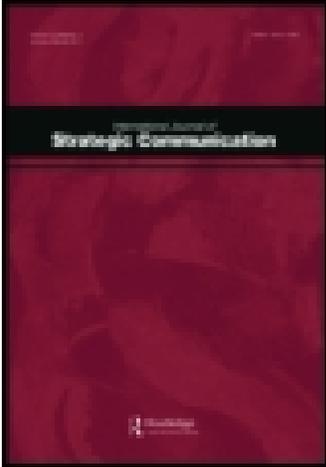


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### Defining Strategic Communication

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# Defining Strategic Communication

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This article examines the nature of strategic communication, which is defined as the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfill its mission. Six relevant disciplines are involved in the development, implementation, and assessment of communications by organizations: management, marketing, public relations, technical communication, political communication, and information/social marketing campaigns. The nature of the term *strategic* is examined, and key aspects of communication are identified. This article is based, in part, on a panel discussion involving the journal's editors and international scholars at the International Communication Association in May 2005 in New York.

Various professional fields engage in the development, dissemination, and assessment of communications on behalf of organizations and causes. These disciplines

include, but are not limited to, management, marketing, advertising, and public relations.

Although their specific activities can be conceptualized in various ways—from coordinating administrative functions to product promotion and relationship building—all of these disciplines involve the organization, defined in its broadest sense,<sup>1</sup> communicating purposefully to advance its mission. This is the essence of *strategic* communication. It further implies that people will be engaged in deliberate communication practice on behalf of organizations, causes, and social movements.

In today's increasingly complex world, organizations vie for the attention, admiration, affinity, alignment, and allegiance of constituents of all sorts—customers, employees, investors and donors, government officials, special interest group leaders, and the public at large. In so doing, organizations make strategic decisions about the level and nature of resources they will devote to such efforts. It is important to stress that not only corporations, but also activist organizations and social and citizen movements, use strategic communication to reach their goals. Strategic communication examines organizational communication from an integrated, multidisciplinary perspective by extending ideas and issues grounded in various traditional communications disciplines. It is important to note that these disciplines were developed as specialty functions in the modernistic world of the 20th century. Yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, these disciplines function in a postmodern environment that stresses more holistic approaches to examining organizational phenomena, while having to deal with increasingly fragmented audiences and delivery platforms.

This article endeavors to set the stage for an academically driven approach to strategic communication. Although the term *strategic communication* has been used in the academic literature for many years, scholars are only now in the process of coherently exploring this in terms of a unified body of knowledge. Here the term will be examined from various perspectives that cut across national borders and several academic disciplines, with the aim of laying the foundation for a systematic study of this new academic field. First, we examine the emergence of strategic communication as a social phenomenon, how it is applied in today's society, and how it relates to other communication disciplines. Second, we deconstruct the term *strategic* to determine whether it necessarily implies manipulative or deviant communication practices or whether it allows for alternative, more critical readings that could provide a home to many different types of scholars. Third, we (re)turn the focus on communication as an essential part of the study of this field, rejecting

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<sup>1</sup>The term *organization* will be used in this article in its broadest sense, referring to corporations, for-profit and nonprofit organizations, activist groups, nongovernmental organizations, organizations promoting various forms of social change, political parties or movements, and government organizations.

the notion that the study of communication should be replaced with a narrow focus on relationships or other phenomena that have communication as the underlying force but essentially ignore that influence. Finally, we explore the notion of how meaning is formed and whether strategic communication necessarily implies undue influence on an unresisting message receiver.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AS AN EMERGING PARADIGM

Kuhn (1996) popularized the concept of a paradigm when he suggested that science is shaped by theoretical frameworks that define both the questions asked and the methods used to investigate them. In professional communications involving organizations, there is no single overarching or unifying conceptual framework to inform the work of the many disciplines relating to the field of strategic communication. Instead, the focus of various communications pursuits has been narrowly defined around specific managerial problems, such as improving organizational performance, selling more products, motivating donors, or building relationships. Although the nomenclature used by these professional disciplines differs, the underlying concepts behind it are strikingly similar. These include, but are not limited to, audience analysis, goal setting, message strategy, channel choice, and program assessment.

Hallahan (2004) addressed the emerging and converging concept of communication management across disciplines. He noted that a growing number of organizations have recognized that various communications disciplines share common purposes and that their objectives and strategies for achieving those objectives are similar. They are differentiated primarily by their tactics and are being pressed to adapt to a changing environment by their organizations' desires to coordinate communications, by the convergence of media, and by the blurring of communication genres. Organizations are seeking integration as well as enhanced effectiveness through synergy, enhanced efficiencies, and reduced redundancies. Hallahan identified six specialties commonly found within organizations. Each is practiced by different staff personnel within large, complex organizations, and each addresses particular organizational purposes, as follows:

### **Management Communication**

**Personnel:** Managerial/administrative personnel throughout organization  
**Purposes:** To facilitate the orderly operations of the organization. Also, to promote understanding of an organization's mission, vision, and goals; and to supply information needed in day-to-day operations, including customer and vendor transactions and customer and staff training.

### **Marketing Communication**

Personnel: Marketing and advertising staffs

Purposes: To create awareness and promote sales of products and services. Also, to attract and retain users and customers, including intermediaries in distribution channels. Among nongovernmental organizations and other not-for-profit organizations, marketing communications incorporates fundraising and development communications.

### **Public Relations**

Personnel: Public relations or publicity, human resources, finance, or government relations staffs

Purpose: To establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key constituencies. This includes consumers and customers, as well as investors and donors, employees and volunteers, community leaders, and government officials.

### **Technical Communication**

Personnel: Technical, engineering support, and training staffs

Purposes: To educate employees, customers, and others to improve their efficiency. It involves reducing errors and promoting the effective and satisfying use of technology when performing tasks important to organization.

### **Political Communication**

Personnel: Government affairs staffs as well as politicians and advocacy groups.

Purposes: To build political consensus or consent on important issues involving the exercise of political power and the allocation of resources in society. This includes efforts to influence voting in elections as well as public policy decisions by lawmakers or administrators. On the international level, this includes communications in support of public diplomacy and military stabilization.

### **Information/Social Marketing Campaigns**

Personnel: Employees in nongovernmental, not-for-profit, and governmental agencies, as well as corporate staffs involved in social, psychological, and physical well-being.

Purposes: To reduce the incidence of risky behaviors or to promote social causes important to the betterment of the community.

