
APPENDIX A

ABSTRACTS OF THEORIES

What follows are brief summaries of the 33 theories featured in the book. There's a potential danger, of course, in trying to capture the gist of a theory in a few cryptic lines, but I didn't craft the abstracts to convey new concepts. Instead, these capsule statements are designed to jog your memory of ideas already considered. With the exception of Bormann's symbolic convergence theory (see Chapter 3), the abstracts are arranged in the same order as the theories appear in the text. At the end of each summary, I've made an attempt to label the communication theory tradition or traditions that undergird each theorist's thought. I hope you'll find both the summaries and their intellectual roots helpful.

Interpersonal Communication

Mead's symbolic interactionism: Humans act toward people, things, and events on the basis of the meanings they assign to them. Once people define a situation as real, it has very real consequences. Without language there would be no thought, no sense of self, and no socializing presence of society within the individual. (Socio-cultural tradition)

Pearce and Cronen's coordinated management of meaning: Persons-in-conversation co-construct their own social realities and are simultaneously shaped by the worlds they create. They can achieve coherence through common interpretation of their stories told. They can achieve coordination by meshing their stories lived. Dialogic communication, which is learnable, teachable, and contagious, improves the quality of life for everyone. (Socio-cultural and phenomenological traditions)

Burgoon's expectancy violations theory: Violating another person's interpersonal expectations can be a superior strategy to conformity. When the meaning of a violation is ambiguous, communicators with a high reward valence can enhance their attractiveness, credibility, and persuasiveness by doing the unexpected. When the violation valence or reward valence is negative, they should act in a socially appropriate way. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Buller and Burgoon's interpersonal deception theory: Human beings are poor lie detectors in interactive situations. Although strategic deception often results in cognitive overload, which leaks out through a deceiver's communication, respondents usually miss these telltale signs due to a strong truth bias. When respondents appear doubtful, deceivers can adjust their presentation to allay suspicion. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Altman and Taylor's social penetration theory: Interpersonal closeness proceeds in a gradual and orderly fashion from superficial to intimate levels of exchange as a function of anticipated present and future outcomes. Lasting intimacy requires continual and mutual vulnerability through breadth and depth of self-disclosure. (Socio-psychological tradition)



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Berger's uncertainty reduction theory: When people meet, their primary concern is to reduce uncertainty about each other and their relationship. As verbal output, nonverbal warmth, self-disclosure, similarity, and shared communication networks increase, uncertainty decreases—and vice versa. Information seeking and reciprocity are positively correlated with uncertainty. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Walther's social information processing theory: Based solely on the linguistic content of computer-mediated communication (CMC), parties who meet online can develop relationships just as close as those formed face-to-face—though it takes longer. Because online senders select, receivers magnify, channels promote, and feedback enhances favorable impressions, CMC may create hyperpersonal relationships. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Baxter and Montgomery's relational dialectics: Social life is a dynamic knot of contradictions, a ceaseless interplay between contradictory or opposing tendencies such as integration-separation, stability-change, and expression-nonexpression. Quality relationships are constituted through dialogue, which is an aesthetic accomplishment that produces fleeting moments of unity through a profound respect for the disparate voices. (Phenomenological tradition)

Watzlawick's interactional view: Relationships within a family system are interconnected and highly resistant to change. Communication among members has a content component, and a relationship component that centers on issues of control. The system can be transformed only when members receive outside help to reframe their metacommunication. (Cybernetic tradition)

Delia's constructivism: Individuals who are more cognitively complex in their perceptions of others have the mental capacity to construct sophisticated message plans that pursue multiple goals. They then have the ability to deliver person-centered messages that achieve the outcomes they desire. (Socio-psychological and rhetorical traditions)

Sherif's social judgment theory: The larger the discrepancy between a speaker's position and a listener's point of view, the greater the change in attitude—as long as the message is within the hearer's latitude of acceptance. High ego-involvement usually indicates a wide latitude of rejection. Messages that fall there may have a boomerang effect. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Petty and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model: Message elaboration is the central route of persuasion that produces major positive attitude change. It occurs when unbiased listeners are motivated and able to scrutinize arguments that they consider strong. Message irrelevant factors hold sway on the peripheral path, a more common route that produces fragile shifts in attitude. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory: Cognitive dissonance is an aversive drive that causes people to (1) avoid opposing viewpoints, (2) seek reassurance after making a tough decision, and (3) change private beliefs to match public behavior when there was minimal justification for the action. Self-consistency, a sense of personal responsibility, or self-affirmation can explain dissonance reduction. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Group and Public Communication

Hirokawa and Gouran's functional perspective: Groups make high-quality decisions when members fulfill four requisite functions: (1) problem analysis, (2) goal setting, (3) identification of alternatives, and (4) evaluation of positive and negative consequences. Most group communication disrupts progress toward accomplishing these functional tasks, but counteractive communication can bring people back to rational inquiry. (Socio-psychological and cybernetic traditions)

Poole's adaptive structuration theory: Structuration is the production and reproduction of social systems by people's use of rules and resources in interaction. Communication matters when groups make decisions. The duality of structures means that the rules and resources members use will affect decisions, and in turn those structures will also be affected by those decisions. (Socio-cultural and cybernetic traditions)

