



# A critical review of how communication scholarship is represented in textbooks: the case of organizational communication and CCO theory

Matthew A. Koschmann and Tajshen G. Campbell

Department of Communication, University of Colorado Boulder, Boulder, CO, USA

## ABSTRACT

A significant issue for any academic field is how key theories are represented in textbooks. Textbooks are important institutional artifacts that organize entire subject areas, and thus key sites for assessing how scholarly ideas are developed and understood. However, the field of communication studies has done little to investigate how the key theories of our discipline are represented in our textbooks. This critical essay seeks to remedy this shortcoming with an exemplar investigation from the field of organizational communication and CCO Theory. We summarize the current state of CCO thinking and explore how this theory is portrayed in organizational communication textbooks, while also discussing implications of textbook representations for the broader field of communication studies.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 11 February 2019

Revised 25 February 2019

## KEYWORDS

CCO; organizational communication; textbooks; pedagogy; constitutive view of communication

## Introduction

One of the most important – and sometimes controversial – developments for an academic field is the representation and dissemination of key scholarly ideas into textbooks. As Palmer, Simmons, and Hall (2013) demonstrate in their extensive review, textbooks are ‘embedded institutional artifacts that configure entire academic subject fields’ (p. 485). The way scholarly ideas are articulated and explained in textbooks establishes a trajectory for how those ideas are likely to be taken up by students and future practitioners, and thus sets the stage for an idea’s impact outside the academy. Textbook representations also provide a unique look at how certain ideas are understood and applied, beyond what might be evident in the academic literature. Plus, textbooks indirectly shape subsequent scholarship and theory development because many of the people teaching from these texts are junior scholars whose research is certainly influenced by the understanding of a field that they develop through their teaching. In short, textbooks play a key role in the institutionalization and legitimization of academic work and are key indicators of intellectual coherence. Therefore, it is important for academic communities to investigate how key theories in their field are being taken up in the textbooks published by scholars in the field – especially when those theories are in a relatively early stage of development and are beginning to make their way into textbooks.

Despite the significance of this endeavor, we simply have not done much of this work in the field of communication studies. We have little sense of how theories and ideas that drive our scholarship show up in textbooks and make their way into undergraduate and graduate classes. To be sure, we have plenty of personal experiences and anecdotal evidence, as individual educators are quite aware of what is happening in their own classes and the specific textbooks they use. However, we lack the

kind of systematic investigation and assessment that would speak to our field more broadly and inform a larger community of scholars about the current state of theory dissemination in textbooks, as scholars from other fields have done. Richardson (2004) provides a notable example for the field of Economics and highlights work from other disciplines (Morawski, 1992 in Psychology; Love, 1991 in Geology, Myers, 1992 in Biology; and Lynch & Bogen, 1997 in Sociology, just to name a few). Yet in the field of communication studies, we have not been as attentive to this sort of work.<sup>1</sup>

This absence is significant because it means we do not have a good sense of the relationship between theory development and pedagogical practice, which is vital for any field's maturity and sustainability. Nor do we have sufficient understanding of what is emerging as the 'received wisdom' of a theory for textbook audiences, regardless of what scholars may articulate in the academic literature. Thus, we remain relatively ignorant about key aspects of our field that could prove to be quite important for producing better educational materials, as well as improving subsequent theory development. We seek to remedy these shortcomings in the following critical review and case study.

But how to proceed? One approach that we pursue here is to identify an ideal test case, a key theory that satisfies two conditions. First, a theory that has been around long enough to make a notable scholarly impact in one of our discipline's main divisions and is starting to show up in textbooks for that division. Second, a theory that is also in a vibrant time of conceptual development, 'wet cement' that is still being shaped by current scholarship. This is a fine line to walk. We want to avoid investigating textbook representations of theories that may be too entrenched in the discipline, thus preventing any meaningful intervention. Yet we also want to avoid theories that are in a stage of infancy and development where this sort of assessment would be premature, or niche theories for smaller divisions where our assessment would lack wider appeal and relevance for the broader discipline of communication, despite its value for a smaller community.

With all this in mind, *CCO Theory* (Communication as Constitutive of Organization) in the organizational communication division offers a good test case for exploring textbook representations of communication scholarship. CCO is a relevant and timely exemplar for this sort of investigation because this theory is growing in scholarly significance and already has a notable presence in several organizational communication textbooks. Plus, the subfield of organizational communication is one of the bigger and more influential divisions across our communication associations, with interdisciplinary connections to management and organizational studies, and multiple textbooks for the thousands of students taking classes on the specific topic of organizational communication. Consequently, this is a good place to get started.

The specific content of our case study will be most immediately useful for scholars in the organizational communication division, but it should also serve as a helpful prototype for how this work might proceed for other theories and divisions within our field. That is, our analysis provides a window into how organizational communication scholars are figuring out how best to represent key ideas from their academic literature in their textbooks. Yet we engage in this organizational communication-specific exercise in front of the broader field of communication (by way of this publication) to inform and inspire subsequent work in other fields of the communication discipline. In what follows, we present an investigation of CCO representations in organizational communication textbooks, including a critical assessment of these representations and a discussion about the broader implications of theory dissemination in textbooks. But first, we preface our case study with a brief overview of CCO Theory and its significance for the field of organizational communication.

## The institutionalization of CCO theory in the field of organizational communication

Current organizational communication scholarship is heavily influenced by a relatively new idea or paradigm, but one that is also starting to show up in organizational communication textbooks and shaping undergraduate and graduate education. That idea is the *communicative constitution of organization*, or CCO for short, and it is fast approaching institutional status in the field of organizational communication (Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017). The basic idea is that organizations are

constituted in and through human interaction and communicative practice; organizations are not simply neutral, *a priori* containers where communication flows or information is transmitted. Conceptually, this is an ontological move away from reifying organizations as existing completely apart from communication towards a social constructionist position where organizations exist in and through communication (although the exact nature and implications of this ontological claim is still an open question in the CCO literature).

CCO's institutional standing is evident in several ways: CCO has a prominent place in the recent *SAGE Handbook of Organizational Communication* (stand-alone chapter and numerous additional references); CCO is the subject of special issues of *Management Communication Quarterly* (2010) and *Organizations Studies* (2011); it has a lengthy entry in the recent *Wiley International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication* (2017); CCO now has the distinguished position of a 'standing working group' at the annual conference for the influential European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS); and CCO is featured in top journals in the broader fields of management and organizational studies (e.g. Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Kuhn, 2008; Schultz, Castelló, & Morsing, 2013). It is fair to say that CCO has arrived.

Yet CCO is not without critique (e.g. Reed, 2010) and its uptake has been questioned (e.g. Novak, 2016). Thus, CCO's future is very much up for grabs and its place in the field is still undetermined. Despite this uncertainty, versions of CCO thinking have already made their way into several organizational communication textbooks, and scholars have begun to articulate a pedagogy of CCO (see Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015). Hence, this is an important juncture for CCO scholarship and the field of organizational communication: institutionalization represents both a time of vibrant scholarly activity, but also a narrowing of conceptual scope and a tightening of intellectual boundaries. Since CCO is one of the main conceptual trends in the field of organizational communication, its legacy and relevance are important to the discipline as a whole, especially in terms of how CCO is being taken up in organizational communication textbooks.

Therefore, this is a key moment to review the institutionalized version of CCO that has emerged over the last twenty years and assess its trajectory within organizational communication and beyond. That is the purpose of our investigation, both to enhance the progress of CCO scholarship and to inform the development of pedagogical materials. Boivin et al.'s. (2017) important contribution explains where CCO came from and how it got here. We build upon their work by reviewing where CCO is going and how it is being taken up in key outlets for scholarly dissemination and translation: textbooks. Similar work has recently assessed CCO's uptake in certain scholarly outlets (see Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Karreman, 2018), and thus our study helps develop a fuller understanding of how these ideas are being taken up beyond the immediate community of CCO scholars.

