

Management Communication Quarterly

<http://mcq.sagepub.com>

Perspectives, Challenges, and Future Directions for Organizational Communication Research in Brazil

Marlene Marchiori and Ivone de Lourdes Oliveira

Management Communication Quarterly 2009; 22; 671 originally published
online Mar 3, 2009;

DOI: 10.1177/0893318909332070

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://mcq.sagepub.com>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

Additional services and information for *Management Communication Quarterly* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://mcq.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://mcq.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://mcq.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/22/4/671>

Perspectives, Challenges, and Future Directions for Organizational Communication Research in Brazil

Marlene Marchiori

Universidade Estadual de Londrina

Ivone de Lourdes Oliveira

Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais

The field of organizational communication in Brazil is relatively new in comparison to other countries. Although research in the United States began in the 1960s, organizational communication is just now developing in universities around the world. In Brazil, organizational communication grew out of questions and issues related to public relations. Although narrowly defined at first, now Brazilian scholars value a broad view of organizational communication, one that embraces different perspectives. Similar to the range of U.S. scholarship (see Putnam & Boys, 2006), Brazilian scholars operate from linear, transactional, interactional, and dialogical models of communication.¹ Practitioners in the market are looking to improve their qualifications through in-company training programs and postgraduate courses offered by communication departments and associations.

Based on this brief scenario, this article highlights and analyzes two trends that attest to the unique nature and possibilities for organizational communication in Brazil. In particular, it focuses on (a) the opportunities to tie organizational communication to other fields of knowledge through multidisciplinary work and (b) the transformation in contemporary Brazilian society based, in part, on current business and work relationships.

Opportunities for Multidisciplinary Research in Brazil

To account for the complexity in which contemporary, global organizations exist, Brazilian studies of organizational communication need to establish a

dialogue with other fields that can contribute to the practical development as well as the social scientific foundations of research. Human beings are developing knowledge at an amazing speed, and this growth demands multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary connections with such areas as administration, anthropology, politics, sociology, economy, education, and linguistics. Despite its multidisciplinary nature, organizational communication retains, at its core, a focus on the nature and exchange of messages as well as attention to the broad-based discourses and cultural framings of these messages, texts, and interactions. As such, authors, including Lopes (2003), Maia and Franca (2003), and Schuler (2004), have highlighted the role of interaction and recognized the symbolic, linguistic, and sense-making processes of communication. Communication is not simply a transmission but rather the process of making meaning.

In the face of rapidly changing experiences and a diverse environment, a multidisciplinary approach alters the way we look at organizational communication. Today, Brazilian social scientists are adopting an approach that enables communication to be at the center of the organization (Hall, 2004, p. 156). This view differs from the functionalist perspective that emphasizes coordination of activities and improving the quality of written and oral messages. Yet the treatment of communication as a management tool is still prominent in organizational studies, and organizational communication researchers in the field of business administration predominantly rely on functionalist approaches (Blinkstein, Alves, & Gomes, 2004, p. 129).

In this sense, expanding research into the larger realm of the social sciences has the potential to provide a breakthrough in Brazilian organizational communication. Moving away from the functionalist approach, the most exciting studies no longer confer the "primacy of the process" to "the communicators" of messages (Iaskbeck, 2007, p. 234); that is, senders are not the owners of communication and sense making. Thus, the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological support employed by other social science disciplines could enrich the analysis and understanding of communicational processes and practices in organizational communication (Mattos, 2008, p. 30).

Transformation of Brazilian Contemporary Society

Developed under a capitalistic mode of production, contemporary Brazilian society has renewed its capacity to adapt to the changing social climate. Decentralization and diversification that stem from the fast pace of

knowledge organizations and rapid globalization of goods and services are accelerating organizational information flows and intensifying the cycles of production and services as well as the development of alliances and relationships. This context calls for management to be more flexible, more oriented to work relations, and more collaborative, both internally and externally, than it previously was (Deetz, 2001).

This transformation of the Brazilian organizational scene also focuses on new processes for economic advancement and political democratization. As social agents expand their scope of articulation through multiple roles, society is increasingly concerned about the legality and credibility of their actions. Ethics lies at the forefront of these discussions and has become a relevant issue in organizational settings, especially with the public. For Lipovetsky (2004), applying ethics to corporations stems from the competitive pace of the contemporary world. Companies in Brazil currently employ codes of ethics to develop accountability in their business practices, especially during times of decision making. This focus on ethics, as a trend in organizational communication, responds to public demands for visibility and legitimacy of social organizations.