In the American and European contexts, the shattering of traditional discipline boundaries was best seen in the emergence of IMC (integrated marketing communication). The IMC concept was not anything new. Clients had engaged in

integrated communication for years by coordinating the activities of disparate outside vendors and consultants. Holtzhausen Publicity and Advertising in Johannesburg, South Africa, had already published in 1980 an IMC model in their corporate brochure. Advertising agencies in the early 1990s embraced IMC mostly as a defensive measure as they watched increased proportions of advertising dollars siphoned off to other promotional activities. Advocates of integrated communication (which goes by a variety of other names, such as *convergent communications*) argued that otherwise-fragmented activities should be coordinated in a strategic way that focused on the audience's needs, concerns, and interests—not merely those of organizational communicators or managers (Duncan, 2001; Duncan & Caywood, 1996; Hallahan, 2006; Moore & Thorson, 1996).

Strategic communication differs from integrated communication because its focus is how an organization communicates across organizational endeavors. The emphasis is on the strategic application of communication and how an organization functions as a social actor to advance its mission.

The purposeful nature of strategic communication is critical. Whereas academic research on organizational communications broadly examines the various processes involved in how people interact in complex organizations (including interpersonal, group, and network communications), strategic communication focuses on how the organization itself presents and promotes itself through the intentional activities of its leaders, employees, and communication practitioners. Of course, this does not exclude their use of relationship building or networks in the strategic process.

### Expanded Adoption of the Term

Strategic communication, as a term, is now emerging as a descriptive term that is gaining acceptance. Among examples of its application are the following:

- An increasing number of corporations in Europe, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and North America use strategic communication to describe their units and the services they perform. Universities that have adopted this approach range from the University of California in the United States to the University of British Columbia in Canada and the University of the Free State in South Africa.
- The giant Mercer Human Resources Consulting group prominently uses the term to describe its services (Mercer Human Resources, 2005), while various smaller agencies and consultancies position themselves as strategic communication consultants (CACI Strategic Communications, 2005; Foundation Strategy Group, 2005; Garmonal, 2005; Holtzhausen Publicity and Advertising, 1980; ICF Communications, 2005; Strategic Communication Laboratories, 2005; Wright, 2001).

- The National Investor Relations Institute in the United States has organized its own Center for Strategic Communication as a resource for investor relations and corporate communications professionals who seek information and best practices for the development of strategic communication plans for their companies (National Investor Relations Institute, 2006).

- The not-for-profit arena has embraced the idea to describe their use of communications activities that meld advocacy and development and offer training in the strategic uses of communication in the public debate about issues (Bank, Griggs, & Tynes, 1999; Benton Foundation, 2001; Kirkman & Menichelli, 1992; Media Alliance, 2006; National Missions Board, 2005; Radtke, 1998).

- The prestigious American Bar Association, which represents United States attorneys, operates a Standing Committee on Strategic Communication, whose jurisdiction includes oversight of the Association's communications priorities and goals; development of integrated communications messages, plans, and strategies; and development and evaluation of demonstration projects (American Bar Association, 2006).

- Sponsors of information campaigns speak of strategic communication as a device used in international health campaigns (Health Communication Partnership, 2006a; Piotrow & Kincaid, 2001), as a tool to encourage environmental activism (Duffy & Omwenga, 2002; Tyson, 2004), and as a critical tool in responding to the HIV/AIDS epidemic (McKee, Bertrand, & Becker-Benton, 2004). Meanwhile, the U.S. government emphasizes strategic communication initiatives in its drug control initiative (McCaffrey, 1999).

- The U.S. government recognizes strategic communication as a critical element in public diplomacy and in military intervention in troubled areas such as Iraq and Afghanistan (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2004; Siddiqui, 2004); the need to engage in such activities has been called for by others (Gregory, 2005; Jones, 2005; Manheim, 1994).

- A United Nations report adopted in 1997 recommended establishment of a strategic communication function "aimed at making the United Nations a more powerful and effective advocate for the programs, policies and values its members to advance" (United Nations, 1997; see also United Nations System Staff College, 2006). Various affiliates of the United Nations, such as the International Labour Organization in Geneva, operate strategic communication programs.

- The World Bank's development communication division explains that the unit "supports the Bank's mission of reducing poverty by providing clients with strategic communication advice and tools they need to develop and implement successful project and pro-poor reform efforts" (World Bank, 2005).

- In Africa and other parts of the developing world, the Health Communication Partnership has as its goal "strengthening public health in the developing worlds through strategic communication programs" (Health Communication Partnership, 2006b).

- In an array of other uses, strategic communication has been used synonymously for public relations (Kaplan, 1991; White & Mazur, 1995), but also to redefine political persuasion (Johnson-Cartee & Copeland, 2004), to promote litigation advocacy services (Decision Quest, 2005), to characterize crisis communications (Ray, 1999), and to promote brand building (Temporal, 2001, pp. 211–231). Strategic communication also is the focus of the newest generation of communication audits (Downs & Adrian, 2004).

- University programs in the United States offering advertising and public relations have adopted strategic communication as a cohesive term for integrated curricula that meld the common strategies of these disciplines. Among schools that have adopted such an approach are state universities in Kansas, Kentucky, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio (Miami University), Oklahoma, and Wisconsin. Meanwhile, a growing number of other schools worldwide offer graduate degrees and certificates in the subject. Examples include Columbia, Lehigh, and Antioch-Seattle (United States); the University of Central Lancashire (United Kingdom); and the Universität der Künste Berlin (Germany; [strategiccommunication.info](http://strategiccommunication.info), 2006).

- Workshops on strategic communication are being offered by various professional groups ranging from the Public Relations Society of America (2005) to the European Federation of Biotechnology (2006). Similarly, strategic communication is the focus of at least two institutes in the United States. American University in Washington, DC, operates the Institute for Strategic Communication for Nonprofits to provide training. Arizona State University's Consortium for Strategic Communication promotes advanced research, teaching, and public discussion of the role of communication in combating terrorism, promoting national security, and successfully engaging in public diplomacy worldwide.

- A practitioner-written trade journal produced by Melcrum Publications, *Strategic Communication Management*, brings together practitioners in areas such as corporate and internal communication, human resources, knowledge management and intranets, and corporate responsibility.

- Scholars in speech communication use the term as both the title of a leading textbook (O'Hair, Friedrich, & Dixon, 2005) and a framework to analyze persuasive story telling (Forman, 1999). Strategic communication is similarly recognized as an element of interpersonal and leadership communication (Management Concepts, 2006; UCSB Leadership SkillsMap Institute, 2006).

### Rationale for Strategic Communication

As suggested by the vitality of these examples, the term *strategic communication* makes sense as a unifying framework to analyze communications by organizations for at least four reasons.