### CCO theory in textbooks – A case study

By our count, there are fourteen<sup>2</sup> distinct English translation organizational communication textbooks from well-known authors and major publishers that are relevant for this review, most with multiple editions and recent publication dates, and all readily available through online retailers and bookstores. Plus, some version of a class in organizational communication is standard in the curriculum of communication departments in almost every university in the United States and many throughout the world. And given the number of communication majors and students this represents, it is reasonable to conclude that these textbooks could have a notable impact on undergraduate and graduate communication education – and that whatever they teach about CCO will shape how CCO is understood beyond the academy. In the following review, we take a more critical approach than Boivin et al. (2017) and other CCO summaries by problematizing the institutionalized version or 'received wisdom' of CCO, rather than taking it as given. As such, we seek to advance the scholarly conversation around CCO's influence and identity, reviewing what exactly is showing up in textbooks and questioning whether this is beneficial for the future of CCO and the field of organizational communication.

To accomplish this, we first review the institutionalized version of CCO, the ‘received wisdom’ that is accepted and perpetuated within the extant literature. Second, we review all relevant textbooks to assess how this received wisdom is being taken up (or not) beyond the academic literature. Finally, we problematize some aspects of the received wisdom and question how CCO is becoming institutionalized in the field of organizational communication through textbook representations. In doing so, our case study makes several important contributions. First, we enhance the ongoing conversations around CCO’s development by providing a review of exactly what has been appropriated and is being taught to students and future practitioners. Second, we show the main trends in CCO’s uptake and how these patterns can influence CCO’s progress as a scholarly project. Third, in rethinking the way that CCO ideas are currently taken up, we offer alternative ways of understanding CCO scholarship, and for orienting future research beyond current approaches. Finally, we provide guidance for how CCO could be presented more constructively in textbooks and other teaching materials, providing CCO with more traction outside the academy, which in turn provides credibility for further scholarly pursuits. All of this serves the broader field of communication studies by offering a unique assessment for one of the key theories in the discipline and a tangible example of how this sort of work can be carried out, helping to chart a course for subsequent scholarly and practical development, and informing current pedagogy and future educational publications.

### *The received wisdom*

CCO is the current manifestation of a larger scholarly project in the field of organizational communication to advance a constitutive approach to communication and organizational realities. Emerging from the interpretive (Bormann, 1983; Putnam, 1983; Weick, 1983) and linguistic (Deetz, 2003) turns, CCO developed as an alternative approach to functionalist assumptions, and extends organizational communication’s ongoing interest in the social construction of reality (e.g. Berger Peter & Luckmann, 1966; Giddens, 1984; Weick, 1979). From this constitutive approach, communication ‘is not a secondary phenomenon that can be explained by antecedent psychological, sociological, cultural, or economic factors; rather, communication itself is the primary, constitutive social process that explains all these other factors’ (Craig, 1999, p. 126). In some areas of organizational communication research this constitutive approach has been more implicit or embedded (e.g. culture, power, and networks); whereas other scholars have foregrounded constitutive thinking much more explicitly, such as McPhee’s work on structuration and Taylor’s work on coorientation (see Ashcraft et al., 2009).

We suggest that five core tenets make up the ‘received wisdom’ of institutionalized CCO: (1) CCO’s formal initiation around the year 2000, (2) CCO’s implicit and explicit manifestations, (3) CCO’s three schools of thought, (4) CCO as contra to the transmission model of communication and the container metaphor of organizations, and (5) CCO as primarily an ontological claim. These ideas are not debated within the CCO literature, but rather have matured to a state of general acceptance in the field of organizational communication.<sup>3</sup> Our goal here is not to merely summarize CCO thinking – that has already been done elsewhere much more extensively (see Brummans, Cooren, Robichaud, & Taylor, 2014; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017). Instead, we want to sketch out the basic tenets that make up the institutionalized version of CCO – what we are calling the ‘received wisdom’ – in order to investigate how these ideas are represented in textbooks.

### *Initiated around 2000*

A first commonly accepted tenet of CCO thinking is its formal initiation around the year 2000. CCO officially (though arguably) came on the scene in 2000 via a special issue of the *Electronic Journal of Communication* featuring articles by both Taylor and McPhee. Of course, there is no zero-point for theories, and CCO is no exception – we can only identify the year 2000 because of the important work that preceded this somewhat arbitrary date. Technically, the idea of a communicative constitution of organization can be traced back to a book published in French by Taylor in 1988: *Une*

*organisation n'est qu'un tissu de communications: Essais théoriques*, which translated in English is 'An organization is nothing but a web of communications: Theoretical Essays.' Taylor had maintained that organizations are inherently communicative for several years prior to 1988, and McPhee's initial work (McPhee & Zaug, 2000) was a response to ideas developed by Taylor and his colleagues throughout the 1990s, arguing that Structuration Theory was a better foundation for exploring communicative constitution.

Nevertheless, the publication of Taylor's and McPhee and Zaug's articles in the 2000 special issue of the *Electronic Journal of Communication* brought the idea of the communicative constitution of organizations to the forefront and exposed the broader discipline of communication to this developing idea in the subfield of organizational communication.<sup>4</sup> What those scholars presented in their individual works would become known as Montréal School and the Four Flows Model, respectively. Thus, the year 2000 serves as a starting point for 'CCO proper' scholarship, providing a tangible means to gauge CCO's progress both theoretically and empirically. The year 2000 is also an important marker because it is the year that Taylor & Van Every's seminal book *The Emergent Organization* was published, which was a culmination of Taylor's work to date on the communicative constitution of organizations (even though the moniker CCO was not used explicitly in this text). To be fair, the seeds of CCO proper were sewn in the late 1980s with ongoing cultivation throughout the 1990s. But CCO as we know it today came of age and was named as such in and around the year 2000, and this serves as a reasonable starting point for assessing CCO's impact and influence.

Since 2000 there have been several key publications that marked CCO's continued evolution and contribution, such as Putnam and Nicotera's (2009) edited volume, which put Taylor and McPhee's work into conversation with one another and firmly established the CCO moniker; Kuhn's (2008) article on a communicative theory of the firm, which introduced CCO thinking to a broader organizational studies audience; Ashcraft et al.'s (2009) article, which introduced CCO to scholars in the Academy of Management; and a special issue of *Organization Studies* (2011) on the topic of CCO (edited by Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark) featuring four empirical studies from a broad disciplinary mix of contributors; to name just a few of the more influential contributions since 2000.

### *Implicit & explicit manifestations*

A second aspect of institutionalized CCO is the recognition of implicit/embedded and explicit manifestations of CCO thinking. Despite the appearance of 'CCO proper' around the year 2000, the concepts and assumptions that lead to CCO began long before, with foundational pieces published throughout the 1980s and 90s (e.g. Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983; Taylor, Cooren, Giroux, & Robichaud, 1996). The far-reaching nature of CCO's history, and its role as an extension of social constructionism and interpretivism, has led to a significant collection of work that is implicitly connected to the understanding of communication as constitutive. Ashcraft et al. (2009) identify three strains of implicit CCO thinking – culture, power, and networks – that are in contrast to the two explicit threads, structuration (a.k.a. The Four Flows Model) and the text/conversation dialectics of coorientation (a.k.a. the Montréal School). The point here is that while 'CCO proper' is relatively new in the field of organizational communication, the underlying ideas have been around much longer. Plus, organizational communication scholars continue to do 'CCO-like' work that contributes to a broader constitutive project, even if not immediately recognized as CCO scholarship per se (e.g. Fairhurst, Green, & Courtright, 1995; Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016).