The role of the mass media in connecting organizations with society represents another area in which contemporary Brazilian society is changing. Specifically, organizations have embraced a new media logic that changes the ways that Brazilian businesses approach their work. This logic embraces new media and mediated communication as an alternative societal link or a means of communicating through such venues as customized literature, radio and television, and new technologies for internal communication. Academia is beginning to investigate and understand how business interactions take place within this new media context. Researchers and academic representatives in communication associations and graduate schools are addressing these issues, as evident in the case studies and colloquia that compare Brazil and Portugal and Brazil and Spain in organizational use of new media. This new direction in mediated communication increases organizational accountability and the interactions among diverse stakeholders, which in turn enhances an organization's sustainable process.

These new relationships have also led to an increased number of Brazilian studies on collaborative networks. Oliveira and Paula (2008) describe the existence of a new network of discursive practices composed of organizational relationships known as "multi-referential processes" (p. 102). Di Felice (2008) observed the formation of a new social organization, diverse from that of the electronically mediated mass, a society made up of technical and spontaneous interactions of its members who redefine it and

shape it through continuous and collaborative interactions. These interrelationships, whether mediated or not, offer the potential for new and far-reaching research developments. Triggered by global changes and recent developments in communication technology, these communication perspectives require organizations to expand social interactions and adopt new relationships.

Conclusion

In conclusion, organizational communication is still in its infancy in Brazil. Nevertheless, graduate programs, scholarly debates, and academic meetings review specific trends and raise challenges that organizational communication scholars are uniquely positioned to address. The two trends noted here—the opportunities for multidisciplinary research and the transformation of the Brazilian contemporary society—reveal the ways that organizational communication research and the needs of society mutually shape and are shaped by these trends.

In the professional context, contemporary organizations need to foster creativity and innovation that will expand economic, social, and environmental contributions to a new society with new values. Organizational communication, with its stance toward organizations as complex interactional processes (Marchiori, 2008), provides an ideal context for responsive and innovative business practices.

In short, organizational communication forms a disciplined site for the development of knowledge that offers “theoretical-epistemological interfaces” (Oliveira & Soares, 2008, p. 10) among organizations, communication, and society. It is a complex, multidimensional, and multidisciplinary process. A logical direction for future studies is to capitalize on this multidisciplinary trend and link organizational communication to scholarship in other fields. Organizational communication studies demonstrate the importance of connecting communication to societal transformations and highlighting the relevance of the field to changes in organizational life and contemporary Brazilian society.

Note

1. Examples of Brazilian studies of models of communication include dialogic communication, addressing interaction and dialogue (Freitas, 2008; Oliveira, 2008; Ribeiro & Marchiori, 2008); relational communication, which intensifies the construction of sense making (Maia & Franca, 2003; Oliveira & Soares, 2008); and strategic communication, seen as an

integral part of organization management (Kunsch, 2003; Schuler, 2004). These studies have connected organizational communication to the production of knowledge (Marchiori, 2001) and addressed the need for intentional and structural relationships between organization and society (Oliveira & Paula, 2007).

