforth considered to be an entity comprising players with multiple competences, motivations and strategies that it seeks to harmonize. Working from a mosaic of roles and statuses, it seeks to obtain an overall dynamic to make the most of human potential while also fostering innovation. It is presented as a structured and hierarchized space for knowledge in which communication intervenes permanently to generate knowledge and experiment with new work processes.

The communication-organization couple now appeared to be clearly identified and was to burgeon over time; researchers (Simon, Weick) reckoned that “*without communication, there can be no organization*” (Euske, Roberts, 1987¹⁰).

After this all too brief historical assessment of just the North American works on the subject, it is appropriate to shed some light on the situation of French research before investigating the main assumptions of the works conducted.

⁸ Voos H., *Organizational Communication: a Bibliography*, NJ. Rutgers. New Brunswick, University Press. 1967.

⁹ Thayer L., *Communication and Communication Systems*. Richard D. Irwin inc. 1968.

¹⁰ Euske N. A., Roberts K. H., *Evolving Perspectives in Organization Theory: Communication Implications*, In *Handbook of Organizational Communication: an interdisciplinary perspective*, (eds.) Jablin. 1987. F.M., Putman, L.L., Roberts, K. H., Porter, L. W., California, Sage Publications.

3. FRENCH WORKS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION: A PLURALITY OF CONCEPTIONS

In France, organizational communication constitutes a central topic of research for a growing number of researchers in the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), a scientific discipline that was institutionally created at the beginning of the 1970s (Boure, 2002), that associates “information” AND “communication”, unlike the American works cited previously. This evolution is in part related to the initiative taken by members of the French Society of Information and Communication Sciences (SFSIC) to set up in 1994 a study and research group in communication inside organizations, named Org & Co. Since its creation, this body has provided a theatre for debate in the French language where various schools of thought can confront their issues, their methodologies and results (Bernard, 2002). Thus, various meetings, workshops, round table discussions and conferences have led to fruitful exchanges and given the participants of various origins an opportunity to confront their approaches and pool their conceptual resources and investigative methods.

Many issues are covered in a field of science that is increasingly affirming a distinctive difference with functional and/or managerial approaches. These concern both the content, the place of information (and its processing) and methods for acts of communication and the role the latter plays in work situations. But they can also relate to communication policies and their effects (including public relations, advertising, etc.), the resources implemented, the communication process between players and interactions within organizations and cognitive and social phenomena attached thereto. Its fundamental issues have taken on a sharper outline and been enriched over the last few years, especially through research into multidimensional explanatory models against a background of critique to transcend the dominant normative and propositional paradigms. Thus, organizational communication is increasingly considered to be a complex process in which the meaning of the messages is not a given prior to interaction but a construction in a culturally marked situation that depends on the way the process itself unfolds in time and in space. Being both structured and structuring, it is no longer reduced to a single instrumental perspective, where the player’s cognitive work is underestimated, but highlights the performance of individuals in their respective situations. Organization and communication are constructed interpedently, are

the emergent realities that form an inseparable couple that can only be grasped through an interdisciplinary approach.

Against this background, a large number of researchers have for a number of years devoted their efforts to studying project-structures that are ever more frequently encountered in organizations (Bouzon, 2006). The project as an uncertain situation oriented towards the future beckons us to ponder the procedures for co-operation between social players whose roles and interests diverge, within a restricted space and for a limited duration. But how do these individuals with their different skills and qualifications manage to co-operate within a project? The players' actions seem to be influenced by their representation of the situation. Collective action then involves a collective representation or at least a minimum of consistency between the representations present. Like any organized group, the project is a social construct that can only exist and survive if it manages to integrate the diverging strategies of its members in a collective production. In this situation, "the object of the process (the goals aimed at, the "thing" to be accomplished, etc.) and the process itself (how each becomes useful to the other ...) are built up by mutual influence. In such processes, those involved cannot readily delimit their contributions and must orient their activities in relation to how the project evolves or the activities of the other players". What are the links that the players maintain amongst themselves and how do they interact? The project can only be justified in the eyes of its initiators if its cognitive production capacity exceeds that of its members considered in isolation. How then are "distributed" actions, conducted simultaneously by different players and each mobilizing a language and tools specific to a skill, and activities during which the stages of reasoning are shared out between different partners allotted? As innovation results increasingly from multiple activities, the players are forced to go beyond their original specialization to recombine their knowledge in hybrid domains, moving from the centre towards the outskirts of their skill and transgressing disciplinary boundaries towards the specialists of other skills.