### *Three schools of thought*

One of the more recent but established aspects of CCO's received wisdom is the 'three schools' categorization of CCO thinking (see Schoeneborn et al., 2014). In just under twenty years, CCO has become a diverse metatheoretical perspective that incorporates three distinct attempts to understand the very nature of organizing, all elevated to the status of 'schools of thought.' First, The Montréal School (Cooren, Taylor, & Van Every, 2006; Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2011) centers on coorientation and the dialectics of texts and conversations that scale up to distinct entities with

the capacity for collective agency and authority. Second, the Four Flows School (McPhee & Zaugg, 2000, 2009) is a structuration-based approach to CCO that identifies four streams or *durée* (à la Giddens) of communication necessary for organizations to exist (membership negotiation, activity coordination, institutional positioning, and self-structuring). Finally is the Social Systems School (Luhmann, 2003; Seidl & Becker, 2005), based on the scholarship of Nikolas Luhmann and his work on autopoiesis and decisional communication. Though united in their central orientation to the communicative constitution of organizations, these schools take markedly different approaches to conceptualizing organizing and its relationship to communication, as well as key distinctions regarding agency, social construction, materiality, and relationality (see Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren et al., 2011; Schoeneborn & Vásquez, 2017 for more detailed explanations of these three schools and their differences).

### *Contra to the transmission model and container metaphor*

A fourth tenet of institutionalized CCO is its contrast to a transmission model of communication and the container metaphor of organizations. CCO is fundamentally opposed to a transmission (only) model of communication and the idea that communication is 'a flow of messages across space from sources to receivers for purposes of influence and control' (Craig, 2013, p. 10). Ashcraft et al. (2009) describe CCO's non-transmission based definition of communication as the 'ongoing, dynamic, interactive process of manipulating symbols toward the creation, maintenance, destruction, and/or transformation of meanings, which are axial – not peripheral – to ongoing organizational existence and organizing phenomena' (p. 22). Furthermore, a container metaphor is the logical extension of the transmission model for conceptualizing organizations (Putnam, Philipps, & Chapman, 1996). Here the idea is that organizations are containers that 'hold' the communication that flows 'within' them, implying a strict separation between 'organization' and 'communication.' This orientation presents both challenges and opportunities for ongoing scholarship that disputes functionalist assumptions of organizing. Though a transmission model and container metaphor are conventionally associated with business communication (the work of Artiz & Walker, 2011 is a notable exception), and are most often referenced or assumed in traditional management and organizational studies, CCO challenges these assumptions and provides an alternative means for understanding the very existence of organization.

### *Ontological claim*

A final aspect of CCO's received wisdom is that CCO is primarily a claim about organizational ontology, what organizations fundamentally *are*, the nature of their being. As an ontological claim, CCO positions communication as the central means of organizing – not as byproduct of existing structures or as a component of the container, but as the manner in which organizational members continually produce and reproduce the organization through their interactions (McPhee & Zaugg, 2000; Taylor, 2011; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Ultimately, CCO recognizes communication as the means through which social realities – and thus organizations – are created. This orientation is clearly demonstrated in Blaschke and Schoeneborn's (2017) recent edited volume, *Organizations as Communication: Perspectives in Dialogue*. In this work, multiple scholars, associated with the *Organization as Communication* (OaC) blog and collaborative work connected with the *European Group for Organizational Studies* (EGOS) conference, contribute a European perspective to CCO's growing literature. Consequently, we argue that *organizations as communication* is the 'big idea' of CCO, the most concise, distilled articulation of CCO thinking.

In summary, the received wisdom of CCO portrays a version of communication as constitutive of organizing accepted as normal science (à la Kuhn, 1970) in the field of organizational communication. Not that everyone in the field of organizational communication identifies with or even agrees with the CCO project, but for those that do, these five tenets are generally unquestioned and taken as points of departure for subsequent CCO scholarship. However, in addition to CCO's scholarly institutionalization in the field of organizational communication, CCO scholars



also seek to make a difference beyond the scholarly literature (see Koschmann, 2010), influencing people who pursue careers outside academia. This raises important questions regarding how CCO is being taken up outside the academic literature in textbooks, whether the received wisdom of CCO is actually being passed on to students and future practitioners, and if this received wisdom is what we should be passing along in the first place. However we might anticipate CCO will be utilized and remembered by future generations of scholars, students, and practitioners, these outlets play an important role in whether or not the legacy and legitimacy of CCO will be sustained (Furusten, 1999). With this in mind, we turn to an analysis of how CCO is being represented in textbooks.

## A critical review of CCO theory in textbooks

In this section, we summarize what content textbooks contain, and offer a constructive critique of this material. Our goal is to provide a thorough understanding and evaluation of how the ideas of CCO thinking are represented in textbooks. This analysis serves two main purposes. First, it gives scholars an honest assessment of how CCO thinking is understood and conveyed to student audiences, which can shape how scholars develop their ideas in the future and inform their efforts to convey the relevance of CCO scholarship to broader audiences. Second, our review can help current and future textbook authors understand how their contributions relate to the work of others, and inform their ongoing attempts to articulate CCO ideas in their textbooks, as well as inspire new materials and methods for teaching CCO (e.g. Boivin et al.'s, 2017 call for CCO textbooks).

## Research methodology

We followed the methods of a general thematic analysis: identifying relevant sources, systematically reviewing and coding the pertinent material from each source, then analyzing this material to identify higher-order themes that emerged from our initial codes (Boyatzis, 1998; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2011). Our review included all current English-language<sup>5</sup> organizational communication textbooks, as well as more general communication textbooks that have sections or chapters on organizational communication – all of which might be expected to include content about CCO. We did not include other textbooks written by organizational communication scholars on more targeted subjects (e.g. 'Communication and Organizational Culture' by Keyton), nor any of the popular organizational communication case study books (e.g. 'Case Studies in Organizational Culture' edited by May). We also did not include older textbooks that pre-dated the year 2000 or are no longer in circulation (e.g. 'Organization-Communication: Emerging Perspectives' edited by Thayer & Barnett). We did include one recent non-textbook in our review (Castor, 2018) because its express purpose is to 'introduce key ideas of the CCO perspective to undergraduate students' (p. X), and thus aligns with our interest in textbook representations of CCO. Finally, we only reviewed English language textbooks from Western publishers (though some of these books have an international readership). Table 1 lists all the materials in our review, as well as a summary of the themes of representation we identified.

We began by looking for evidence of explicit chapters or sections on CCO in these textbooks. We also searched the indices for related terms like *constitutive*, *communicative*, or *social construction* that suggested an orientation towards CCO thinking, even if CCO terminology was not used explicitly. Our review of this material was guided by several initial questions: Where is CCO being taken up in textbooks? How is CCO represented in these textbooks? Then our analysis of this content included more targeted and critical questions: What does this representation tell us about how the received wisdom of CCO is understood and passed on to students? How might CCO scholars respond to the way CCO is represented in textbooks? How might future textbooks or other pedagogical materials address CCO? Our analysis resulted in two overarching thematic categories: (1) themes of representation and (2)

**Table 1** CCO representation in textbooks (most recent editions).

Themes of representation	Source	CCO content
Full Chapters	Castor (2018)	Preface and chapter 1 introduces CCO thinking Chapter 2 titled 'A Tale of Three Perspectives' describes the three schools of CCO Remaining chapters apply Montréal School thinking to environmental case studies
	Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks (2019)	Depicts CCO as the Four Flows model
	Miller and Barbour (2014)	Chapter titled 'Constitutive Approaches' Describes Montréal School and Four Flows 'Spotlight on Scholarship' section highlighting a CCO empirical study
Chapter Sections and Honorable Mentions	Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2011).	Opening chapter includes section called 'Organizations as Communication' Chapter on Organizational Structure and Process concludes with a section on 'Emergent Structures and Self-Organizing Systems' that highlights research from Taylor and McPhee & Zaug Leadership chapter includes section called 'Constitutive Approaches'
	Kramer and Bisel (2016)	Introduces a 'Communicative Definition of Organizations' in a section of the opening chapter called 'Defining Organizations' Explains 'four kinds of messaging' that communicatively define organizations (mirroring the Four Flows)
	Modaff, Butler, and DeWine (2018)	Introductory chapter has section called 'Communicative Constitution of Organizations' Explains CCO as the Four Flows model and rooted in structuration, CCO represents the first theory development by the field of organizational communication
	Mumby and Kuhn (2019)	Discussion of the 'CCO approach' in a subsection of the introductory chapter called 'Organizations as Communication' Chapter 2 reiterates the 'CCO approach' in a discussion about the social construction of organizations
	Shockley-Zalabak (2015)	Side panel with brief definition and explanation of CCO End of chapter review question about communication and organizational constitution
	Nicotera (in press)	Chapter on 'History of the Field' presents the three schools of CCO: Montréal School, Four Flows, and Social Systems approaches Remaining chapters explore organizational communication 'through an approach based in structuration theory and CCO theory'
Absent	Avtgis and Rancer (2012) Brewer and Westerman (2017) Conrad and Poole (2012) Eisenberg, Goodall, and Trethewey (2014) Zaremba (2009)	NA

themes of trajectory, each consisting of several subthemes. We explain these findings below, then conclude with a discussion about our analysis and the broader implications of our work.

