

MODULE 3 TASKS

- Read Chapter 2
- Read Module Overview
- Complete Reading Quiz (Chapters 1, 2 and the PDF from last week)
- Article Reports (if applicable)

Disclaimer: The module overview is only meant to serve as a supplement to the required readings. This review does not include all of the information from the chapter. Instead, it provides a brief summary while also factoring in discussion questions and additional examples. Please see the end of the document for a formal reference list, which includes our textbook as well as any other resources used to complete this document.

Housekeeping: Remember, module 2 was extended to January 24th. If you haven't done so already, remember to submit your module 2 assignments.

Module 3 Overview

What is Organizational Communication?

In chapter one Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017), explain, “interaction required to direct a group towards a shared goal is called organizational communication” (p. 4). Throughout the chapter, they build on this understanding by explaining the history of definitions for organizational communication. The authors address four approaches to organizational communication (Table 2.1 on page 42 provides nice summaries and comparisons of these approaches):

Communication as Information Transfer (or the linear model of communication). This approach views communication as a flow from one person to another. When a person does not receive a message in the way a sender intended, this would be considered miscommunication. The chapter explains three listening barriers that could lead to miscommunication—information overload, distortion, and ambiguity. However, critics argue that this model was too simplistic and assumed that receivers were passive (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017). Think about when you have a conversation with someone—do you simply sit there and receive the message during the communication process? Or, do you actively take part in the communication process, sending some type of message back (verbally or nonverbally). Even providing eye contact, nodding your head and remaining silent is are means of communicating. These examples of nonverbal communication are addressed in the transactional model of communication.

Communication as Transactional Process (or the transactional process model). This approach views communication as a simultaneous process. In a conversation, I am both a sender and a receiver. This model focuses on how senders and receivers construct meaning; the communication process used to create shared meaning. But, critics argue that this approach focuses too much on creating shared meaning and doesn't consider when shared meaning is not accomplished. Critics also argue that creating shared meaning is difficult to measure empirically (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

Communication as Strategic Control. This approach views communication as addressing many goals—not just creating shared meaning (one goal). An effective communicator is able to “[choose] strategies that are appropriate for accomplishing and balancing among multiple goals” in order to influence others and lead to some organized action (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017, p. 36). The chapter also discusses the role of *strategic ambiguity* when communicating in order to reach certain goals. However, critics argue that this approach focuses too much on individual behaviors (and not community) and not enough on ethics.

*Communication as a Balance of Creativity and Constraint. I place an asterisk beside this last view of communication since this is a part of our textbook title. The authors explain, “We believe that communication is the moment-to-moment working out of the tension between individual creativity and organizational constraint” (p. 40). Communication attempts to mediate this relationship. For example, communicating about structure helps employees understand the rules of an organization. Our own creativity and social constructions can even create constraint. Page 41 in your textbook provides an example of how this relationship between creativity and constraint could play out in an office meeting.

Although the different approaches come with criticisms, Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017) acknowledge beneficial elements of each approach and pull them together to present *organizations as dialogues*. The authors define dialogue as, “balanced communication, or communication in which each individual has a chance to both speak and be heard” (p. 48). In this regard, communication must include (1) *mindful communicators*, (2) *equitable transactions*, (3) *empathic conversations*, and (4) *real meetings*. In other words, as part of dialogue, when communicating individuals would (1) engage in active thinking while communicating, (2) all have the opportunity to express their views and thoughts, (3) imagine themselves in another’s shoes while drawing meaning and communicating, and (4) have respect for each others differences and own experiences. While this approach can certainly be beneficial, it can also bring challenges. The chapter highlights some of these advantages and disadvantages. For example, employees may grow more satisfied with their job, however with this approach may also be the assumption that all of their opinions will be used in making major decisions for the organization (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017).

When viewing organizational communication as dialogue, you must also consider the role of context. Members of the organization are *situated individuals* who communicate based on their interpretations of multiple contexts (Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, & Goodall, 2017). For example, as an employee of your current organization you know about your work environment (a context). When you are in the boardroom meeting with key executives, you would consider this context when communicating. This view of organization’s as dialogue also considers the role of ethical communication. The chapter provides some examples of rules to follow to remain ethical when communication as an organization.

So what’s the bottom line?

The definition of organizational communication has changed over time. Eisenberg, Trethewey, LeGreco, and Goodall (2017) highlight keep elements of these multiple definitions/approaches in order to present organizational communication as dialogue. This approach continues to highlight the importance of feedback and a two-way flow of communication. In addition, the authors emphasize communication as a balance between creativity and constraint, as illustrated in the title of our text.

REMINDER: You have a reading quiz this week. Also, the following students are scheduled for an article report this week: *As of January 20th, no one has signed up for chapter 2 article reports. I will update this list again once the sign-up sheet closes on Wednesday, January 24th. However, if you know that you signed up for a chapter 2 article report, you should go ahead and begin preparing your assignment. My list (at the end of module overviews) only serves a reminder.*