Works currently being conducted summon up all sorts of knowledge and feed off multiple methodological experiments, according to the objects studied (content, situation, process, etc.) and the end goal (describing, understanding, intervening, etc.) of the research. The corresponding works are covered by many empirical studies addressing the content and/or procedures for acts of communication, their effects, their role in work situations or the

discursive construction of the context in particular. However, in this framework, besides the objects and concepts specific to the ICS, the researchers concerned are constantly confronted by questions relating to investigative methods in a context where their conceptual¹¹ choices have to be accommodated with the constraints of research out in the field. For conducting an investigation into structured organization is no easy matter (Delcambre, 2000). In addition to difficulties gaining access to the enterprise first of all and then the players involved, the researcher's position is a delicate one, with the considerable risk of confusing the attitude of research with that of consultancy. In this situation, the pressures are keenly felt and the danger is a real one. Moreover, given that the social protagonists neither have a vocation to be interviewed, nor to account for themselves, nor yet to give out information on themselves, gathering relevant data results from what is often a delicate negotiation process. A large number of publications consider how to tackle the issue, rightly considering that no work in the Human and Social Sciences (HSS) can dispense with the need for a debate as to the empirical tools used (Bouzon, Meyer, 206; 2008).

It would appear that two features characterize organizational communication nowadays, extension on the one hand and fragmentation on the other.

This rapid extension, as corroborated by the number of researchers now listed can come as a surprise in so far as the first collective work of the group Org&Co (Le Moenne, 1998) aimed at bringing hitherto isolated and dispersed researchers together and sought to have the scientific field of organizational communication recognized in its own right. But the subject of organizational communication is all the more compelling in its attraction to researchers in that, in the current context of globalization, organizations are increasingly adopting operating rules that release them from the conventional framework and timescales that modify the place and role of communication.

This is accompanied by a phenomenon of fragmentation¹² that results from the disintegration of the fields of specialization and the influence of competing paradigms. These

¹¹ Thus, Yves Winkin's publications, the works of the Palo Alto school according to which "*any communication shows two aspects: the content and the relation, such that the latter subsumes the former*" are widely quoted and added to or revised by other authors. Daniel Bounoux (1997) in particular operates a fecund distinction proposing to make a substitution and to replace content by information and relation by communication, a distinction implicitly adopted by many researchers in organizational communication.

¹² Especially noticeable in the choice of thesis topics over the last few years.

processes show through in bibliographical references mobilized by researchers in their works, as revelatory of the links they weave with the scientific community. We are thus witness to a burgeoning of the number of references coming out of the field associated with those from a host of other disciplines. With this double evolution, organizational communication is coming to terms with a pluralism of explanations that while not impairing its epistemological validity, does create a certain “marginality” (Dogan, Pahre, 1991)¹³ that proves to be creative and provides a source of innovation¹⁴. Indeed, the mosaic of existing works is not lacking in consistency. Most works fit into the more general questioning relating to the place and role of organizational communication that, considered as a collective form of intelligence (in the meaning given to it by Lacoste and Grosjean)¹⁵, still remains an enigma even if it has generated a variety of models and has already mobilized a large number of researchers in various disciplines.

Though their openness, organizational communication in general, and organizational communication in particular, now offer the researcher a wide gamut of questions, that differ according to their themes (studying a content, analyzing a process) and vary with respect to their purpose (describing a situation, understanding a phenomenon or explaining a way of functioning), enlisting all sorts of knowledge and taking sustenance from a variety of methodological experiences.

In the next paragraph, we shall attempt to get to grips with the two best represented epistemological paradigms usually identified in organizational communication, the functionalist one and the interpretativist one, as they each correspond to a particular vision of the organization and communication, structuring the resulting conclusions (Giroux, 1994)¹⁶.

¹³ Dogan M., Pahre R., *L'innovation dans les sciences sociales*, Paris, PUF, 1991.

¹⁴ Thesis work conducted over the last few years as well as the number of post-doctoral degrees (HDR, or habilitation à diriger des recherches) bear witness to this

¹⁵ Lacoste M., Grosjean M., *Communication et intelligence collective. Le travail à l'hôpital*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France. 1999.

¹⁶ Giroux N., La communication interne: une définition en évolution. *Communication & Organization*. N°5, July. 1994, pp.16-45.