### *Themes of representation*

This theme captures the various ways in which CCO is represented in textbooks, ranging from full chapters to complete absence.



### Full chapters

Three texts devote full chapters to CCO thinking. First, Griffin, Ledbetter, and Sparks' (2018, 10th edition) communication theory textbook includes a chapter called 'Communicative Constitution of Organizations of Robert McPhee.<sup>6</sup>' This chapter originated in the previous edition (9th) but the content is the same in the current edition. It provides a detailed description of CCO as represented by the Four Flow's Model. The authors describe organizations as existing 'because communication brings the organization into existence' (p. 255) and clearly articulate McPhee's understanding of CCO:

He [McPhee] thinks communication doesn't just reduce ambiguity—it creates organization itself. But it's one thing to observe that communication creates organization; it's much harder to explain exactly *how* that happens. McPhee's answer to this big CCO question is four specific forms of communication, or *flows*, that accomplish this (p. 257).

The authors go on to explain how McPhee recognizes communication as the essence of organization and emphasizes the role that communication has in calling organizations into existence. Furthermore, this chapter positions CCO as asking a foundational question: how does communication create organization? The authors briefly acknowledge other formulations of CCO, but do not label these as schools of thought, nor do they describe their contributions to CCO.

Second, Miller and Barbour (2014) dedicate a full chapter to 'Constitutive Approaches' in the most recent edition (7th) of their textbook on organizational communication. Here the authors define a variety of concepts and provide detailed descriptions of both The Montréal School and the Four Flows Model. Miller and Barbour also explicitly refer to CCO as an ontological claim, particularly in a stand-alone section entitled, *Spotlight on Scholarship: Constituting Collaboration*, which features Koschmann's (2013) work on the communicative constitution of collective identity as an exemplar of empirical CCO work. What's more, this chapter clearly positions CCO as antithetical to transmission model and container metaphor of organization:

As we discussed back in Chapter 1 when we considered ways to complicate our thinking about communication, it is often important to move beyond ideas about communication as simply transmitting information – and related ideas about the organization as the container in which the information is transmitted to – to consider the ways in which communication processes create and recreate systems of meaning and understanding. (p. 83)

In this description, Miller and Barbour reference CCO's role in the ongoing conversation around social construction and emphasizes CCO's perspectives ontological aims. Though this text does not provide a clear articulation of the Social System Theory approach to CCO, in the discussion section the authors direct their students to recognize a broad collection of CCO related terms including each of the Four Flows, the duality of structure, d/Discourse, conversation, text, scaling up process, degrees of separation, and ventriloquism.

Finally, Castor's (2018) text introduces CCO thinking in chapter 1, with a clear explanation that CCO addresses the 'ontological nature' of organizations, and a section on the 'conceptual and theoretical roots' of CCO thinking. This is followed in chapter 2 with lengthy explanations of the Montréal School, Four Flows, and Social Systems approaches to CCO. The remainder of the book applies Montréal School concepts to a variety of environmental case studies in order to demonstrate the utility of CCO thinking.

### Chapter sections and honorable mentions

The broadest scope of representation involves textbooks with chapter sections or 'honorable mentions' of CCO. For instance, Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh's (2011) textbook includes several sections related to CCO thinking. Their opening chapter includes a brief section called 'Organizations as Communication' where they explain how organizations exist as 'complex systems of symbols, messages, efforts, and activities' (p. 8). Additionally, their second chapter on Organizational Structure and Process concludes with a section on 'Emergent Structures and Self-Organizing Systems' where they encourage readers to move away from seeing communication *in* organizations towards

seeing the organizing properties of communication itself. They develop these ideas in reference to both Taylor and McPhee and Zaug, citing their seminal works and describing organizations as 'communicatively constituted' (p. 40). Finally, their chapter on Leadership includes a section on 'Constitutive Approaches' that explains the social construction of leadership qualities and situations, as well as the centrality of managing meaning for leadership effectiveness.

Additionally, Mumby and Kuhn's (2019) recent textbook introduces the 'CCO approach' in a subsection called 'Organizations as Communication,' which is part of their broader 'Defining Organizational Communication' section in their opening chapter titled 'What is Organizational Communication?' The authors reiterate this reference to the CCO approach in chapter 2 ('Developing a Critical Approach to Organizational Communication') in a section on the social construction of organizations. These explanations expand what Mumby did in the first edition of his textbook (2012) where in the introduction he simply oriented the text to the position that 'communication constitutes organization' but with no further explanation of CCO per se. Both editions also include chapters titled 'Organizations as Communication Systems' that discuss social systems. The first edition mentions Luhmann explicitly, whereas the second addition does not. Neither edition mentions the Montréal or Four Flows specifically, only the broad reference to the 'CCO approach.'

In a different vein, Nicotera's forthcoming textbook is intended to provide a CCO-driven perspective on organizational communication, highlighting what it means to take a communicational approach to organizational studies (personal correspondence). She includes an extensive section on CCO in an early chapter called 'History of the Field: Developments in the 21st Century.' This section presents CCO in the familiar three-schools framework, saying: 'this genre of theory is most often described as occupying three distinct branches: McPhee's four flows; the Montréal School; and Luhmann's social systems theory' (n.p.). The concluding section of this chapter explains that the rest of the textbook develops an understanding of the field of organizational communication through an approach based in structuration theory and CCO theory.

Furthermore, the most recent edition (4th) of Modaff, Butler, and DeWine's (2018) textbook includes a section in their introductory chapter called 'Communicative Constitution of Organizations,' where they explain that 'communication is more than just something that happens in organizations – it constitutes organizations' (p. 3). They go on to claim that 'CCO represents the first theory development by the field of organizational communication' (p. 4) and has its roots in structuration theory. The rest of this section 'Examine[s] the four flows model to understand the relationship between organization and communication' (p. 4) and states that they will 'integrate the CCO perspective' throughout the remaining chapters (p. 5). This is a notable expansion from their previous edition, where Modaff et al. (2012) introduce the notion of the 'communicative organization' in their textbook, where 'communication is the central process in the organization' and the 'essence of organizational life' (p. 10). However, their 'communicative organization model' is all about the centrality of 'misunderstanding' and portrays organizational life as inherently problematic, but with no further explanation or exploration of the communicative constitution of organization (vs. strategic communication planning and social interaction in relation to anticipated misunderstandings).

Finally, some textbooks make brief mentions of CCO but with limited explanation, or hint at ideas of communicative constitution but with no further development. Shockley-Zalabak (2015) provides a brief description of CCO within the larger context of organizational communication perspectives. In this section, Shockley-Zalabak's side-panel definition describes CCO as 'Communication processes or flows which generate and sustain organizations' (p. 50). At the conclusion of the chapter, the review section challenges readers to 'Describe how communication constitutes an organization' (p. 62). This statement suggests that CCO is more than just another component of organizing; it is an ontological approach to understanding the very existence of the organization. However, because CCO is embedded within a larger chapter of 'emerging perspectives' and because this question is only one of sixteen for this chapter, CCO is portrayed as one perspective among many. The chapter references ideas from both the Montréal School and the Four Flows Models, but does not label the schools or describe the ideas part of a broader CCO

project. Similarly, Kramer and Bisel's (2016) textbook incorporates CCO thinking in the 'definitions of organizations' section of their introductory chapter, offering a 'communicative definition of organizations' (vs. a legal definition or a social definition, p. 8). CCO is not mentioned explicitly, nor are any of the three schools discussed formally, but the general idea of communicative constitution is included as a key way to define and understand organizations and organizing. Kramer and Bisel go on to develop this communicative definition of organizations in terms of 'four kinds of messaging' that mirror McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows.