First, the ability of communicators to differentiate between traditional communications activities and their effects is rapidly disappearing. Although IMC focused attention on the coordination of various functions, many of those functions themselves are being redefined. Public relations practitioners, for example, are increasingly relying on paid advertising to communicate critical messages on topics ranging from corporate reputation and social issues to events sponsorships. Meanwhile, marketers are spearheading cooperative programs and cause-related marketing programs that once were the exclusive province of public relations. The reason is simple: These techniques work in an era in which organizations must differentiate themselves and in which audiences view organizations from multiple perspectives—including their product and service offerings, their expertise and competence, their service commitment, and their social responsibility. Any claims to exclusive responsibility for particular activities within an organization are becoming challenged in many organizations.

Second, important changes in public communication are being driven by technology and by media economics. Digital technologies such as the World Wide Web and instant messaging, for example, make it increasingly impossible to differentiate what is advertising versus publicity, sales promotion, or e-commerce. Technology is converging communications channels. Several universities now offer programs in Multimedia Journalism or Media Convergence to prepare future journalists to work in converged media environments. In a similar way, the array of hybrid messages being touted by profit-driven media companies worldwide—advertorials, product placements, sponsorships—is melding the traditional and familiar genres of public communication. This is an important, but overlooked, example of postmodernism at work in communications.

Third, organizations use an expanding variety of methods to influence the behaviors of their constituencies—what people know, how people feel, and the ways people act—relative to the organization. Thus, audiences' experiences with and impressions of organizations are the sum total of the people's experiences—and it is increasingly questionable whether the effects of any particular communication activity can be validly examined in isolation. People do not necessarily differentiate between the various forms of communications in which organizations might engage. One example is the difference between advertising and publicity (Hallahan, 1999). Thus, it is important to consider an organization's communications activities from a strategic and integrative perspective.

Fourth, strategic communication recognizes that purposeful influence is the fundamental goal of communications by organizations. Whereas certain disciplines are conceptually grounded merely in providing information (e.g., technical communication) or in establishing and maintaining mutually satisfactory relationships (public relations), these foci are only necessary—but not sufficient—conditions for organizations to achieve strategically important goals. To be relevant

today, communication theory and research must focus on how communications contribute to an organization's purpose for being.

### STRATEGIC AS AN IMPETUS FOR THE FIELD

The question might well be asked why the term *strategic* should be applied in conjunction with *communication* to describe current formal communication practices in society in general and organizations in particular.

Part of the problem with the term *strategic* is that it has been strongly associated with a modernist approach to management. Critics of this approach argue strategic communication privileges a management discourse and emphasizes upper management's goals for the organization as given and legitimate. *Strategic* implies organizations and their functions are evaluated in terms of economic contribution and "rational" economic goals (Deetz, 2001, p. 9).

The goal of the modernist approach is a world that can be controlled through administrative procedures, the elimination of dissension and conflict, and the blind acceptance of organizational goals and roles. The role of communication in this approach is to ensure information transfer from the supervisor to the subordinate in order to gain compliance and to establish networks to ensure the organization's power in relations with the public. This perspective includes the concepts of strategic message design, management of culture, and total quality management (Holtzhausen, 2002). Theoretical approaches include covering laws, systems approaches, and an emphasis on skills development, particularly in the areas of communication and management (Deetz, 2001; Hatch, 1997). The mere mention of the term *strategic* thus evokes a one-sided approach to organizational management that is based in asymmetrical or top-down communication that does not permit for the exploration of alternative approaches to studying the communication practices of organizations.

These perspectives have been strengthened by the fact that strategic planning is being taught in most undergraduate programs in public relations, advertising, and marketing through the rather formulaic management by objectives approach that emphasizes goal setting, measurable outcomes, and action plans (see, for example, Austin & Pinkleton, 2001; Caywood, 1999; Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Ferguson, 1999; Moffitt, 1999; R. D. Smith, 2005; Wilson & Ogden, 2004).

Viewing strategy in such a very basic manner, however, does not do justice to its richness and also loses perspective of the many existing readings of the term. It also inhibits the possibilities for theory development in this area. Under closer scrutiny, there are indeed several alternative approaches to perceiving the term *strategic* in addition to those listed previously. Also, a thorough deconstruction of the term opens up new ways of viewing and researching communication practice

in modern-day organizations. Thus, it is valuable to explore the different meanings associated with the term *strategic* and the implications of applying the term to the practice of communication management.

### An Emphasis on Management

The term *strategic* was first used in organization theory in the 1950s (Hatch, 1997). Its purpose was to describe how organizations compete in the marketplace, obtain competitive advantage, and gain market share. The above description of a modernist approach to strategic planning is indeed accurate when one considers the original aims of strategic planning as ones of controlling the environment and maintaining the organization's autonomy (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). In its most negative context, the term *strategic* is understood as having originated in warfare and is in its strictest sense described as the art of war. The word *strategy* originates from the Greek word for "generalship" (Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary, 1984). As a result, the term often has negative associations, particularly in an era in which organizations are perceived as using their resources to manipulate their environments to their own benefit without consideration of stakeholders, other constituencies, and the concerns of society in general. Associating *strategic* as a war metaphor in connection with communication practice can thus strengthen the existing negative perceptions of the field.

This perception is further strengthened when organizations view the strategy process as rational decision making (Hatch, 1997). The familiar SWOT analysis is a part of this process, as are goal setting, strategy formulation and implementation, and evaluation (Porter, 1985). In addition to formulating their own communication strategies, communication practitioners are often tasked to communicate to employees the vision and mission of the organization as set out by management.

Although this remains the standard view of strategic communication, alternative perspectives on strategy formulation open up new directions for studying the role of communication in strategy formulation and execution.

In one application, the term *strategic* is associated with power and decision making. When used in conjunction with communication, *strategic* implies that communication practice is a management function. Mintzberg (1979) was the first to describe the "strategic apex" of the organization as consisting of "those people charged with overall responsibility of the organization—the chief executive officer ... and any of the top-level managers whose concerns are global" (p. 237). Although he placed the public relations function in the category of support staff, Mintzberg's description of the functions of the strategic apex was similar to our understanding of the role of communication managers: stakeholder liaison, boundary spanning, acting as spokesperson, environmental scanning and issues management, and integration of communication functions.

Alternative, and more positive, notions of strategy have also emerged since the 1950s. These reject the use of *strategic* only in an asymmetrical context. Quinn's (1978) perspective on emergent strategy held that strategy is based on prior experience and action. Emergent strategy thus legitimates and values the actions and decisions of employees at all levels of the organization. Not only does this approach challenge the notion of top-down communication, it focuses the attention on the impact of communication on strategy formulation (i.e., how communication about daily practices eventually impacts the strategic decisions of organizations).

