

is seen as a “process that produces and reproduces shared meaning” (Craig, 1999, p. 125). We will consider the ways in which the notion of “constitution” has been applied in detail to organizational communication processes in Chapter 5. Craig suggests that the simple distinction between transmission and constitution is not particularly helpful, though, when considering broader theoretical approaches to communication. For one thing, he argues that it is not really a fair fight, as the transmission model is usually just presented as something easy to knock down. But Craig also believes that the transmission model can be useful to consider in some cases. For example, when the goal is to get evacuation information to residents in the path of a hurricane, the effective transmission of information is a lot more important than the creation of shared meaning. However, Craig doesn’t think we should stop at the simple choice between a transmission model and a constitutive model. Instead, he suggests we complicate our thinking.

Craig argues that we should recast the constitutive model of communication as a metamodel—an overarching way of thinking about communication. That is, if we see the constitutive model as a “model of models,” it is possible to constitute communication in a wide variety of ways. These different ways of constituting communication can provide different avenues for the development of theory and research. But more important for our purposes here, various ways of constituting communication can help us deal with the practical challenges that individuals face in organizations today. That is, there will be times when it is important to think about communication as a way of getting information from one person to another. There will be other times when it is important to think about communication as shared dialogue and a way to enhance understanding about self and others. There will be other times when communication is best seen as a means of persuasion and motivation. Thus, Craig’s metamodel of communication can help us meet the practical challenges of today’s organizational world.

Craig proposed seven **domains of communication theory**—seven different ways of thinking about how communication works in the world. These are presented in Table 1.1, and they range from the notion of communication as information processing (the cybernetic model) to communication as the experience of otherness and dialogue (the phenomenological model). Table 1.1 also considers how each way of thinking about communication might be put into play in the organizational context. It should be clear that these various approaches to communication allow us to answer—and, perhaps more important, to ask—very different questions about how organizations and people work in today’s complex society.

In summary, then, our world is becoming increasingly complex, and the intricate situations that arise with globalization, terrorism, climate change, and changing demographics require multifaceted approaches to understanding. Indeed, even without these issues, life in organizations is complex enough! Thus, it is critical to complicate our thinking and discussion about “organization” and “communication” in ways advocated by scholars such as Tretheway and Ashcraft (2004) and Craig (1999). In the final pages of this chapter, we will look ahead to the remainder of the book to consider how these ideas about organization and communication will be brought to bear on traditional and contemporary approaches to the study of organizational communication and on a wide range of organizational communication processes.