### *Absent*

In addition to reviewing where CCO was present within textbooks, we also considered where it was absent. Despite CCO's growing popularity, some of the texts we considered for this analysis made no noteworthy reference to CCO thinking. For example, Papa, Daniels, and Spiker (2008) describe the Social System Theory of organizing but without any further discussion related to communicative constitution:

Luhmann has a theory that is grounded explicitly in communication, and he also relies on an evolution model to explain social change, but he generates some new thinking about systems that is attracting considerable interest among scholars in management studies and organizational communication (p. 116).

Additionally, the textbook by Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017) makes no mention of CCO or a constitutive approach to communication (neither terms are listed in the index); the same is true of Conrad and Poole's (2012) text on strategic organizational communication, as well as the organizational communication textbooks by Avtgis and Rancer (2012), Brewer and Westerman (2017), and Zaremba (2009). Overall, these absences are notable because they show that despite CCO being seen as institutionalized in the scholarly organizational communication literature, it is virtually non-existent in these texts. To be sure, these textbook authors are under no obligation to include CCO in their textbooks, and CCO may not be a good fit for the purpose or audience of a given textbook. However, we include these relevant texts in order to provide a thorough review of current textbook content to provoke discussions about how best to represent and advance ideas of communicative constitution beyond the academic literature.

### *Themes of trajectory*

This theme identifies emerging trends in CCO textbook representations, indicating the direction we seem to be heading and offering opportunities for assessment and critique.

### *Limited uptake*

Despite the institutional status of CCO described by Boivin et al. (2017), one of the main trends of our thematic analysis is the limited uptake of CCO ideas and terminology in organizational communication textbooks. Even textbooks that clearly introduce and explain CCO do little more than define basic terms or situate CCO as a general orientation for the rest of the book, but with limited further development, and minimal attempt to apply CCO thinking to various organizational issues and cases (though Castor's recent text is a notable exception). This is certainly understandable, given that the CCO literature can be a bit dense and abstract – especially the Montréal School and Social Systems vocabulary – and that textbooks are intended to reach a broader, non-scholarly audience. This is also probably why we see Four Flows thinking represented more in these textbooks – its vocabulary is more accessible and less abstract. Yet it still raises questions about the discrepancy between the deep insights found in the CCO literature and the limited portrayals we see in textbooks, and whether organizational communication scholars can develop relevant ways to translate or transform CCO thinking for student and practitioner audiences.

### *Discrepant portrayals*

Our analysis reveals that the Four Flows Model receives the most attention in textbooks, followed by the Montréal School, whereas the Social Systems approach receives little description or recognition as a key aspect of CCO thinking. This contrasts with what is portrayed in the academic literature, where the Montréal School has by far the most scholarly development, followed by a growing presence of Social Systems research (particularly in Europe), and lastly a limited amount of Four Flows research (despite an extensive amount of citations). This raises important questions for organizational communication scholars to consider: Should textbooks generally reflect the balance of scholarly development? What are the implications for the least-developed scholarly approach to CCO being most represented in textbooks? Should textbook authors even be concerned about representing CCO with the three-schools framework that is common in the scholarly literature?

### *Tension of CCO as both question and answer*

In their recent article on the pedagogy of CCO, Kuhn and Schoeneborn (2015) note that ‘the CCO perspective represents a powerful way for students to *question* and look behind the taken-for-granted of the organization’s existence’ and position this as one of the primary goals of presenting students with constitutive perspective to organizing (p. 298, emphasis added). Similarly, Putnam and Nicotera (2009) clarify that ‘CCO is a body of work connected by a central *question* or an overall problem rather than a clear-cut *answer*’ (p. 158, emphasis added). However, we contend that this emphasis on CCO as a question is not a central message being conveyed in textbooks. Rather, CCO is portrayed more as an answer or a conclusion. Of course, textbooks focus more on accepted or established knowledge and not academic speculation. Yet presenting CCO as more of an answer or conclusion – however implicitly or indirectly – may be a missed opportunity to help students and future practitioners develop the analytical skills to question the taken-for-grantedness of organization’s existence and explore ways in which organizations may be communicatively constituted. Again, we see a discrepancy between the vibrancy of CCO scholarship and a much more limited portrayal in textbook outlets, raising questions about how best to convey the richness of CCO thinking to a non-scholarly audience. Conversely, despite the quotes above, CCO actually *is* an answer, an affirmative statement about the constitution of organizations and their ontological status, which is beneficial for students and practitioners looking for more concrete and tangible ideas. Thus CCO as both question and answer creates a tension of how best to represent these ideas in textbooks; a tension that probably does not need a resolution, but may need better representation and articulation.

### *Case study conclusion: taking stock of the uptake*

In an effort to advance the conversation initiated by Boivin et al. (2017), we now problematize the institutionalized version of CCO and how this received wisdom has been taken up in textbooks. We move to question how CCO is developing and consider what the state of its legacy might be, should its present trajectory remain unchanged. Specifically, we interrogate the ‘big idea’ of CCO and our continued acceptance of CCO as three schools of thought.

### *Clarifying the Big Idea*

Although we certainly recognize that textbooks are not the place for nuanced academic debate and deep theoretical development, we still should ensure that these outlets cohere with ideas in the scholarly literature. One way to do this is to focus on a unifying concept that faithfully represents the breadth of thinking in the scholarly literature, but without getting lost in the theoretical minutia that is less relevant for students and future practitioners. However, this is not what we see in most textbook representations of CCO thinking (Cheney et al. and Mumby & Kuhn’s texts are modest exceptions, with their brief sections on Organizations as Communication). Instead, we see discrete categories, multiple definitions, and an emphasis on learning the different schools (if even that).

Yet this seems to miss the heart of what CCO is trying to accomplish and the overall thrust of the constitutive project. Earlier we suggested that *organizations as communication* is the 'big idea' of CCO, the most concise, distilled articulation of CCO thinking. We believe this may be the most effective way to convey CCO to a textbook audience, providing a foundation from which to explore further aspects of CCO thinking. It is also a vague enough term to accommodate multiple approaches to CCO thinking, enabling textbook authors to sidestep current academic debates that are better worked out in the scholarly literature and stay focused on a unifying concept. In textbooks, we could do more than just describe individual components of CCO thinking, such as the process of coorientation or the definitions of the four flows. We can also do a better job of orienting people towards the 'big idea' of CCO: organizations as communication. *Organizations as communication* signifies the ontological position of CCO and provides a clear contrast to the idea of communication *within* organizations, the main implication of the transmission model of communication and contain metaphor of organizations. But it does not require textbook authors (or students) to take a stand on specific ontological positions or implications currently being debated among CCO scholars, such as the flattened ontology currently advocated by some Montréal scholars versus the stratified/leveled ontology of other related organizational theories (see Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017), or the alternative conceptions of agency advocated by different CCO scholars (see Brummanns 2018).

Other approaches to organizational communication have made similar translation moves with notable success. In particular, critical scholars have been quite effective at advancing the big idea of *power* without getting bogged down in the minutia of postmodernism and poststructuralism that may not be/seem immediately relevant for some textbook audiences. This provides instructors a strong foundation from which to discuss a number of relevant concepts, such as ideology, discipline, and concrete control that are more easily connected to students' experiences and current events. Similarly, focusing on the big idea of *organizations as communication* can ground insightful discussions on issues of authority, agency, collective action, change, culture, and identity, just to name a few.