The term *strategic* is also increasingly used in conjunction with change management (Gagliarde, 1986; Hatch, 1993) to describe the role of communication practitioners in organizational change (Ströh, 2005). Gagliarde (1986) argued that cultural assumptions and values determine strategy and that culture in particular impacts an organization's ability to change. This again challenges the rational model of strategic decision making that implies that strategic decisions are objective, and culture and gender free.

This interpretation of *strategic* allows students of strategic communication to explore the links between culture, communication, and organizational change. For an even wider application, scholars who are interested in gender studies have a place in the field of strategic communication by studying (a) how the use of language privileges male leadership and strategic decision-making processes (Pfeffer, 1997), (b) how women use language strategically to reach their goals, and (c) how gendered lives affect organizational strategies. Hatch (1997) emphasized "symbolization" (p. 364) as playing an important role in cultural change. Communication practice (be it through public relations, advertising, or marketing) is often used for symbolic management. Strategic communication therefore also describes how organizational symbols are created through communication practice, both internally and externally; this provides the opportunity to apply visual narrative theory to this discipline.

As previously mentioned, organizational strategy often describes how organizations compete in the marketplace. The marketing discipline, like public relations, bases much of its practice on environmental analysis and compatibility, which means *strategic* also includes the study of organizational environments. Such studies should naturally include communication with specific market segments but should also include the study of "all stakeholders within and without the organization with quite different notions of ... goal attainment" (Perrow, 1992, p. 371). This, of course, is the main aim of public relations scholarship. European public relations scholars in particular differentiate themselves from their U.S. colleagues by claiming to study public relations as a social phenomenon that has an impact on social subsystems like the political system, the economic system, the cultural system, or the media system (Bentele, 2004).

In a similar vein, *strategic* is associated with organizational survival and efficiency (Perrow, 1992). One example is the effort in recent years to prove the contri-

bution of communication practice to the organization's bottom line, putting this line of research also within the parameters of strategic communication. Recent research has indicated that practitioners contribute to organizational survival by privileging influential publics in organizational environments, particularly by urging their organizations to adhere to the dominant value systems in those environments (Holtzhausen, 2005). This creates the opportunity to argue that inclusiveness might often, if not always, be an appropriate strategy for organizational survival and rejects the notion that *strategic* necessarily implies asymmetrical communication.

### An Emphasis on Action and Practice

The term *strategic* is often associated with practice and the tactics used to implement strategy (Mintzberg, 1990). Traditionally, public relations literature argues *strategic* used in this context has the potential to reinforce the perception that the practice of public relations and communication is merely tactical and not considerate of larger social, political, and economic factors. Dozier (1992), for example, argued that public relations managers make strategic decisions and that technicians merely execute those decisions. The concept of emergent strategy as discussed previously would reject that notion and would argue that it is actually the successful practice of technicians that leads to successful strategic decision making. The term *strategic*, therefore, also has the potential to investigate the importance and contribution of the tactical level of communication practice and so legitimate the work of communication practice at all levels.

Focusing on practice brings a much-needed critical approach to the field of strategic communication. From this perspective, the notion of practice as part of the strategic process that influences society and in turn is influenced by society allows scholars, rather than studying communication practice as an organizational function, to study how communication practices transform both organizations and societies. Viewing strategic communication from a critical perspective allows for analyses based on sociology, critical and cultural theory, and postmodern theory.

For instance, the concept of agency aligns strategic communication and practice and focuses on power relations in the communication process. The struggle to exert power and control is inherent in all agency, as is power (Clegg, 1994; Giddens, 1984). It is the ability of the agent to resist power and control that is at the core of the critical debate about agency. Two conflicting perspectives dominate the argument. One argument holds that agents are put into place to legitimate the power and position of those already in power (Bourdieu, 1977). From this argument, powerful organizational players will use communication agency to create norms of discipline and submission of both internal and external publics. Communication practitioners will actively be involved in creating the rules, practices, and norms of organizations through which they and others are regulated through

self-control and self-discipline (Foucault, 1982). Thus, communication practitioners are the agents used to establish corporate ideologies, a process that is often associated with the creation of meaning in the service of power.

Giddens (1984) had a much more positive interpretation of agency. He argued that agents have the potential to deliberately and effectively choose and carry out actions in defiance of established rules. Giddens positioned the agent as an active person who can navigate the impact of social structure on her or his life. From Giddens's perspective, then, the communication agent is able to reflexively resist domination and play an active role in shaping the organization through her or his (strategic) communication role in the organization.

Habermas (1979) posed "strategic" action as directly opposed to communication action, which, he argued, is based on the presupposition of "mutually recognized validity claims" (p. 209). In the strategic "attitude ... only indirect understanding via determinative indicators is possible" (p. 209). Habermas did not disregard the use of strategy altogether, as long as it was used to create understanding. However, he did associate "strategic attitude" with "deliberate pseudo-consensual" communication (p. 210). He also held that strategic communication is becoming increasingly important in the public sphere for all players. Despite the inherent discrepancies in power that give people such as politicians and lobbyists more media access than the "actors of civil society," the "common construct of 'civil society' certainly invites actors to intervene strategically in the public sphere" (Habermas, 2006, p. 16). The ability to use corporate communication management methods allows "representatives of functional systems and special interest groups" to gain access to media and thus to gain political influence. Although the "actors of civil society" have less power than politicians and lobbyists, they too have the opportunity and do use strategic communication to affect the debate in the public sphere (p. 15).

Postmodernists argue that Habermas's ideal communication situation is impossible because power imbalances are inherent in, and influence, all communicative situations. Foucault argued that all relationships are political and therefore strategic. Lyotard (1988) conceptualized these power imbalances as the *differend*:

A case of *differend* takes place when the "regulation" of the conflict that opposes them is done in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified by the other in that idiom. (p. 9)

These different idioms are "genres of discourse" (Lyotard, 2006, p. 29). He argued that all discourse is political—aimed at silencing or persuading.

These arguments again emphasize the importance of *strategic* as an impetus for the field of communication practice. Communication agency will be influenced by organizational power based on the hierarchical importance of the position itself and the class and gender of the agent. A number of issues position agency as an im-

portant part of the strategic process. First, the power of the agent will influence the agency itself. Second, societal norms, values, and culture will play a role in how agency is executed. Third, the agent can and will be used by people with more power to cement that power and individual wealth. Finally, the ability of the individual agent to resist domination is in question.

