

COM 360: Organizational Communication
Fall 2015
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TEXTBOOK:

Miller, K. (2011). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes* (6th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

COURSE PURPOSE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES:

The purpose of this course is to introduce you to key historical and contemporary theories of organizational communication—including classical, human relations, human resources, systems, cultural, and critical theories. In this course, you will also examine relevant organizational communication processes studied in organizations (e.g., assimilation, change, conflict management, etc.), emphasizing how these processes are studied *differently* using different theories.

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Recognize, compare, and articulate predominant theories of organizational communication
- Describe and analyze relevant communication processes that have been studied (and are being studied) in organizations
- Articulate how relevant communication processes are studied differently based on diverse theoretical assumptions
- Analyze how differing social identities (e.g., based on sex, race, class, etc.) are “organized” differently in institutions
- Discuss your role in enacting theory and impacting organizational communication dynamics

COURSE REQUIREMENTS TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES:

- 1. Two examinations.** These exams will both test your retention and understanding of theory as well as encourage you to apply theoretical concepts; consequently, questions will be objective, short answer, essay and take-home essay. Questions will be taken from lectures, textbooks, homework, and in-class exercises and discussions. *The first test on theories (Chapters 1-6) is worth 20 percent of your course grade, and the second test on processes (Chapters 7-11, 13) is also worth 20 percent of your course grade.*
- 2. Org Comm Theory Application Paper.** This purpose of this assignment is to apply and integrate the information you have learned about organizational communication theories into a 10-12 page paper. First, you will articulate how you see your identity in the “world” of contemporary organizational communication theory: in other words, do you see yourself thinking in terms of systems, cultural or critical approaches? Then to practice *being* a theorist from each perspective, you will analyze an organization with which you are familiar...it might be the place you work, a service organization, your place of worship, a Greek organization, a sports team, etc. from the systems, cultural and critical perspectives on organizing.
 - **Introduction:** Provide a brief introduction (one to two paragraphs) that identifies and describes the organization under study (and your role in it) and previews the rest of the paper.
 - **Identification of theoretical perspective:** Based on your knowledge of contemporary perspectives (systems, cultural and critical), if you could choose, which makes the most sense to you as a beginning scholar in organizational communication and a member of this organization?

How do you see your identity in the “world” of organizational communication theory...do you see yourself relating most to the systems approach? to the cultural approach? to the critical approach? Why? Make a clear argument as to why you relate most to the _____ perspective.

[Then in the next sections, you will apply each perspective to the organization...]

- **Application of systems perspective to organization:** What would a systems theorist say about your organization? What key concepts or terms would be used to study your organization? (e.g., system, subsystems, and supersystem...input-throughput-output processes...Weick’s model of enactment, selection, and retention) What aspects of your organization stand out from this perspective? What assumptions would be made about the effectiveness of your organization? What suggestions might a systems theorist make about your organization?
- **Application of cultural perspective to organization:** What would a cultural theorist say about your organization? What key concepts or terms would be used to study your organization? (e.g., artifacts of culture such as rituals, rites, ceremonies, stories, symbols, metaphors, etc.... underlying values...basic assumptions...subcultures) What aspects of your organization stand out from this perspective? What assumptions would be made about the effectiveness of your organization? What suggestions might a cultural theorist make about your organization?
- **Application of critical perspective to organization:** What would a critical theorist say about your organization? Identify the dominant ideology in your organization (these beliefs may be similar to the Level 3 assumptions described in the cultural approach). How is this ideology hegemonic? That is, who is favored and who is left out within this ideology and why? Beyond this, consider any issues of oppression based in gender/race/class/age/status. Next, provide a specific example to illustrate the duality of structure at work—how employees participate in their own subordination (*perhaps* through concertive control). Finally, explain how employees might use the dialectic of control in their favor: what *specifically* could they do to shift the balance of power in your organization? What aspects of your organization stand out from this perspective? What assumptions would be made about the effectiveness of your organization? What suggestions might a critical theorist make about your organization?
- **Conclusion:** Finish the analysis with a brief conclusion. Review your main points, and close with a statement of how easy or difficult it was to analyze to your organization. What insights did your “lenses” provide that you may have otherwise overlooked? Make sure your final sentences indicate the paper is coming to a close.

This paper is worth 15 percent of your course grade.

3. Org Comm Processes Literature Review. The purpose of this assignment is to provide you with an opportunity to gain expertise in a specific aspect of organizational communication. For example, you could look at leadership, organizational climate, motivation, voice/empowerment, work-life policies, emotion in the workplace, etc. You will first choose an aspect of organizational communication (related to processes of organizing) that you would like to further examine. I would suggest thinking not only about the themes in your text, but also those suggested in the 5-volume Organizational Communication reference set as well as in *Communication Yearbook(s)* and recent tables of contents in *Management Communication Quarterly*, *JACR*, *Human Relations*, etc. You will then conduct library research to find **ten** scholarly articles/chapters on your topic to write a literature review that summarizes AND synthesizes the current research in a given area. You will also be making an argument about the limitations of the current literature and suggestions for overcoming the limitations, concluding with a research agenda that suggests some concrete ideas for what is needed next, offering potential research questions to be explored. This will be written in 6th edition APA style.