### Rethinking the three schools of thought

For several years now, CCO has been explained as a meta-theoretical framework composed of different schools of thought, first as two (Montréal and Four Flows in Ashcraft et al.'s 2009 article), then as three (Social Systems added in Cooren, et al.'s 2011 article and beyond). This categorization may have been a helpful way to make sense of emerging ideas in the scholarly literature, but now we question whether this approach may have outlived its usefulness – like a ladder that enabled us to gain necessary elevation but now may be an encumbrance for the remainder of our journey. This is especially true as we seek to represent the CCO literature in textbooks. Our contention is that despite its initial utility in the academic literature, the current three-school categorization has key shortcomings that may hinder the advancement of CCO thinking for students and practitioners.

First, the present three-school categorization seems too dependent on founding scholars (Taylor, McPhee, and Luhman) and locales (namely the Université de Montréal). For example, Miller and Barbour indicate that they will 'discuss two specific constitutive approaches that have their home in the discipline of organizational communication: the *Montréal School* developed by James Taylor, Francois Cooren and their colleagues and *The Four Flows* approach developed by Robert McPhee and his colleagues' (p. 83). Certainly founding scholars should get their due recognition in the literature, and institutions that foster innovative thinking should be acknowledged. But going forward, this may not be the best way to teach and advance CCO thinking in the pages of organizational communication textbooks for several reasons: it makes CCO thinking too biographical and personality driven, it may keep CCO thinking too rooted in the past, it hints at a potential academic tribalism, and it obstructs CCO thinking from branching out beyond its original circumstances – all of which may hinder the advancement of CCO thinking in textbooks (and perhaps even in the scholarly literature). It also makes it difficult to incorporate important constitutive work that does not fit neatly within a particular school (e.g. Putnam et al.'s, 2016 article that develops a constitutive approach to

contradictions, dialectics, and paradoxes in organizations), and work that is clearly aligned with a particular school but not by scholars who are from that locale (e.g. Montréal-related work by Koschmann, 2013; Koschmann et al., 2012; Kuhn, 2008; Kuhn & Burk, 2014; Stohl & Stohl, 2011). Instead, as we will develop further below, we suggest a better approach could be to categorize CCO thinking in textbooks based on concepts and ideas (i.e. coorientation, structuration, autopoiesis), simpler frameworks that are easier for students and future practitioners to grasp initially (i.e. bottom up, structure, social systems), or even the underlying questions that motivate each school (i.e. the question of scaling up, the question of organizational distinctiveness, the question of self-replication and preservation).

Furthermore, portraying CCO thinking via the current three-school conception conveys an equivalency that is simply not supported by the academic literature. Textbooks that address CCO thinking either present the Montréal School and the Four Flows as comparable schools of thought (Miller & Barbour, 2014; Shockley-Zalabak, 2014) or focus primarily on the Four Flows model (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2014, 2018; Kramer & Bisel, 2016; Modaff et al., 2018). However, this is not an accurate reflection of what we see in the scholarly literature. By far, the majority of empirical and conceptual CCO research is from scholars aligned with the Montréal School, or who are doing clear Montréal School work. In comparison, while McPhee and Zaug's (2000) original article on the Four Flows model (and subsequent reprint in Putnam & Nicotera's 2009 edited book) has been cited extensively, our analysis of Google Scholar citations ( $N = 503$ ) demonstrates that almost all of these citations simply reference the Four Flows model with no further engagement or development. The small number of studies that do engage with the Four Flows model merely apply one or more of the flows to a particular organizational context (e.g. Bean & Buikema, 2015; Fay & Kline, 2011; Mann, 2015; Mease, 2015), and only a small handful of studies seek to advance the Four Flows model through further conceptual development (e.g. Bruscella & Bisel, 2018; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008; Osacio, Loewenstein, & Nigam, 2015). For the most part, the Four Flows model continues to be articulated the same way it was originally introduced nearly twenty years ago, and by no reasonable measure provides evidence of a 'school' of thought today (i.e., a recognizable collection of scholars clearly working to develop and advance this line of thinking). However, recent developments may challenge this assessment: the number of Four Flows citations has increased notably over the past ten years (sixty-five references in 2018 compared to twenty in 2008), and a long-awaited book by McPhee and Iverson is under review with a major publisher at the time of this writing (personal correspondence). But for now, we would be wise to reconsider how we represent the Four Flows model in our textbooks.

A similar assessment can be made of the Social Systems approach developed by Luhmann. European scholars (especially Dennis Schoeneborn, Stephen Blaschke, and David Seidl) have done excellent work to explain the relevance of Luhmann's thinking for organizational communication and appropriate his work in the broader field of organizational studies. However, it is probably best to categorize this as more of an 'emerging' approach, given the limited uptake and application in the extant scholarly literature. Of course, none of this is to disparage Four Flows or Social Systems thinking, nor to assume the superiority of the Montréal School, but only to call for an honest assessment of what organizational communication scholars have actually contributed to the academic literature, and to consider a revised presentation of this work in our textbooks.

To be clear, we are not suggesting that the current three-school categorization is wrong or misguided, especially for the academic literature. We applaud the recent panel at the University of Hamburg and subsequent article in *Management Communication Quarterly* about the three schools of CCO thinking (Schoeneborn et al., 2014) and see this as an exemplar of scholarly development and beneficial for the field of organizational communication. However, we are claiming that the current three-school categorization may not be the best way to represent CCO thinking in textbooks, especially if we are concerned about the future relevance and legacy of CCO and the broader constitutive project. Instead, we are calling for enhanced representational and translational work in textbooks that does more to convey the 'big idea' of *organizations as communication*. CCO is a way to understand and explain organizational ontology. We need to foreground questions of being for textbook audiences, we need to explain why organizational existence matters, and we need to



demonstrate how CCO provides a variety of different ways to both ask and respond to these questions, leading to new insights that are relevant for students and future practitioners. We can do this by showing how different concepts (i.e. coorientation, structuration, and autopoiesis) help us understand and explain organizations as communication, how these concepts relate to – and challenge – frameworks students are already familiar with (e.g. micro-level interaction, social structures), and how they address relevant organizational questions (e.g. how do local conversations scale up to certain organizational forms, how do people exercise collective agency, how do organizations speak, how and why do organizations have authority?). We should be grateful for the three-schools ladder that helped us scale to our current heights, but we should also consider whether or not this is the best resource for proceeding on the next leg of our journey.

Of course, some may see this whole case study as a bit premature. After all, CCO Theory has only formally been around for roughly twenty years, and its presence in textbooks is somewhat modest. But that is exactly our point – now is a key time for assessment and intervention because the future is still very much up for grabs. Once certain ideas become more entrenched and codified it will be much harder to alter the trajectory and shape the direction of CCO thinking. Our hope is that textbooks would provide insightful representations and applications of CCO scholarship in order to advance these important ideas among students and future practitioners, and to provide a strong foundation of intellectual coherence and credibility to advance CCO thinking.

## Discussion and conclusion

From time to time, it is important for academic disciplines to assess the ways in which key theories within their field are represented and disseminated in textbooks. This kind of work is important for gauging the institutional trends in a particular field, and evaluating what scholarly ideas are taken up by textbook authors and gaining traction with students, thus providing key insights into the trajectory of the field and presenting opportunities for intervention or affirmation. At issue is the way in which textbooks tend to codify ideas as canonical knowledge because of the format and cultural standing of textbooks in our educational system (despite qualifications and caveats by textbook authors). Thus, any investigation into textbook representations of scholarly ideas is likely to raise just as many questions as it may answer. Should textbooks reflect current scholarly discussions, and to what extent? What should we reasonably expect from textbooks in terms of representing scholarly conversations and theoretical developments? Should textbooks only present ‘settled’ scholarship, or also include current debates and trends? For instance, Modaff et al. (2018) present the notions of agency and structure as relatively straightforward concepts in their introductory section on CCO, yet these are two of the most contested and debated concepts in the CCO literature and the broader field of organizational studies. Furthermore, how much should textbook content stay tethered to developments in the scholarly literature? For example, is it problematic that the Four Flow approach to CCO thinking is the most represented approach in textbooks, even though it is the least developed in the scholarly literature? Or does it tell us something that this CCO approach might have the most traction with textbook audiences? Trying to answer these questions often leads to a paradox of competing goods in our pedagogy. As Swales (1993, p. 224) explains, ‘The better textbooks are at transmitting a canon of knowledge (one good), the worse they are at fostering critical reading (another good).’ Thus, we are left with important questions about how to balance the tension between transmitting canonical knowledge and fostering critical thinking.