### *Strategic* as a Descriptor of Communication Practice

Because of its many-faceted meanings, the term *strategic* might offer one of the most inclusive, although conflicting and contradictory, descriptions of the field of communication practice. Although it emphasizes the role of communication as a management practice, it does not necessarily imply power and control of management over other stakeholders. It also allows for the study of participatory communication practices that include stakeholder communication, change management, and complex analyses of organizational environments.

*Strategic* further includes the study of all communication practices, including those of public relations, advertising, and marketing, as well as the other disciplines mentioned earlier. Finally, it focuses the attention of critical scholars on power relations in the communication environment and on the role of the communication practitioner as an organizational agent.

## EMPHASIS ON COMMUNICATION

The emergence of strategic communication as a unifying paradigm for studying purposeful communications by organizations provides an important opportunity to reinvigorate and refocus the study of organizational communications onto how organizations present and promote themselves and interact with their audiences (i.e., putting communication back into the study of communication by organizations).

Refocusing on communication is important for two reasons: (a) Theoretically, without their communication science roots, disciplines such as management, advertising, and public relations lose their conceptual and methodological apparatus; and (b) such an initiative focuses interest on the fundamental processes at a time when some disciplines have lost sight of their primary focus. Many in advertising, for example, have become more interested in marketing than in marketing communications. In a similar vein, public relations scholars have chosen to emphasize relationships and relational outcomes (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000) at the cost of studying the process—communication—through which relationships are formed.

In large measure, this is an anomaly found within academia in North America, where academics studying relationships have invented all kinds of new names for their work. It is unfortunate, however, because scholarship in areas such as public relations has become desynchronized with the world of practice and with develop-

ments in academia in other parts of the world, where there is a growing interest in communication science.

The vitality of such a focus can be readily seen in the various terms being used to denominate the communication field: *communication management*, *corporate communication*, *integrated (marketing) communication*, *reputation management*, and now *strategic communication*. At the same time, people working in government, companies, and agencies define themselves and their work simply as *communication*. This requires that traditional disciplines such as advertising and public relations reexamine their core roles within the communications activities in which organizations might engage. Strategic communication is about informational, persuasive, discursive, as well as relational communication when used in a context of the achievement of an organization's mission.

By the beginning of the 21st century, practically all corporations and most non-profit organizations in the United States, the European Union, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa had organized formal communication programs. Two studies over the past 15 years illustrated the depth and breadth of organized communications programs by corporations.

In 1992, the U.S.-based Conference Board, an association of the nation's largest corporations, reported that among 157 large corporations (out of 700 surveyed), fully 60% employed senior executives at the rank of executive director, vice president, or higher. The same percentage of respondents worked in a function simply called *communication* (and another 20% in positions that combined *communication* with some qualifying term). Nearly half of these communications executives reported to the highest people in their organizations, and more than half were responsible for both external and internal communication. Their average budget was around \$3 million U.S. (range = \$1 million to \$100 million). About 80% were involved in media relations, speech writing, and employee relations, whereas 60% oversaw corporate advertising, community relations, and creative services like design and production. At least half used video, teleconferences, and other audiovisual technologies and managed sponsorships and donations. More than one third managed relations with shareholders and analysts, and one fourth were involved in investor relations and public affairs/political relations (Troy, 1993).

In 1999, researchers at St. Gallen University in Switzerland conducted a similar survey among the 60 most reputable corporations in Europe; 47% of selected corporations responded, including Allianz, DaimlerChrysler, Nestlé, and Nokia (Will, Probst & Schmidt, 1999a, 1999b). All of the firms had communication departments led by communication directors; of these, two thirds reported directly to the chief executive officer. Excluding marketing communications budgets, 38% of respondents reported spending more than 27.5 million Euros per year. Practice areas attracting the most attention were media relations and internal communication (100%), sponsorships (96%), media monitoring (83%), public affairs/lobbying (75%), event management (75%), corporate marketing (71%), investor relations

(67%), and product marketing (33%). On average, each department was active in seven of these practices.

#### Four Academic Clusters

Thompkins (1987) argued that contemporary organizational and managerial theories are rooted in communication theories. Yet in large measure, academic research and training in the fields of management and communication are disconnected from strategic communication practice. The challenge confronting the field today is to more closely draw the vital linkages between how communication is taught in academia and how it is practiced strategically.

Reflective of the Hallahan (2004) breakdown of communication practice, an examination of academia finds four principal clusters of scholarship from which strategic communication can draw: (a) corporate communication; (b) marketing, advertising, and public relations; (c) business communication skills; and (d) academic studies of organizational behavior in general.

*Corporate communication.* Corporate communication exists as a small specialty in schools of management and communication. Titles use both the singular and plural form of the word: corporate communication (Argenti, 1998; Goodman, 1994; Oliver, 1997) and corporate communications (Gayeski, 1993; Heath, 1994; Dolphin, 1999). Originally, the term was to differentiate communications related to the organization and its environment versus communications about the organization's products or services (Argenti, 1998). In the United States, *corporation* means a large, publicly traded commercial company. Therefore, corporate communication there refers to communication of corporations in this market sense. When the term *corporate communication(s)* arrived in Europe, some authors (e.g., van Riel, 1995) gave it a broader meaning based on the Latin root of the term *-corpus* (body). *Corporate communication* was used to describe the communication of any organization and not only (commercial) companies. Thus, the term has been used by prominent authors in at least four contexts: as the communication of whole companies (Argenti, 1998), as communication of whole organizations (van Riel, 1995), as holistic communication in a corporate environment (Goodman, 1994), and as holistic communication in an organizational environment (Oliver, 1997).

*Marketing, advertising, and public relations.* Separate from corporate communications domiciled in schools of management, promotional communications have evolved as separate specializations in separate departments of marketing or communications. Traditionally, marketing communications focused on advertising, but in recent years the discipline has seen a broader emphasis on marketing communications (Fill, 1999; P. Smith, Berry & Pulford, 1997; P. R.

Smith, 1993). Alternatively, IMC (Schultz, Tannenbaum, & Lauterhorn, 1993) and simply integrated communication (Caywood, 1997; Hallahan, 2006; Thorson & Moore, 1996) have become popularized. In a similar fashion, public relations has expanded to incorporate communication management (e.g., J. E. Grunig, 1992a; Verčič & Grunig, 2000; White, 1991).