- **Introduction** (1-2 pages): In this introduction you should (a) catch the reader’s attention, (b) orient reader to the general topic, issue, or area of concern, (c) state your thesis, establishing your reason for reviewing the literature and (d) preview the organization of the review.

- **Body/Review of Literature** (6-10 pages): The body should be divided into sections (and maybe even subsections) that reflect the categories or themes you have found in the literature; it can be organized chronologically, thematically, or methodologically. You should summarize individual studies or articles with as much/little detail as each merits according to its comparative importance in the literature, remembering that space (length) denotes significance. Finally, make sure to provide the reader with strong umbrella sentences at beginnings of paragraphs, signposts throughout, and brief “so what” summary sentences at intermediate points in the review to aid in understanding comparisons and analyses.
- **Agenda for Future Research and Conclusion** (2-4 pages): This section should first restate your thesis and summarize the major contributions of significant studies and articles to the body of knowledge under review, maintaining the focus established in the introduction. You will then evaluate the current “state of the art” for the body of knowledge reviewed, pointing out major methodological flaws or gaps in research, inconsistencies in theory and findings, and areas or issues pertinent to future study. Finally, include your ideas for future topics of research, updating research, new methods, etc... Discuss what you have drawn from reviewing literature so far. Where might the discussion proceed?

This paper is worth 25 percent of your course grade.

4. In-class activities and homework. In order to assure that everyone is prepared and ready to participate, there WILL be some form of activity(s) for each and every class session. These activities will typically be in the form of worksheets on the learning management system, but also may be in the form of short reading quizzes and in-class activities. Activities will vary in how they are graded based on the difficulty of the assignment and whether it was completed in or out of class. *Activities are graded on an ongoing basis and scaled to 20 percent of your course grade.*

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE:

| WEEK | TOPIC | TO DO |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | Introduction to Course | |
| | The Challenges of Org Comm | Read: Preface and Chapter 1 DUE: Activity |
| 2 | Organizations as...Machines (Classical) | Read: Chapter 2 DUE: Activity |
| | Organizations as...Families (Human Relations) | Read: Chapter 3, pp. 37-45 DUE: Activity |
| 3 | Organizations as...Grouped Assets (Human Resources) | Read: Chapter 3, pp. 45-56 DUE: Activity |
| | Comparing “Classical” Theories to move to “Contemporary” Theories | |
| 4 | Orgs as...Systems (General concepts) | Read: Chapter 4, pp. 59-67 DUE: Activity |
| | Orgs as...Systems (Specific theories) | Read: Chapter 4, pp. 68-78 DUE: BlueLine Activity |
| 5 | Orgs as...Cultures (General concepts) | Read: Chapter 5, pp. 81-89 DUE: BlueLine Activity |
| | Orgs as...Cultures (Specific theories) | Read: Chapter 5, pp. 89-96 DUE: BlueLine Activity |

| WEEK | TOPIC | TO DO |
|-------------|---|--|
| 6 | Orgs as...Sites of Domination (General concepts) | Read: Chapter 6, pp. 100-110 DUE: Activity |
| | Orgs as...Sites of Domination (Specific theories) | Read: Chapter 6, pp. 110-118 DUE: Activity |
| 7 | Critical Theory in Action: <i>The Yes Men Fix the World</i> movie—Day 1 | |
| | <i>The Yes Men Fix the World</i> movie—Day 2 (discuss) | |
| 8 | EXAM 1 (Chapters 1-6) | DUE: <i>The Yes Men Fix the World</i> take-home |
| | Org Comm Theory Paper Discussion and Brainstorming Org Comm Lit Review Preview | |
| 9 | Socialization Processes | Read: Chapter 7 DUE: Activity |
| | Decision-Making Processes | Read: Chapter 8 DUE: Activity DUE: Org Comm Theory Paper |
| 10 | Conflict Management Processes | Read: Chapter 9 DUE: Activity |
| | Organizational Change Processes | Read: Chapter 10, pp. 179-187 DUE: Activity |
| 11 | Leadership Processes | Read: Chapter 10, pp. 188-195 DUE: Activity |
| | Processes of Emotion in the Workplace | Read: Chapter 11 DUE: Activity |
| 12 | Technological Processes | Read: Chapter 13 DUE: Activity |
| | Organizational Processes in Action: <i>The Social Network</i> —Day 1 | |
| 13 | <i>The Social Network</i> —Day 2 (discuss) | |
| | EXAM 2 (Chapters 7-11, 13) | DUE: <i>The Social Network</i> take-home |
| 14 | Organizational Diversity Processes | Read: Chapter 12 DUE: Activity |
| | Organizational/Institutional Oppression—Sex and Sexuality | Outside readings DUE: Activity |
| 15 | Organizational/Institutional Oppression—Race | Outside readings DUE: Activity |
| | Organizational/Institutional Oppression—Class | Outside readings DUE: Activity |
| 16 | The Changing Landscape of Organizations Wrap-Up and Lit Review Presentations | Read: Chapter 14 DUE: Org Comm Lit Review |