4. TWO SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT USUALLY IDENTIFIED IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

While it appears necessary to define the characteristics of these two perspectives that allow communicational phenomena to be studied, one should however avoid opposing them in confrontations of a too simplistic nature that would artificially segregate transmission from interpretation, as both the latter are constantly interwoven in exchanges. Our argument will deliberately only concern two of the mainstream paradigms: positivism, which is dominant in the theory of organizations, and interpretativism that traditionally takes a stand against it, while excluding the third, constructivism¹⁷. Indeed, this latter has for long been evinced from the vocabulary of the Information and Communication Sciences (ICS), and if over the last few years it has re-emerged¹⁸, this is within the scope of an unresolved polemic that we feel moves out of the bounds of the present article. This latter paradigm also shares a certain number of hypotheses with the interpretativist paradigm.

a) The functionalist school

Associated with the positivist paradigm, also referred to as the “ballistic vision of communication”¹⁹, this school of thought considers social reality as a real phenomenon (“ontological principle”²⁰), endowed with an existence outside the subject that observes and/or makes it (“objectivity principle”), with a determined functionality and laws for success that are specific to it (“principle of the hardwired universe”) and that can lead to the optimum solution (“least action principle or unique optimum”).

Against this background, Nicole Giroux defines communication as “*integrative*”, meaning behavioral with a collectivist vision of the organization. As an example, she takes the

¹⁷ Cf. the works of P. Berger and T. Luckmann, Y. Chevalier, B. Delforce, G. Derville, J.-L. Le Moigne, J. Piaget, J. Searle, P. Watzlavick... This enumeration shows to what extent this involves a current that brings together highly diversified options, going under the names of constructionism, constructionalism or constructivism.

¹⁸ Cf. various issues of the scientific review *Questions de communication* since 2004

¹⁹ Giordano Y., Business communication: should managerial practices be reconsidered? In *Revue de gestion des ressources humaines*, Vol. 13, n°4, 1994, pp 49-61.

²⁰ Here we adopt the epistemological assumptions proposed by J.L. Le Moigne for whom positivism considers the organization to be a construction (“constructed universe principle”), taking in the subject who attempts to control it or makes do with observing it through the representation they make of it (“principles of representability and projectivity”), having a complex way of working that cannot be broken down into simple, independent elements and that can only lead to more or less satisfactory solutions (“intelligent action principle”). Cf. Le Moigne J.L., *Constructivist epistemologies of the organizational sciences*. In *Epistémologies et sciences de gestion*. Paris: Economica, 1990, p. 81-140.

manager who ponders the links binding him or her to the organization and their degree of integration within the organizational collective.

Goldhaber (1986) considers that, with this approach, organizational communication is the process of creation and exchange of messages that, within a network of interdependent relations, has to adapt to the uncertainty of the environment. His works conceptualize the organizational structure by distributing the roles and actions of individuals into properties, setting levels, departments and borders. The organizational structure is then perceived of as a container of entities such that the social structures exist prior to individual actions.

One of the basic postulates of the functionalist school is the notion of determinism. Here we find the telegraphic model of communication²¹ that retains an instrumental proposition of communication and is based on the imposition on the players involved of laws and technical schematics. According to this perspective, individuals are products of the environment and respond mechanically to external *stimuli*. They are essentially reactive. The unit for analysis retained is the organizational entity with its social, psychological and economic characteristics perceived as static entities rather than social processes. The organization is a concrete structure in which activities arise and communication is a tangible substance that travels upwards, downwards and sideways. Messages are seen as physical forms that have spatial-temporal positions and exist independently of an issuer and recipient.

Thus, for functionalist researchers, the essence of communication lies in the transmission of messages and the study of the effects produced by communication channels.

Within this trend, beyond the works specialized in identification (George Cheney), analysis of networks (Peter Monge; Noshir Contractor), structuration theory (Robert McPhee) or conflict resolution (Cynthia Stohl), two approaches seem to characterize the functionalist school (Axley, 1984; Daft, Langel, 1984; Jablin, 1987...), mechanistic approaches on the one hand and institutional approaches on the other.

The highly influential mechanistic perspective perceives human communication “*as a transmission process*” in which a message travels along a channel from one point to another.

²¹ Published in *Théorie mathématique de la communication* (Shannon and Weaver, 1948), this model designates a simple, linear model of communication in which the latter is reduced to the transmission of a message.

