

- What are the various communication patterns and needs of individuals from different age groups?
- How can we use communication technology to design virtual workplaces for employees in a variety of locations?
- How do we make the tough decisions regarding the roles of institutions and government in supporting an aging America?
- What role does communication play in assuring a level playing field for individuals with disabilities?

From this brief consideration of several newsworthy facets of the twenty-first century, it is clear that we live in a complex world and that organizational communication can play a pivotal role in addressing these complexities. It is important, though, to consider the ways in which our thinking about organizational communication can best facilitate our ability to make a difference in today's world. One important theorist who can help us in this is a scholar named Karl Weick, who we will encounter later in this book. Weick has a lot to say about how we organize and make sense of organizing through ongoing interaction. At this point, though, it is helpful to consider one concept that Weick emphasizes: **requisite variety**. This concept suggests that successful organizations and groups need to be as "complicated" as the problems that confront them. For example, the organizational structure of a small catering service can probably be relatively simple. However, if that small catering service grows into a large restaurant or an even larger food service organization, the structure needed for decision making, payroll, customer service, training, and myriad other functions must become increasingly complex. The organization must be as complicated as the problem.

The same principle holds for our consideration of how we should see "organizational communication" as a means for approaching the challenges of today's world. We have talked about issues such as globalization, terrorism, climate change, and changing demographics as just a few of the complexities that must be dealt with through organizational communication. Thus, if we see these problems as complicated, we must also complicate our thinking about organizations and complicate our thinking about communication.

Complicating Our Thinking about Organizations

The first way of complicating our thinking about organizational communication is to complicate our thinking about organizations. In the first edition of this book (Miller, 1995), I defined organization as including five critical features—namely, the existence of a social collectivity, organizational and individual goals, coordinating activity, organizational structure, and the embedding of the organization within an environment of other organizations. These critical features still hold today, but in complicating our thinking about organizations, it is important to stretch our understanding of each of these concepts. For example, when we think about the idea of "structure," we need to consider more than basic hierarchical structure or even more complex team structures. We also need to consider structures based on collective and communal relationships, structures that eschew hierarchy in favor of flat organizational forms, and structures that cross boundaries of time and space.