Organizational Communication
Foundations, Challenges, and Misunderstandings
Fourth Edition

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Preface

In preparation for writing the first three editions of this book, we conducted more than 160 interviews with leaders and workers in a variety of organizations. For this fourth edition, our students have conducted an additional 100 interviews. We have woven some of the stories from the interviewees throughout the book to breathe life into and illustrate the concepts and theories discussed. These interviews revealed a common theme that organizational life tends to be characterized by what we (broadly) term misunderstandings. The concept of misunderstandings, as we use it here, involves more than ineffective communication between members of an organization; it is an umbrella term used to connotate the problematic nature of interaction in organizational settings. Misunderstandings seem to characterize communication in organizations. As organizations develop, both productive and unproductive features emerge, such as layers of hierarchy, opposing goals, struggles for power, use of technology, gender and cultural differences, reward systems, and control mechanisms. These features serve to complicate the communication process at almost every moment, such that misunderstanding is at least as prevalent as understanding.

New to This Edition

This edition of the book offers many changes that came about as a result of several different factors. First, the realities of modern organizational life, specifically the proliferation of communication technology, diversification of the workforce, and work–life balancing concerns, have led to new challenges for organizational members. We address these challenges throughout many of the chapters in this new edition and provide new stories from our interviewees to show how these challenges play out in day-to-day life. Second, recent research in the field of organizational communication has revealed new perspectives on organizational life. In particular, we provide a brief overview of the communicative constitution of organization approach to understanding how communication and organization are interrelated. Finally, we have refocused our central organizing feature of the textbook, misunderstandings, and have removed it from a broader context that we had proposed in the first three editions—the communication organization model. This significant change provides students and teachers with a more focused lens at the very beginning through which to view the material in the remainder of the text.

As a result of all of these factors, we have written this fourth edition to integrate the following significant changes:

• New interview data throughout the book.
• A newly titled and re-envisioned chapter, The Individual in the Organization, which provides much broader and inclusive coverage of diversity, including intersectionality and microaggressions.
• Discussions of emotions at work have been expanded beyond emotional labor to include emotions and co-workers.
• Broadened coverage of work-life challenges to not just focus on gender but the challenges any organizational member can face.
• A review of the concept of workplace dissent has been integrated into the chapter on superior–subordinate communication.
• The chapter on peers and co-worker communication has been expanded to include workplace bullying, blended relationships, and technology as related to gender and age.

This book is written for an introductory course in organizational communication. In writing this book, we made several assumptions: (1) students will have had some previous course in communication; (2) the purpose of this course is to familiarize students with the basic elements of the field of organizational communication; and (3) students will cover methodological and philosophical orientations of organizational communication more deeply in a subsequent advanced course.

Given these assumptions, we had to make choices regarding content. For example, we have not included chapters on external organizational communication (e.g., public relations) or macro-organizational communication (e.g., organizational memory, life span). Our intention is to focus on internal communication and organizing issues that are on the organizational behavior level.

The title of the book describes our twofold intentions—to introduce basic concepts and to deal with misunderstandings. In Part One, we expose students to the foundations of organizational communication. Therefore, in early chapters we offer extensive discussions of the foundations of the discipline. Chapter 1 introduces students to the field of organizational communication and discusses the central organizing feature of the text—misunderstandings. Chapter 1 also includes introductory material on technology and diversity; issues in these areas are woven throughout the rest of the book, particularly
in Part Two. Chapter 2 lays the foundation for the field by examining the classical management theories. Chapter 3 describes the progression from the classical theories to those based more on concern for individuals. We have chosen to treat the theories of human relations and human resources together in this chapter because they are so closely linked. Chapter 4 covers systems theory and the learning organization, which represents a shift from material dedicated to prescriptive theories of organizational communication and management to theories that provide an analytical framework. Chapters 5 and 6 continue with additional analytical frameworks for understanding communication in organizations—organizational culture and critical theory.

In Part Two, we present challenges and misunderstandings, which underscore our particular approach to the field of organizational communication. Throughout Part Two, we have attempted to frame the topics traditionally covered in organizational communication textbooks in terms of misunderstandings and to illustrate the relevant issues with excerpts from the interviews we conducted or from current news stories. Chapter 7 explores the concept of realistic recruitment. We use it as the beginning of Part Two to show that organizational communication is a process that begins even before an individual becomes an official member of the organization. Chapter 8 continues with the next step of the process, detailing the socialization of organizational members. Chapter 9, a newly titled and reconceived chapter, explores the role of the individual in the organization, attending particularly to the issues of diversity, emotions, and work–family balancing. Chapter 10 explores the relationship and communication between supervisors and subordinates. Chapters 11 and 12 examine communication in other important organizational relationships—among peers and within teams, respectively. Chapter 13, the final chapter, provides an overview of communication as it relates to leadership in organizational settings.

Available Instructor Resources
The following instructor resources can be accessed by visiting http://www.pearsonhighered.com/irc

Instructor Manual
Detailed instructor’s manual with chapter overview, learning objectives, discussion questions, activities and assignments.

Test Bank
Exhaustive test banks with MCQs, truth and false, fill-in-the-blanks, and essay type questions.

Acknowledgments
This book would not have been possible without the help of many people. We would like to thank the staff at Pearson for giving us the opportunity to pursue a fourth edition of this textbook in the way we envisioned it.

Dozens of students from University of Wisconsin—La Crosse served as interviewers for this edition. The following students have their work represented as new interview data in this fourth edition: Amy Olson, Anne Tolmie, Beth Rayome, Casey Kulinski, Courtney Joslin, Jake Kozelek, Jessica Dierkop, Maggie Whitish, Samantha Finley, Sarah Klopp, Kirstie Warren, Anne Lefevre, Madison Norris, and Morgan Dirks. Thanks, too, to Mark Collins for his contributions to this and past editions.

We were honored to have had the research assistance of Bailey Benedict for this edition. Bailey’s contributions to the text are innumerable, and we cannot thank her enough for her hard work and dedication to the project. Bailey tirelessly reviewed the new interview data, scrutinized the third edition and made suggestions for revision, and conducted literature searches for many of the new topics covered in the new edition. She also served as an excellent sounding board as we were debating areas for change and reorganization.

We hope you enjoy reading this book as much as we enjoyed writing it.

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