It stresses the communication channel as a means of transmission and also a link between encoding and decoding functions. This perspective conveys four basic postulates, quasi-causality, transitivity of communication functions, the conceptualization of materialism and reductionism. Quasi-causality is centered on the link between prior conditions and future conditions: this is a linear vision of the communicational process. The second, transitivity of communication functions, considers that communicational concepts are linked in a chain of relations, while the mechanistic perspective treats communication as a material entity, meaning a message that becomes a concrete substance with spatial-temporal properties. Lastly, communication can be broken down into sub-units. This reductionist conception implies that concepts are better understood if the whole is broken down into parts while also identifying and measuring the latter in order to check the linear causal chain lining them together.

The institutional theory meanwhile constitutes the alternative approach of the functionalist school. The institutionalization concerned involves all the processes whereby obligations or current issues take on status in thought and social action. It postulates that organizations comply with the expectations of the environment and adapt. In return, the organization is legitimized by the environment that provides it with its financial resources and recognizes its social status.

These two conceptions are often taken up by practitioners and are frequently to be found in manuals, especially those covering internal communication.

Let us now take a look at the second school of thought, the interpretativists:

b) The interpretativist school

The interpretativist school considers society as a construction made by the subjective experiences of its members. Through their skill in communicating, individuals are capable of creating and constructing their own social reality through their words, symbols and behaviors. Organizations are then seen to be processes that develop through the changes in behavioral patterns.

The interpretativist school takes an interest in the creation of significances shared by common actions and events. The meaning of words and actions is interpreted symbolically through mutual experience rather than by the sender's intention and the recipient's filtering. Behavior develops through social interactions, changes as the social context changes and forms a new entity (Fischer, 1978)²².

This vision (Putnam, Pacanoswski, 1983) has implications for the way the organizational structure is conceived. Indeed, structures are treated as a complex, semi-autonomous set of relations that take human interactions as their origin. The members of the organization use their actions and their interactions in order to create departments, levels and procedures that have direct consequences on daily behavior. The organization chart becomes symbolic since it represents relations in processes of change but it is also structural as it has an effect on the daily actions of the members. As the interpretativist school treats organization as a set of groups with different interests and diverging goals, the vision it entertains of it is no longer unitary but pluralist.

The interpretativist method fits in with a relativistic vision of the world. It seeks to come to an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon. Considering the organization to be a social construction of reality, the organizer becomes in turn a communication process. In that same vision, communication is not just another organizational activity, but creates, legitimizes and re-creates the social structures that form the node of the organization (Hawes, 1974).²³

This approach integrates communication in a dynamic and interactive organizational system where reality is jointly constructed by the players and in which the company's employees constitute the social body, interacting with the organization; in this, it refers back to the progress made in what it has become customary to call the "Palo Alto School"²⁴. Works from the French scientific community, both for ICS and Management Sciences, mostly refer to a

²² Fischer B. A., *Perspective on Human Communication*. New York, Macmillan. 1978.

²³ Hawes L.C., Social collectivities as Communication: Perspectives on Organization Behavior In *Quarterly Journal of Speech*. 60, pp.497-502.

²⁴ In 1959, Don Jackson founded the Mental Research Institute at Palo Alto, CA. Paul Watzlawick joined him there in 1962. With other researchers like Erving Goffman, Edward T. Hall, Gregory Bateson and Ray Birdwhistell, they conducted research that was to shift paradigms of comprehension of communication towards a so-called "systemic" model, by opposition to the linear model, defining concepts of "double constraint", of "presentation of self" and "hidden dimension".

few publications, abundantly quoted, by L. Putnam and Karl Weick. It should be recalled that the latter's research emphasizes the performance of players in situation and the place of communication in daily interactions. It considers communication as an active part of a process of organizing that contributes to a permanent re-generation of the company's structures and the links between individuals. Analysis of situations is thus no longer merely performed from the *ex post facto* reconstruction of phenomena but is based on observations, highlighting the effective operation of the organization in real time.

We could refer to other works, including the post-modern, critical approaches of Dennis Mumby²⁵ for example. However, we shall simply mention in passing (and all too briefly) the discursive trend that takes on board Foucauldian and critical approaches, conversational approaches (Gail Fairhurst) and narrative approaches (Yannis Gabriel's *storytelling*). Since the highly innovative works of James R. Taylor (Taylor, Van Every, 2000) on what is referred to as the *constitutive* approach of organizational communication (Putnam, Nicotera, 2009), a number of researchers have initiated various ambitious and fruitful research programs aimed at exploring the key role played by communication in the constitution of organizations (Cooren, 2000; Robichaud, Giroux, Taylor, 2004). According to this approach, communication manifests itself essentially according to two modes, one, conversational, refers back to the event-related dimension of any interaction and corresponds to what Taylor and Van Every (2000) call the *site* of emergence of organizational reality, while the other, textual, expresses the iterative, repetitive dimension of any exchange, reflecting the *surface* of the organization.