Bormann's symbolic convergence theory: Sharing common fantasies transforms a collection of individuals into a cohesive group. Symbolic convergence occurs when group members spontaneously create fantasy chains that display an energized, unified response to common themes. A fantasy theme analysis across groups can reveal a rhetorical vision that contains motives to enact the joint fantasy. (Rhetorical and socio-psychological traditions)

Weick's information systems approach to organizations: Organizing is the process of making sense out of equivocal information through enactment, selection, and retention of information. Organizations survive in hostile environments when

they succeed in reducing equivocality through retrospective sensemaking. When faced with an ambiguous situation, managers should rely on double interacts rather than rules. Act first, plan later. (Cybernetic tradition)

Geertz and Pacanowsky's cultural approach to organizations: Humans are animals suspended in webs of significance that they themselves have spun. An organization doesn't have a culture, it is a culture—a unique system of shared meanings. A nonintrusive ethnographic approach interprets stories, rites, and other symbolism to make sense of corporate culture. (Socio-cultural tradition)

Deetz' critical theory of communication approach to organizations: The naïve notion that communication is merely the transmission of information perpetuates managerialism, discursive closure, and the corporate colonization of everyday life. Language is the principal medium through which social reality is produced and reproduced. Managers can further a company's health and democratic values by coordinating stakeholder participation in corporate decisions. (Critical and phenomenological traditions)

Aristotle's rhetoric: Rhetoric is the art of discovering all available means of persuasion. A speaker supports the probability of a message by logical, ethical, and emotional proofs. Accurate audience analysis results in effective invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and, presumably, memory. (Rhetorical tradition)

Burke's dramatism: Life is drama. The dramatisic pentad of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose is the critic's tool to discover a speaker's motives. The ultimate motive of rhetoric is the purging of guilt. Without audience identification with the speaker, there is no persuasion. (Rhetorical and semiotic traditions)

Fisher's narrative paradigm: People are storytelling animals; almost all forms of human communication are fundamentally narrative. Listeners judge a story by whether it hangs together and rings true with the values of an ideal audience. Thus, narrative rationality is a matter of coherence and fidelity. (Rhetorical tradition)

Mass Communication

Barthes' semiotics: The significant visual sign systems of a culture affirm the status quo by suggesting that the world as it is today is natural, inevitable, and eternal. Mythmakers do this by co-opting neutral denotative signs to become signifiers without historical grounding in second-order connotative semiotic systems. (Semiotic tradition)

Hall's cultural studies: The mass media function to maintain the ideology of those who already have power. Corporately controlled media provide the dominant discourse of the day that frames interpretation of events. Critics should seek not only to interpret culture, but to change it. Media audiences do have the capacity to resist hegemonic influence. (Critical tradition)

Gerbner's cultivation theory: Television has become society's storyteller. Heavy television viewers see a vast quantity of dramatic violence, which cultivates an exaggerated belief in a mean and scary world. Mainstreaming and resonance are two of the processes that create a homogeneous and fearful populace. (Socio-cultural and socio-psychological traditions)

McCombs and Shaw's agenda-setting theory: The media tell us (1) what to think about, and (2) how to think about it. The first process (agenda setting) transfers the salience of items on their news agenda to our agenda. The second process (framing) transfers the salience of selected attributes to prominence among the pictures in our heads. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Noelle-Neumann's spiral of silence: People live in perpetual fear of isolating themselves and carefully monitor public opinion to see which views are acceptable. When their opinions appear out of favor, they keep silent. Television's constant repetition of a single point of view biases perception of public opinion and accelerates the spiral of silence. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Cultural Context

Gudykunst's anxiety/uncertainty management theory: Intergroup encounters are characterized by high levels of uncertainty and anxiety, especially when cultural variability is high. Effective communication is made possible by our ability to mindfully manage our anxiety and reduce our uncertainty about ourselves and the people with whom we are communicating. (Socio-psychological tradition)

Ting-Toomey's face-negotiation theory: People from collectivistic cultures with an interdependent self-image are concerned with giving other-face or mutual-face, so they adopt a conflict style of avoiding or integrating. People from individualistic cultures with an independent self-image are concerned with protecting self-face, so they adopt a conflict style of dominating. (Socio-cultural and socio-psychological traditions)

Philipsen's speech codes theory: Through ethnography of communication we know all cultures have multiple speech codes that involve a distinctive psychology, sociology, and rhetoric. The meaning of a speech code is determined by speakers and listeners, and is woven into speech itself. Artful use of the code can explain, predict, and control talk about talk. (Socio-cultural tradition)

Tannen's genderlect styles: Male-female conversation is cross-cultural communication. Masculine and feminine styles of discourse are best viewed as two distinct cultural dialects rather than as inferior or superior ways of speaking. Men's report talk focuses on status and independence; women's rapport talk seeks human connection. (Semiotic and socio-cultural traditions)

Harding and Wood's standpoint theory: Different locations within the social hierarchy affect what is seen. The standpoints of marginalized people provide less false views of the world than do the privileged perspectives of the powerful. Strong objectivity requires that scientific research start from the lives of women, the poor, gays and lesbians, and racial minorities. (Critical tradition)

Kramarae's muted group theory: Man-made language aids in defining, depreciating, and excluding women. Women are less articulate in public because the words and the norms for their use have been devised by men. As women cease to be muted, men will no longer maintain their position of dominance in society. (Critical tradition)