*Business communication skills.* The roots of this tradition go back to the 1920s in the United States, when the quality of communication processes was approached as a “technical” problem requiring the training of employees. University courses and textbooks in the United States focus on teaching written communications (e.g., Kolin, 2005) and communication skills more generally (Gaut & Perrigo, 1998; Locker, 1997) in order to prepare students to be successful as future employees. These studies largely focus on an array of disparate activities and techniques. Professionals also have access to a multitude of self-help trade books that ensure them success on the job. One example is the *10-Minute Guide to Business Communication* (Olderman, 1997). Understanding of communication in this line of thinking extends from learning communication skills (Hargie, 1997) as components of organizational communication competence (Jablin, Cude, House, Lee & Roth, 1994; Verčič, 1998; Verčič, 1999) to prescriptions of the “right communication” for “linguistic control” over employees. Cameron (2000) found that the majority of the techniques and skills that employees need to learn really have very little to do with communication knowledge. Instead, these are perfunctory gestures that are a part of what American sociologist Ritzer (1996) termed *the McDonaldization of society*.

*Organizational communication.* Learning communication skills without communication knowledge (to know “what” without “why” and “when”) is useless. For this reason, the two need to be studied together to forge communication competence. *Communication competence* is a term that belongs to academic organizational communication studies that emerged in the 1950s. As an academic discipline, organizational communication combines the traditional study of rhetoric with newly emerging social sciences, speech communication, and communication science. The mainstream of academic organizational communication today is focused on five notions: communication media, channels, and networks; organizational climate; and superior–subordinate communication (Putnam & Cheney, 1995). Organizational communication gained ground in European universities maybe even more so than in the United States, but it suffers from being decontextualized from any business/commercial/market elements (cf. a standard organizational communication textbook, such as Goldhaber, 1993). As a result, it is not surprising that organizational communication has lost favor to new specialties, such as corporate communication and public relations.

## Two Major Models of Communication

As a concept, communication has been explicated extensively, but two major models of communication dominate discussions within professional and academic circles. Both are relevant to strategic communication.

First is the so-called transmission model of communication, which conceptualizes communication as the one-way emission of information. Shannon and Weaver's model is a widely cited one-way model of communication focusing on the transmission of signals through a channel with a limited feedback capacity (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Critics of this model argue that such an approach to communication is too sender oriented and understates or ignores the important role of receivers in the process.

Second is an interactive model of communication that argues that communication involves the creation and exchange of meaning between the parties in a communication activity. This interactive approach has its roots in symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934/1972) as well as in Wiener's (1948) cybernetics theory, which showed how communication processes can be seen in terms of action and reaction. In a similar vein, Bauer (1964) stressed the role of audiences as active processors of information, and Thayer (1968) drew a distinction between synchronic and diachronic views about the concept of communication.

The interactive model is similar to the ritual model of communication. In the ritual model, communication is a symbolic process whereby reality is created, maintained, repaired, and transformed, according to Carey (1989) in *Communication as Culture*. Bell, Golombisky, and Holtzhausen (2002) succinctly described the differences between the transmission and ritual models of communication:

Transmission asks questions about how we get information from here to there across distances. The ritual model asks questions about how we manage to get along together over time. The ritual model helps us explain how we build shared reality and culture in social groups, including in organizations, even as we account for constant change. (p. 5)

(See Figure 1.)

Until late in the 20th century, the transmission model served as the basis for conceptualizing communications activities by organizations. Many managers of organizations thought that superior-subordinate communication was all that was necessary to communicate with employees, who would obediently comply. In part reflecting the powerful effects thinking that predominated media research in the early 20th century, the traditional advertising model also used a one-way approach that stressed creating awareness and interest, which would lead to desire and action (Strong, 1925) or to decision, trial (implementation), and adoption (confirmation; Rogers, 2003).

<b>Transmission</b>	<b>Ritual</b>
Metaphors of Space, Travel, Geography, Technology.	Metaphors of Sharing, Community, Fellowship, Communion in time.
Technology helps us communicate farther, faster.	Things don't exist until we name them & give them meaning.

FIGURE 1 Two Alternative Models of Communication

Today, most communications researchers agree that communication involves more than one-way transmission. In public relations, for example, J. E. Grunig (1976, 1989, 2001; Grunig & Hunt, 1984) differentiated between one-way and two-way communication. J. E. Grunig further described his two-way models as symmetrical and asymmetrical, after Watzlawick, Beavin, and Jackson (1970), who described the circular character of communication. Whereas Thayer (1968, 1987) was concerned with the development of meanings in messages over time (diachronic means literally “through time”), Watzlawick and colleagues were concerned with people’s socially related behaviors, and more specifically doctor–patient behaviors, when communicating.

According to J. E. Grunig, *symmetrical public relations* means “the use of bargaining, negotiating, and strategies of conflict resolution to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes, and behaviors of both the organization and its publics” (J. E. Grunig, 1989, p. 29). *Symmetrical communication* means that each participant in the communication process is equally able to influence the other. In his normative theorizing, J. E. Grunig advocated a two-way influence model instead of a (controlled) one-way influence model as the most effective and ethical way to conduct public relations.

By contrast, J. E. Grunig (1992a, 2001) claimed that one-way models are always asymmetric, because the sender is only concerned with the transmission of his message and does not take the receiver into account. Although Watzlawick and colleagues used (a)symmetry in a different way, Dozier and Ehling (1992) defined *asymmetry* as a communication model in which a one-way, linear causal effect is predicted and evaluated. They stated: “The presupposition is asymmetrical, for it conceives of communication and public relations as something organizations do to—rather than with—people” (p. 176). In J. E. Grunig’s work, however, it is still unclear what is meant by “one-way.” Does this predict the existence of a receiver or not? If so, what is the difference between one-way asymmetrical and two-way asymmetrical? If not, what is meant by one-way? J. E. Grunig dismisses the value of one-way communication, including the two underlying common models of public relations practice that are subsumed by it—press agency and the dissemination of public information (for descriptions, see J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

In studying the strategic communications activities of organizations, it is important to be open to all conceptualizations of communication processes, including the actions of communications professionals and models, regardless of whether they conceptualize communications as either a one-way or interactive process. Indeed, a variety of middle grounds are possible, as can be seen in the latest transformation of the J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) models into the two-way contingency model (L. A. Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This model combined the two-way symmetrical and two-way asymmetrical models into a single model. These scholars described the contingency component of this model as “the need for public relations professional to make decisions about whom most needs to be persuaded in particular situations. ... These contingent decisions must be made, however, with the interests of both the organization and the public in mind” (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002, p. 472).

Another important area related to this is the study of communication effects. During the 1960s, for example, Bauer (1964) concluded that there are two different views regarding the idea of effects. The first of these, which he described as the social model, is

held by the general public and by social scientists when they talk about advertising, and somebody else’s propaganda, is one of the exploitation of man by man. It is a model of one-way influence: The communication does something to the audience, while to the communicator is generally attributed considerable latitude and power to do what he pleases to the audience. (p. 319)

Bauer described his second model, the scientific model, as “a transactional process in which two parties each expect to give and take from the exchange approximately equitable values” (p. 319). Although this scientific model allows for influence, it does not follow a linear causal model. Bauer stated that although research shows the scientific model is by far the more adequate of the two, it is the social model that is dominant in practice.

