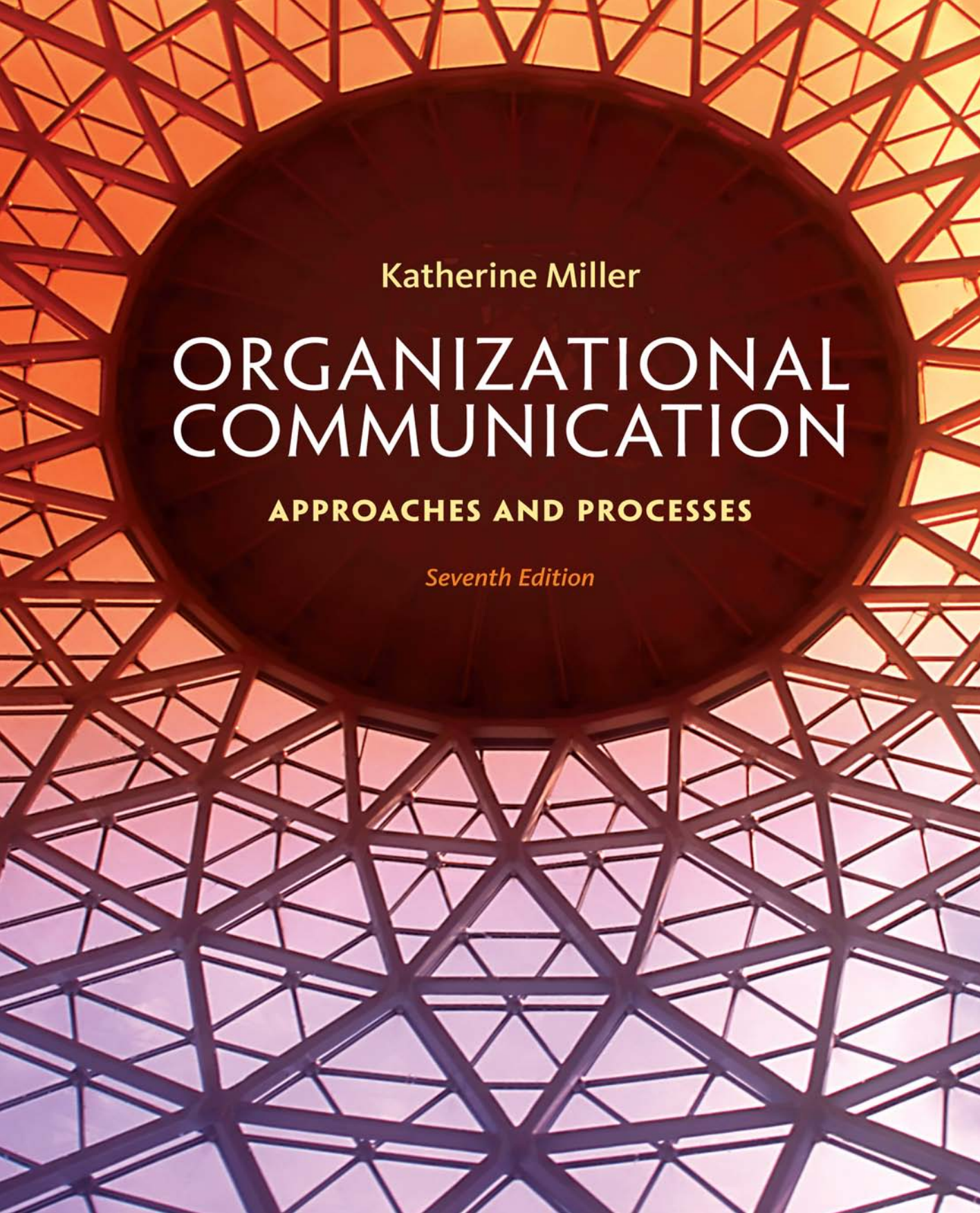
Katherine Miller
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION
APPROACHES AND PROCESSES
Seventh Edition

