

relations approaches, the spotlight is on individual needs; in human resources approaches, it is on the role of employees as valued contributors to organizational functioning. In Chapters 4 through 6 of this textbook, we will consider more contemporary ways of viewing organizations that shift the focus in several ways. First, these contemporary approaches constitute ways to understand and explain organizational communication. In contrast to founding approaches, they are not prescriptive theories but are theories that can be used to enhance our understanding of any organization, be it guided by classical, human relations, or human resources practitioners. Second, these approaches are primarily used by scholars rather than practitioners, although, of course, there are important pragmatic implications that stem from all these approaches. Third, all of these approaches continue to exert substantial influence today in terms of how organizational communication is studied. An organizational communication scholar would find research stemming from all of these approaches in current academic journals.

Chapter 4 will consider two metaphors that guided the study of organizational communication during much of the latter part of the twentieth century and continue to exert influence today. The first of these, the systems approach, looks at organizations as complex interactions of systems components and processes. The second, the cultural approach, considers organizations as emergent entities of values, norms, stories, behaviors, and artifacts. In Chapter 5, we will look at a set of ideas that hold great currency in today's study of organizational communication—the notion that organizations are constituted through communication. Finally, in Chapter 6 we will turn to critical and feminist approaches that emphasize various aspects of organizational power and control and aspire to the emancipation of marginalized voices within the organizational context.

In the second half of this textbook, we will move our focus from approaches that inform our understanding of organizational communication to the specific processes to which these approaches have been applied. What do I mean by process? Simply, it is something that happens in an organization. Organizations are marked by constant activity. People learn about new jobs, make decisions, deal with conflict, cope with customers, program computers, form alliances, institute change, and cope with differences. All these communication processes have been the focus of organizational communication scholars, and the last half of this book will consider our knowledge about what happens in these processes, how it happens, and why it happens.

The first four chapters that consider organizational communication processes can be seen as “enduring” processes because they consider things that have probably been happening in organizations for as long as organizations have existed.

In Chapter 7, we will look at assimilation—or the processes through which individuals attach to—and detach from—organizations. Chapter 8 investigates how communication influences organizational decision making and knowledge management, and Chapter 9 presents theories and research on the role of communication in organizational conflict. Then, in Chapter 10, we look at change in organizations and the leadership processes that are often crucial in terms of both change and stability.

Finally, in the last four chapters of this textbook, we will consider some of the organizational communication processes that have emerged in the last twenty to