Our analysis also surfaces questions of application and relevance for students and practitioners. What aspects of CCO thinking seem to resonate most with students or current practitioners, and how could this in turn inform future scholarship? What related concepts could make for insightful textbook content, even if not explicitly connected to CCO scholarship? For example, Deetz’s (1995) stakeholder model is a popular application of critical management studies, but does not necessarily require students to fully understand the breadth of critical theory in order to appreciate and apply the model. Could a similar application of CCO thinking be developed? What might this look like? Can we

draw students in to interesting discussions about the implications of a CCO approach (e.g. agency, authority, emergence) without necessarily requiring a thorough understanding of coorientation or autopoiesis, for example? What are the practical areas where the question ‘what is an organization’ makes a difference? Further development of CCO thinking does not depend on students’ abilities to master the theoretical vocabulary of CCO scholarship, but rather that they grasp the gist of the idea – organizations *as* communication – and how it can apply in a number of relevant contexts and scenarios.

Overall, we are calling for more attention to the ways in which scholarly ideas in the field of communication studies are represented in our textbooks. We offer but one example of how this could be done, focusing on a burgeoning and influential theory (CCO) in one of our field’s main divisions (organizational communication). We sought to answer the question: what are we doing?, while also provoking the question: what do we think about this? We summarized the institutionalized version of CCO, the ‘received wisdom’ and explored how this was represented in organizational communication textbooks. By summarizing this content and assessing its trajectory, we enable organizational communication scholars a better understanding of our subfield to inform subsequent scholarship and pedagogy, as well as demonstrating to the broader field of communication how we all might engage in this important work.

## Notes

1. A Google Scholar search of ‘textbook’ in the title and ‘communication’ in the source revealed 118 citations, none of which address the issue of communication theory representation or dissemination in textbooks.
2. This only includes textbooks that are currently in print, but not out-of-print textbooks that still may be available from a used bookseller.
3. To be sure, the implications and applications of these ideas are still debated within the scholarly literature, just not necessarily the premises themselves. For example, there continues to be lively debates about the exact nature of CCO’s ontological claims (e.g. Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017), but the idea *that* CCO is making ontological claims about communication and organizations is not debated.
4. These articles motivated a subsequent pre-conference at the 2002 National Communication Association convention called ‘The Communicative Constitution of Organization and Its Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice,’ which resulted in Putnam and Nicotera’s (2009) influential book *Building Theories of Organization: The Constitutive Role of Communication*.
5. We consulted organizational communication colleagues from Europe regarding additional textbooks we should include in our review. We were told that most European universities either use one of the English-language textbooks already included in our review, or use corporate communication textbooks or scholarly handbooks that would not be relevant for our analysis.
6. Every chapter in this textbook is a separate theory attributed to a specific author(s), but not written by that author.

## Acknowledgements

A previous version of this manuscript received a top paper award from the Organizational Communication Division of National Communication Association at the 2017 annual convention in Dallas, TX. The authors thank Ryan Bisel for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## References

- Artiz, J., & Walker, R. C. (2011). *Discourse perspectives on organizational communication*. Plymouth: Rowan & Littlefield/Fairleigh Dickenson University Press.
- Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). 1 Constitutional Amendments: “materializing” organizational communication. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3, 1–64. doi:10.1080/19416520903047186

- Avtgis, T., Rancer, A. S., & Liberman, C. (2012). *Organizational communication: Strategies for success* (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.
- Bean, H., & Buikema, R. J. (2015). Deconstituting al-Qa'ida: CCO theory and the decline and dissolution of hidden organizations. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 29(4), 512–538. doi:10.1177/0893318915597300
- Berger Peter, L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City, NY: First Anchor.
- Blaschke, S., & Schoeneborn, D. (Eds.). (2017). *Organization as communication: Perspectives in dialogue*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Boivin, G., Brummans, B. H., & Barker, J. R. (2017). The institutionalization of CCO scholarship: Trends from 2000 to 2015. *Management Communication Quarterly*. doi:10.1177/0893318916687396
- Bormann, E. G. (1983). Symbolic convergence organizational communication and culture. In L. L. Putnam, & M. E. Pacanowsky (Eds.), *Communication and organizations an interpretive approach* (pp. 99–122). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Brewer, E. C., & Westerman, J. (2017). *Organizational communication: Today's professional life in context*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brummans, B. H. J. M. (Ed.). (2018). *The agency of organizing: Perspectives and case studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Brummans, B. H. J. M., Cooren, F., Robichaud, D., & Taylor, J. (2014). Approaches to the communicative constitution of organizations. In L. L. Putnam, & D. K. Mumby (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of organizational communication theory: Advances in theory, research, and methods* (pp. 173–194). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Bruscella, J. S., & Bisel, R. S. (2018). Four Flows theory and materiality: ISIL's use of material resources in its communicative constitution. *Communication Monographs*, 85(3), 331–356.
- Castor, T. (2018). *Climate risks as organizational problems: Constructing agency*. New York: Peter Lang, Inc.
- Cheney, G., Christensen, L. T., Zorn, T. E., & Ganesh, S. (2011). *Organizational communication in an age of globalization*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Conrad, C., & Poole, M. S. (2012). *Strategic organizational communication in a global economy*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Cooren, F., Kuhn, T., Cornelissen, J. P., & Clark, T. (2011). Communication organizing and organization: An overview and introduction to the special issue. *Organization Studies*, 32, 1149–1170. doi:10.1177/0170840611410836
- Cooren, F., Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2006). *Communication as organizing: Empirical and theoretical explorations in the dynamic of text and conversation*. Mahway, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 119–161. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1999.tb00355.x
- Craig, R. T. (2013). Communication theory and social change. *Communication & Social Change*, 1(1), 5–18. doi:10.4471/csc.2013.01
- Deetz, S. A. (2003). Reclaiming the legacy of the linguistic turn. *Organization*, 10(3), 421–429. doi:10.1177/13505084030103002
- Deetz, S. (1995). *Transforming communication, transforming business: Building responsive and responsible workplaces*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Eisenberg, E. M., Goodall, Jr., H. L., & Trethewey, A. (2014). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Eisenberg, E., Trethewey, A., LeGreco, M., & Goodall, H. (2017). *Organizational communication: Balancing creativity and constraint* (8th ed.). New York, NY: St. Martin's.
- Fairhurst, G. T., Green, S. G., & Courtright, J. A. (1995). Inertial forces and the implementation of a socio-technical systems approach: A communication study. *Organization Science*, 6, 168–185.
- Fay, M. J., & Kline, S. L. (2011). Coworker relationships and informal communication in high-intensity telecommuting. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 39(2), 144–163.
- Furusten, S. (1999). *Popular management books: How they are made and what they mean for organisations*. London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Chicago, MI: University of California Press.
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2014). *A first look at communication theory* (9th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2018). *A first look at communication theory* (10th ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Griffin, E., Ledbetter, A., & Sparks, G. (2019). Communicative constitution in organizations. In E. Griffin, A. Ledbetter, & G. Sparks (Eds.), *A first look at communication theory (chapter 20)* (10th ed., pp. 248–258). New York: McGraw Hill.
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2011). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Koschmann, M. A. (2013). The communicative constitution of collective identity in interorganizational collaboration. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 27(1), 61–89.
- Koschmann, M. (2010). Communication as a distinct mode of explanation makes a difference. *Communication Monographs*, 77(4), 431–434.