To summarize, the functionalist perspective considers communication along the lines of the telegraphic model as transmission from a transmitter to a receiver, whereas the interpretivist perspective reckons that communication is co-constructed by players endowed with processual, cognitive, affective and strategic capabilities during processes of interaction involved in building up meaning; the organization here becomes a product of communication. Indeed, the latter takes part in the process of interaction between individuals and contributes to constructing meaning, with reality. It is not just a one-off or isolated transmission of a message, but also an instance of actualizing individual and

²⁵ May, S., & Mumby, D.K., *Engaging Organizational Communication Theory and Research: Multiple Perspectives*. Thousand Oaks, CA, Sage, 2005.

collective representations that brings into play previously worked out meanings. It is the locus where the work issues and the players' identities are negotiated. Through communication, the human collective regulates itself, institutionalizes itself or, conversely, brings itself into question and transmutes. Communication thus appears as a complex process in which the meaning of the messages is not a given prior to the interaction but a construction in a culturally marked situation that depends on the progress of the process itself, in time and in space (Bouzon, 2006).

Admittedly, communication is also a product of the organization (both commercial and non-commercial)²⁶ when it results from a deliberate choice to address an outside (public relations, event creation, advertizing, direct marketing direct, etc.) or internal (company newsletter, Intranet, meetings, etc.) audience with or without the help of the ICTs²⁷, but there is a *continuum* between the two of them that is now clearly apprehended (Bouzon, 2005).

5. CONCLUSION

Whether considered as an institutional or commercial discourse and/or the fruit of the permanent interaction between its members or partners, organizational communication is now the focus of special attention from researchers. The latter take as much interest in its meaning as in the strategic resources implemented, the communicational processes and cognitive and social phenomena attached thereto. In doing so, they develop explanatory models, whose inspiration sometimes derives from other disciplines, that prove to be strongly dependent on their own specific culture.

One of the ambitions of the present article is to offer the reader, whether the professional or the layman, an overall representation of some of the significant research work in this fragmented field. The difficulty in such a project, in a necessarily limited framework, is then to attempt to restore its internal plurality without falling into the trap of a fragmentary

²⁶ In the meaning of the theory of organizations that defines the organization as a social unit having shared goals and resources, relating both to commercial and non-commercial structures, to take in all their diversity (business, hospital, trades union, association, administration, conventions, etc.).

²⁷ In the present article, the initials ICT refers to all digital media including the Internet, Extranet, e-mail and integrated management software of the Enterprise Resource Planning Application, but also the so-called "traditional" media.

vision, and to reconstruct the evolution of issues and the renewal of objects considered without offering too simplistic a representation. To enable the reader to forge an enlightened opinion as to the interest and scope of the works conducted, we were obliged to go beyond the chronological record of works to attempt to find a correlation between them and position them in relation to their respective epistemological fundamentals.

If, through this overview, organizational communication appears in its plurality, the concerns of researchers referring to it are nevertheless increasingly tending to converge around a certain number of basic questions. Thus, there can be seen a growing influence of works referring to the theories and methods of *Organizational Communication* in line with the trend of the American works of Putnam, and the strong development of those relating to conversations, texts and agentive functions along the lines of Taylor and Cooren.

By way of a conclusion, it is appropriate to look at the question of the respective status of science and the researcher when confronted by social expectations, a question that nowadays fuels a good many debates in the ICS disciplinary field as in others (and all the more so in organizational communication). For there is a social demand, taking the form of public or private commissioning of research, studies or interventions, on which researchers' works increasingly depend in Europe for reasons of the concomitant financing. In this situation, how to move on from a social demand, from a practical issue, to a broader, more theoretical framework? Is there not here a risk of confusion between the role of researcher and consultant; the researcher being gradually drawn into social engineering? How can we ensure that our human and social sciences remain useful to the individual, the business, and society without being instrumentalized? So, considering the fact that the crux of our various approaches lies where work out in the field and research meet, we shall conclude the present article on the matter of deontology, stressing again the need for clear ethics and certain bounds to be respected when getting to grips with the world of organizations.

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