Today, the Belgian communication scientist Fauconnier (1990, p. 74) promotes a scientific concept of communication in which one is not only concerned with the way in which a message is expressed but also with what happens at the receiving end. However, he claims that, in practice, many people are concerned solely with expression. Communication that is limited to expression is, of course, a kind of one-way model without concern for the destination of what is expressed. The only concern is the “emission” itself. Effects are an unaddressed process. It is questionable whether communication as emission can even be defined as a one-way process because there is no concern whatsoever about what is expressed.

### Emphasis on Meaning

Rosengren (2000) suggested that, above all, communication can be said to be about the process of meaning creation. In an organizational context, strategic com-

munication involves describing how entities intentionally attempt to communicate or create meaning, as well as understanding factors that confound the sharing of meaning between an organization and its various constituents. Such noise (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) can be the result of both intended consequences of an organization's actions as well as the conscious and unconscious responses of those with whom an organization communicates.

Meaning involves questions such as how people create meaning psychologically, socially, and culturally; how messages are understood and elaborated upon in memory; and how ambiguity arises, and how it is resolved. "Communication does not happen without meaning, and people create and use meaning in interpreting events" (Littlejohn, 1992, p. 378). The crucial question, then, is what kind of meaning of whom is created by whom and what implications does this have in terms of interpreting the world? (See for an overview Littlejohn, 1983, pp. 95–113.) Meaning can be explained as the "whole way in which we understand, explain, feel about and react towards a given phenomenon" (Rosengren, 2000, p. 59).

It is important to note that meaning creation occurs among both message creators and message recipients and is often the outcome of the interaction between the two (e.g., Mead, 1934/1972). Meanings also have two dimensions, involving denotation and connotation (Langer, 1967). A denotative meaning is the intersubjectively shared signification of a word, whereas the connotative meaning refers to all personal feelings and subjective associations related to a symbol. Many communication scientists stress that the connotative meaning is the guiding factor in cognition and behavior (see, for example, Berlo, 1960; Littlejohn, 1983, 1992; Rosengren, 2000; Thayer, 1987). Thus, strategic communication research must address both the denotative and connotative dimensions of meaning.

Recent approaches view communication as a fundamentally two-way process that is interactive and participatory at all levels. This involves the paradigmatic change from a sender/receiver orientation into an actor orientation (e.g., a process in which all actors can be active and take initiatives). That is why the emphasis nowadays is on communication as a process in which meanings are created and exchanged, or even shared, by the parties involved.

Once again, there are two different views on this two-way process. For some scientists, the key to communication is the fact that it creates meanings intersubjectively (see, for example, Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). The key word in this approach is *dialogue*, or the free flow of words and its interpretations. This fits Thayer's (1968, 1987) diachronic view of communication as an ongoing process of learning in which meanings develop.

For others, this process goes further and actually creates a shared meaning (i.e., a new denotative or overt meaning), which we normally call *consensus* (Schramm, 1965, 1971; Susskind, McKernan, & Thomas-Larmer, 1999). The first view sees communication as an ongoing process of cocreating (connotative) meanings, whereas the second view sees communication as the cocreation of a new (denota-

tive) meaning, which is normally called *consensus building*. It would, however, be a pitfall to overlook the connotative side of meaning in consensus building and see it only as a rational process of decision making in which emotions have no place and alternative meanings get no ear. Noelle-Neumann (1974) showed that meanings go undercover as soon as they may not be heard, and they explode sooner or later.

Postmodern philosophers, however, hold that meaning is solely shaped by the receiver, who receives communication and creates meaning within the context of her or his own life experiences and references. It is also impossible to return to original meaning because in the communication process meaning is irretrievably transformed. In the words of Harland (1987), "Language in the mode of dissemination is endlessly unbalanced and out of equilibrium ... they push successively, in causal chains, toppling one another over like lines of fallen dominoes" (p. 137). In contrast to the link between cocreation of meaning and consensus, the postmodern emphasis is on dissensus as the best way to create new meaning and new ways of doing (Lyotard, 1988, 1993). A postmodern analysis takes a dialectic approach "that sees human reality as evolving and conflict ridden." Instead of "idealizing society as one only of cooperation and harmony," a postmodern approach focuses on "how social relations today are shaped principally by competition, conflict, struggle, and domination" (Best & Kellner, 2001, p. 14). The aim of a dialectic approach to public relations is the ability "to make connections that were not hitherto apparent" (Best & Kellner, 2001, p. 27).

### Emphasis on Influence

Central to the issue of strategic communication is the idea of influence (i.e., "the power or capacity of causing an effect in indirect or intangible ways") (Webster's, 1984, p. 620). Organizations (or individuals) who want to alter the behavior of others have four tools at their disposal: physical force, patronage, purchase, or persuasion (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1995). The latter involves the use of communication to promote the acceptance of ideas. Indeed, persuasion is the essence of strategic communication.

Early communication theories were focused on communication as a one-way process in which a sender does something to a receiver. However, the identity of this "something" remained a matter of debate. Some theories view communication as a dissemination process, a flow of information in which a sender disseminates a message to receivers by revealing its meaning through symbols. The focus is on the flow of information (Shannon & Weaver, 1949), and this information is seen as objective, thereby implicitly focusing on the denotative side of meaning. A typical definition within this scope of communication is: "Communication is the transmission of information, ideas, attitudes, or emotion from one person or group to

another (or others)” (Theodorson, G. A. & Theodorson, 1969, p. 62) (for an overview, see Littlejohn, 1992; McQuail & Windahl, 1986).

Other theories view communication as an attempt by a sender to produce a pre-defined attitudinal change in the receiver (i.e., a change in the [connotative] meaning of the situation as perceived by the latter). One well-known theory of this type is diffusion theory (also known as the two-step flow theory; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), which stipulates that mass media inform certain people, who, on their part, influence the meanings perceived by others. The focus is on the flow of influence (Lin, 1971). It is obvious that there can be no flow of influence without a flow of information, but a flow of information is not necessarily also a flow of influence—at least not in such a way that the sender can forecast how it will be interpreted by the receiver (Nillesen, 1998). However, as long as information is seen as objective, it could be argued that there is no need to differentiate between information and influence.