- Koschmann, M. A., Kuhn, T. R., & Pfarrer, M. D. (2012). A communicative framework of value in cross-sector partnerships. *Academy of Management Review*, 37(3), 332–354. doi:10.5465/amr.2010.0314
- Kramer, M. W., & Bisel, R. S. (2016). *Organizational communication: A lifespan approach*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Kuhn, T. (2008). A communicative theory of the firm: Developing an alternative perspective on intra-organizational power and stakeholder relationships. *Organization Studies*, 29, 1227–1254. doi:10.1177/0170840608094778
- Kuhn, T., Ashcraft, K. L., & Cooren, F. (2017). *The work of communication: Relational perspectives on working and organizing in contemporary capitalism*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kuhn, T., & Burk, N. R. (2014). Spatial design as sociomaterial practice: A (Dis) organizing perspective on communicative constitution. In F. Cooren, E. Vaara, A. Langley, & H. Tsoukas (Eds.), *Language and Communication at Work: Discourse, Narrativity, and Organizing* (Vol. 4, pp. 147–172). London: Oxford University Press.
- Kuhn, T., & Schoeneborn, D. (2015). The pedagogy of CCO. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 29(2), 295–301. doi:10.1177/0893318915571348
- Luhmann, N. (2003). Organization. In T. Bakken, & T. Hernes (Eds.), *Autopoietic organization theory: Drawing on Niklas Luhmann's social systems perspective* (pp. 31–52). Oslo, Norway: Copenhagen Business School Press.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & McDermott, V. (2008). The constitution of employee-abusive organizations: A communication flows theory. *Communication & Journalism*, 18, 304–333. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2008.00324.x
- Lynch, M., & Bogen, D. (1997). Sociology's asociological 'core': An examination of textbook sociology in light of the sociology of scientific knowledge. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 481–493.
- Mann, A. (2015). Communication, organisation, and action: Theory-building for social movements. *Communication Research and Practice*, 1(2), 159–173.
- McPhee, R. D., & Zaug, P. (2000). The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation. *Electronic Journal of Communication*, 10(1-2). Retrieved from <http://www.cios.org/EJCPUBLIC/010/1/01017.html>
- McPhee, R. D., & Zaug, P. (2009). The communicative constitution of organizations: A framework for explanation. In L. Putnam & A. M. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication* (pp. 1–20). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Mease, J. J. (2015). Embracing discursive paradox: Consultants navigating the constitutive tensions of diversity work. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 30(1), 1–25. doi:10.1177/0893318915604239
- Miller, K., & Barbour, J. (2014). *Organizational communication: Approaches and processes* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Modaff, D. P., DeWine, S., & Butler, J. (2012). *Organizational communication: Foundations, challenges, and misunderstandings* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon/Pearson.
- Modaff, D. P., DeWine, S., & Butler, J. (2018). *Organizational communication: Foundations, challenges, and misunderstandings* (4th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon/Pearson.
- Morawski, J. G. (1992). There is more to our history of giving: The place of introductory textbooks in American psychology. *American Psychologist*, 47(2), 161–169.
- Mumby, D. K., & Kuhn, T. (2019). *Organizational communication: A critical approach* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: SAGE.
- Myers, G. (1992). Textbooks and the sociology of scientific knowledge. *English for Specific Purposes*, 11, 3–17.
- Nicotera. (in press). Origins and traditions of organizational communication.
- Novak, D. R. (2016). Democratic work at an organization-society boundary: Sociomateriality and the communicative instantiation. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 30(20), 218–244. doi:10.1177/0893318915622455
- Osacio, W., Loewenstain, J., & Nigam, A. (2015). How streams of communication reproduce and change institutional logics: The role of categories. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1), 28–48.
- Palmer, M., Simmons, G., & Hall, M. (2013). Textbook (non-)adoption motives, legitimizing strategies and academic field configuration. *Studies in Higher Education*, 38, 485–505.
- Papa, M. J., Daniels, T. D., & Spiker, B. K. (2008). *Organizational communication: Perspectives and trends*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Putnam, L. L. (1983). The interpretive perspective an alternative to functionalism. In L. L. Putnam, & M. E. Pacanowsky (Eds.), *Communication and organizations an interpretive approach* (pp. 29–54). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Putnam, L. L., Fairhurst, G. T., & Banghart, S. (2016). Contradictions, dialectics, and paradoxes in organizations: A constitutive approach. *The Academy of Management Annals*, 10(1), 65–171. doi:10.1080/19416520.2016.1162421
- Putnam, L. L., & Nicotera, A. M. (2009). *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication*. New York: Routledge.
- Putnam, L. M., Nicotera, A. M., & McPhee, R. D. (2009). Introduction: Communication constitutes organization. In L. Putnam, & A. M. Nicotera (Eds.), *Building theories of organization: The constitutive role of communication* (pp. 1–20). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Putnam, L. L., & Pacanowsky, M. E. (1983). *Communication and organizations: An interpretive approach*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Putnam, L. L., & Phillips, N. (1996). Metaphors of communication and organization. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy, & W. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of organizational studies* (pp. 375–408). London: Sage.

- Reed, M. (2010). Is communication *constitutive* of organization? *Management Communication Quarterly*, 24(1), 151–157. doi:10.1177/0893318918909351583
- Richardson, P. W. (2004). Reading and writing from textbooks in higher education: A case study from economics. *Studies in Higher Education*, 29, 505–521.
- Schoeneborn, D., Blaschke, S., Cooren, F., McPhee, R. D., Seidl, D., & Taylor, J. R. (2014). The three schools of CCO thinking: Interactive dialogue and systematic comparison. *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28, 285–316. doi:10.1177/0893318914527000
- Schoeneborn, D., Kuhn, T. R., & Kärreman, D. (2018). The communicative constitution of organization, organizing, and organizationality. *Organization Studies*. doi:10.1177/0170840618782284
- Schoeneborn, D., & Vásquez, C. (2017). Communicative constitution of organizations. *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*, 1–21. doi:10.1002/9781118955567.wbieoc030
- Schultz, F., Castelló, I., & Morsing, M. (2013). The construction of corporate social responsibility in network societies: A communication view. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 115, 681–692. Retrieved from <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-013-1826-8>
- Seidl, D., & Becker, K. H. (eds.). (2005). *Niklas Luhmann and organization studies*. Malmö: Liber.
- Shockley-Zalabak, P. (2014). *Fundamentals of organizational communication* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.
- Shockley-Zalabak, P. S. (2015). *Fundamentals of organizational communication: Knowledge, sensitivity, skills, values* (8th ed.). Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Stohl, C., & Stohl, M. (2011). Secret agencies: The communicative constitution of clandestine organizations. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1197–1215. doi:10.1177/0170840611410839
- Swales, J. (1993). The paradox of value: Six treatments in search of the reader. In W. Henderson, T. Dudley-Evans, & R. Backhouse (Eds.), *Economics and Language*. London: Routledge.
- Taylor, J. R. (2011). Organization as an (imbricated) configuring of transactions. *Organization Studies*, 32(9), 1273–1294.
- Taylor, J. R., Cooren, F., Giroux, N., & Robichaud, D. (1996). The communicational basis of organization: Between the conversation and the text. *Communication Theory*, 6(1), 1–39. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.1996.tb00118.x
- Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2000). *The emergent organization: Communication as its site and surface*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Taylor, J. R., & Van Every, E. J. (2011). *Situated organization: Case studies in the pragmatics of communication research*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Weick, K. E. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Weick, K. E. (1983). Organizational communication toward a research agenda. In L. L. Putnam, & M. E. Pacanowsky (Eds.), *Communication and organizations an interpretive approach* (pp. 13–29). Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Zaremba, A. J. (2009). *Organizational communication* (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.