References

- Blinkstein, I., Alves, M. A., & Gomes, M. T. (2004). Nota técnica: Os estudos organizacionais e a comunicação no Brasil [Technical note: Organizational studies and communication in Brazil]. In S. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook de estudos organizacionais. Vol. 3—Ação e análise organizacionais* (pp. 126-130). São Paulo, Brazil: Atlas.
- Deetz, S. (2001). Conceptual foundations. In F. M. Jabline & L. L. Putnam (Eds.), *The new handbook of communication* (pp. 3-46). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Di Felice, M. (2008). *Do público para as redes: A comunicação digital e as novas formas de participação social* [From the public to the networks: Digital communication and the new forms of social participation]. São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.
- Freitas, S. G. (2008). Comunicação interna e o diálogo nas organizações [Internal communication and dialogue in the organizations]. In M. M. K. Kunsch (Ed.), *Gestão estratégica em comunicação organizacional e relações públicas* (pp. 139-154). São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.
- Hall, R. H. (2004). *Organização: Estruturas, processos e resultados* [Organization: Structures, processes and results] (8th ed.). São Paulo, Brazil: Prentice Hall.
- Iaskbeck, L. C. A. (2007). Discurso e texto nos processos comunicacionais [Discourse and text in the communicational processes]. In F. Dravet, G. de Castro, & J. J. Curvello (Eds.), *Os saberes da comunicação* (pp. 209-236). Brasília, Brazil: Casa das Musas.
- Kunsch, M. M. K. (2003). *Planejamento de relações públicas na comunicação integrada* [Planning public relations in integrated communication] (4th ed.). São Paulo, Brazil: Summus.
- Lipovetsky, G. (2004). *Metamorfozes da cultura liberal. Ética, mídia, empresa* [Metamorphoses of the liberal culture: Ethics, media, and the organization]. Porto Alegre, Brazil: Sulina.
- Lopes, L. C. (2003). Hermenêutica, teorias da representação e da argumentação no campo da comunicação [Hermeneutics, theories of representation and argumentation in the field of communication]. In M. I. V. de Lopes (Ed.), *Epistemologia da comunicação* (pp. 163-185). São Paulo, Brazil: Loyola.
- Maia, R. C. M., & Franca, V. V. (2003). A comunidade e a conformação de uma abordagem comunicacional dos fenômenos [The community and the conformation of a communicational approach of the phenomena]. In M. I. V. de Lopes (Ed.), *Epistemologia da comunicação* (pp. 187-203). São Paulo, Brazil: Loyola.
- Marchiori, M. (2001). *Cultura organizacional: Conhecimento estratégico no relacionamento e na comunicação com os empregados, Tese* (Doutorado em Ciências da Comunicação) [Organizational culture: Strategic knowledge in the relationship and communication with employees, Thesis (doctoral degree in Communication Sciences)]. São Paulo, Brazil: Universidade de São Paulo.
- Marchiori, M. (2008). *Cultura e comunicação organizacional* [Culture and organizational communication] (2nd ed.). São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.

- Mattos, M. A. (2008). Interfaces do saber comunicacional e da comunicação organizacional com outras áreas de conhecimento [The interfaces of communicational knowledge and communication with other fields of knowledge]. In I. L. Oliveira & A. T. N. Soares (Eds.), *Interfaces e tendências da comunicação no contexto das organizações* (pp. 17-37). São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.
- Oliveira, I. L. (2008, October). Espaços dialógicos e relacionais nas organizações e sua natureza ético-política [Dialogical and relational spaces in the organizations and their ethical-political nature]. Paper presented at the Congresso da ALAIC, Mexico City, Mexico.
- Oliveira, I. L., & Paula, M. A. (2007). *O que é comunicação estratégica nas organizações?* [What is strategic communication in organizations?] São Paulo, Brazil: Paulus.
- Oliveira, I. L., & Paula, C. C. (2008). Comunicação no contexto das organizações: Produtora ou ordenadora de sentidos? [Communication in the context of organizations: A producer or a manager of senses]. In I. L. Oliveira & A. T. N. Soares (Eds.), *Interfaces e tendências da comunicação no contexto das organizações* (pp. 91-108). São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.
- Oliveira, I. L., & Soares, A. T. N. (2008). (Eds.), *Interfaces e tendências da comunicação no contexto das organizações* [Interfaces and trends of communication in the context of organizations]. São Caetano, Brazil: Difusão.
- Putnam, L., & Boys, S. (2006). Revisiting metaphors of organizational communication. In S. Clegg (Ed.), *The Sage handbook of organization studies* (2nd ed., pp. 541-576). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Ribeiro, R., & Marchiori, M. (2008, October). Comunicação organizacional dialógica: Uma perspectiva de interação nas organizações [Dialogical organizational communication: A perspective of interaction in the organizations]. Paper presented at the Congresso da ALAIC, Mexico City, Mexico.
- Schuler, M. (2004). *Comunicação estratégica* [Strategic communication]. São Paulo, Brazil: Atlas.

Marlene Marchiori (doctoral degree, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil, 2001) is an associate professor in the School of Communication at Universidade Estadual de Londrina, Brazil. Her current research focuses on employer–employee communication and relationships as well as organizational culture.

Ivone de Lourdes Oliveira (doctoral degree, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2002) is the director of the Communication and Arts School at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, Brazil. Her research is focused on communication theory, particularly sense-making processes in organizations.