Regrettably, many disciplines minimize the importance of persuasion. Notable exceptions include advertising, political communication, and information campaigns. For example, organizational communications rarely focus on the interests of management in influencing the behavior of employees or other constituents. Similarly, technical communication stresses clarity of language and explicitness of directions in providing instructions without addressing the importance of clear communication from the sponsoring organization’s perspective. Similarly, public relations, in part because of allegations of manipulation, has skirted addressing persuasion in recent years (J. E. Grunig, 1989; Miller, 1989) in favor of a more elegant, and presumably more respectable, emphasis on research and counseling (Pavlik, 1987). Similarly, in their review of the emergence of the current emphasis on relationship management in that field, Ledingham and Bruning (2000) observed that communication efficiencies are of no use to measure public relations, but have to be replaced by such issues as consumer satisfaction, competitive choice, and media relations (pp. xiii–xiv).

Indeed, in a number of disciplines, communication has been relegated to an instrument merely used to reach managerial or marketing-based goals. Dervin (1991) termed this a *noncommunication* approach to communication. This raises the fundamental question of what the study of communications-based disciplines should be. Even if communication is seen as only one of the instruments for building relationships, trust, legitimacy, or reputation—understanding the underlying processes by which information is transmitted and meaning created is critical for understanding how higher order results are obtained (van Ruler, 1997; van Ruler & Verčič, 2005).

Scholars and practitioners interested in communications by organizations must challenge communication theory to examine the possibilities and constraints and to focus on everyday practice. Toth (1992, p. 3), for example, argued that communication is underdefined in systems approaches to public relations and that it is too

often seen as a transfer of information “as opposed to the more global rhetorical sense that with communication we transform our culture.” Paraphrasing Toth (1992, p. 12), the most obvious contribution that can be made by communication scholars to organizations and organizational practices is a much richer delineation of what is meant by communication. Fortunately, such efforts can be seen in the rhetorical (e.g., Toth & Heath, 1992) and societal (Ronneberger & Rühl, 1992) schools of public relations. Similarly, in the corporate communication approaches (see, for example, Argenti, 1994; Dolphin, 1999; Fleisher & Hoewing, 1992; van Riel, 1995), we find full faith in the power of communication to reach certain pre-defined causal effects in cognitions and behaviors.

One explanation for the reluctance to focus on communication lies in the increased difficulty of assessing communications today. In this regard, Pavlik (1987, p. 119) observed:

Communication can accomplish only so much in today’s society. It no longer has the power to influence public opinion the way it could in days of P.T. Barnum or Ivy Lee. The role of communication today is more often limited to building mutual understanding (which is often of vital importance).

This argument seems to suggest that strategic communication is solely for influencing target groups or for producing mutual understanding between an organization and its publics. It suggests that the linear influencing of target groups is no longer possible. Nonetheless, these approaches are meant as causal effects—and make strategic communication all the more important and relevant to modern organizations. Producing mutual understanding for decisions made is an obvious and legitimate end of communication, even if it is no longer possible to get others to think as organizations would like them to think. In this instrumental view, communication is something that managers do to accomplish something else (e.g., Conrad & Haynes, 2001, p. 53). This is a rather narrow view on communication, not least because in theories of organizational communication the process of decision making is seen as a communication process itself, by which meaningful decisions are constructed (Deetz, 2001).

Modern organizations are important social actors that play an increasingly important role in the debate about public issues and that have transformed the way in which we deliberate in modern society (Habermas, 1979). Goffman (1959) used the analogy of a play to describe the purposeful process of self-representation in which social actors engage, whereas Burke (1945/1969) similarly emphasized dramatism and showed how we might analyze discourse and thus understand the motives of social actors. Both suggested social actors are quite purposeful—strategic—in their actions.

## CONCLUSION

This article suggests that a new paradigm for analyzing organizational communications is emerging that focuses on the purposeful communication activities by organizational leaders and members to advance the organization's mission. These activities can involve the varied organized endeavors in which an organization engages to communicate with constituents and can cross traditional communication disciplines.

The two key words that comprise the term *strategic communication* are particularly significant. First, these activities are strategic, not random or unintentional communications—even though unintended consequences of communications can adversely impact the ability of an organization to achieve its strategic goals. Importantly, *strategic* must not be defined narrowly. Instead, *strategic* is a rich, multi-dimensional concept that needs to be examined broadly. Second, the concept of strategic communication emphasizes the fact that communication ought to be the focal interest of communications scholarship. The value of such an approach is readily apparent if communication is defined as the constitutive activity of management.

Researchers have an important opportunity to renew their interest in examining and understanding what organizations actually do to create and exchange meaning with others. This involves the circumstances in which communication processes occur, communication processes themselves, and communication outcomes. In this regard, a wide range of constituents is important to organizations. Strategic communication research can focus on how organizations interact with customers, employees, investors or donors, government officials, and community leaders (including media). Insights gained from research involving one group can inform understanding about how organizations interact with other groups.

Strategic communication also includes examining how an organization presents itself in society as a social actor in the creation of public culture and in the discussion of public issues. Research can be informed by looking beyond the bounds of traditional communications disciplines to include such diverse activities as public diplomacy, psychological operations by the military, and social marketing.

Studying strategic communication as a social science and humanistic domain is reflective of real changes in society and its organizing principles. With the proliferation of media and the cacophony of messages they generate, it has become increasingly important for social actors and organizations to be deliberate and thoughtful in their communication to be heard (Habermas, 1979, 1962/1989). This is especially true as strategic organizational communication has become increasingly international and virtual in today's postmodern world. It is increasingly impossible to escape communicating across national, cultural, and linguistic borders. Having an understanding of international communication processes and the fac-

tors that influence that communication has become imperative for communication practitioners and the scholars who study this phenomenon. Various forms of scholarship can inform our knowledge: descriptive, historical, predictive (hypothesis based), and critical scholarship. Although all methodologies should be welcomed, rigor remains critical.

This article also suggests the difficulties and challenges of creating a coherent body of knowledge for a new social phenomenon. Strategic communication is still an immature science (Kuhn, 1970) or a pre-scientific tradition (Popper, 1965). Kuhn (1970) argued that a field gains maturity when provided with theory and technique that satisfy the following four conditions:

- Concrete predictions for some range of natural phenomena must emerge from practice in the field;
- Predictive success must be consistently achieved;
- Predictive techniques must have their roots in theory, which, however metaphysical, justifies them; and
- The improvement of a predictive technique must be challenging and demand the very highest degree of talent and devotion.

To take the field of strategic communication forward toward a mature scientific domain will require a dedicated group of scientists who will work diligently and dogmatically in the field. Hopefully this article lays the foundation for future research and for the integration of the many loosely related theories in the field. At the same time, the article suggests the many problems and contradictions inherent in the different approaches to studying the field.

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