Organizational Communication

Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes

SEVENTH EDITION

Katherine Miller
Arizona State University

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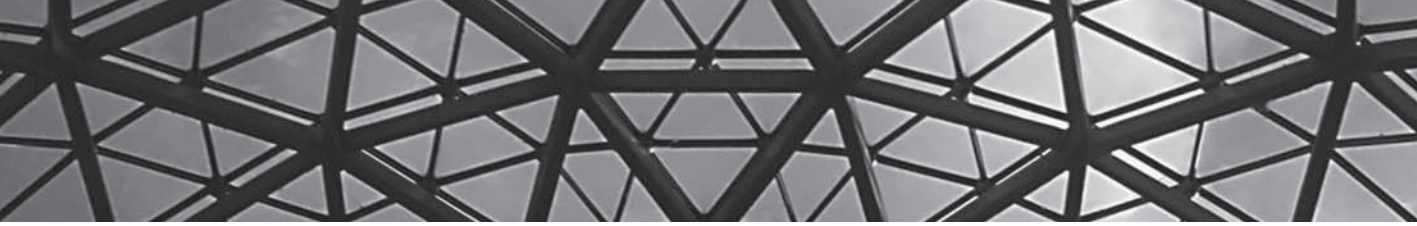
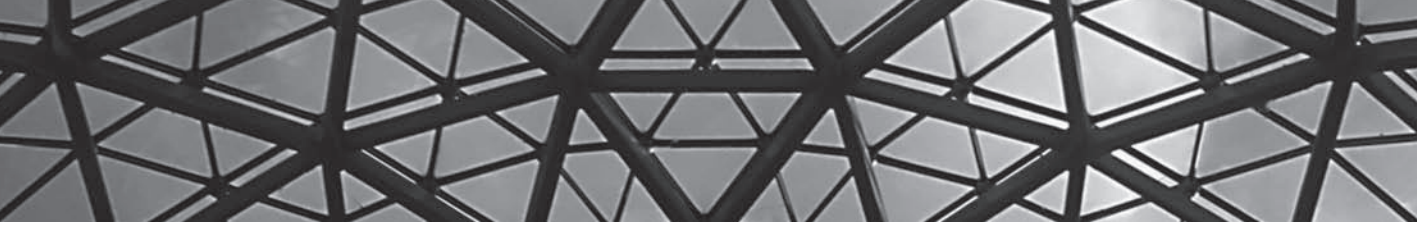
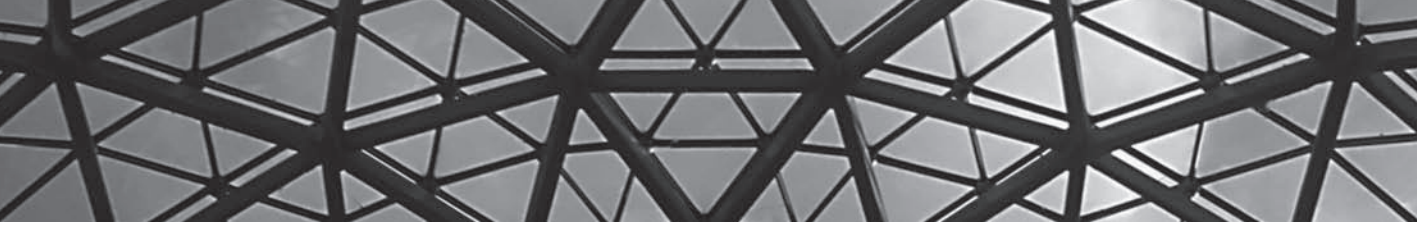


About the Author

Dr. Katherine Miller is a leading scholar on processes of emotion and compassion in the workplace. She holds bachelor's and master's degrees in communication from Michigan State University, and a doctorate from the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. She is currently a professor at Arizona State University and has also served on the faculties of Michigan State University, University of Kansas, and Texas A&M University. Dr. Miller is the author of four books and more than sixty journal articles and book chapters.



Brief Contents



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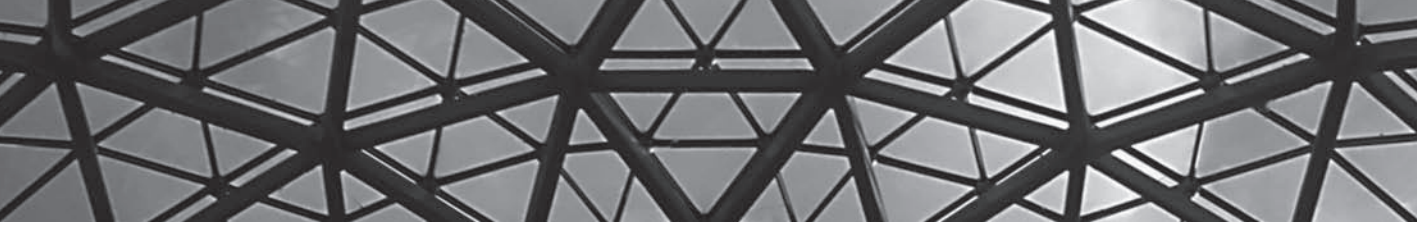

Preface

As I have noted in the previous editions of this book, the "ages" of scholarly fields are notoriously hard to pinpoint. Most would agree, however, that organizational communication has been around for well over six decades. The infancy of the discipline was marked by struggles for survival and nurturance from other disciplines. The discipline's teenage years—the time when I was entering the field—saw a questioning of identity and fights for autonomy. Today, organizational communication has reached a maturity few would have envisioned in the middle of the twentieth century, and the field now encompasses a healthy eclecticism, in that a variety of theoretical approaches provides contrasting accounts of the ways in which communicating and organizing intersect. And this is definitely a good thing, for few would have predicted the changes that have occurred in our world—changes in politics, business, technology, values, the environment. We need a solid but dynamic understanding of organizational communication to cope with this complex and changing world.

This book attempts to reflect the eclectic maturity of the field of organizational communication. When I began writing the first edition of this book almost twenty years ago, my first conceptual decision was not to advocate a particular approach to the field. Instead, I tried to show that both traditional and contemporary perspectives provide potentially illuminating views of organizational communication processes.

For example, a critical theorist, an ethnographer, and a systems researcher may all look at a particular organizational communication phenomenon—say, socialization practices—and see very different things. A systems theorist might see a cybernetic system in which the goal of organizational assimilation is enhanced through a variety of structural and individual communication mechanisms. A cultural researcher might see socialization as a process through which the values and practices of an organizational culture are revealed to—and created by—individuals during organizational entry. A critical theorist might see socialization as a process through which individuals are drawn into hegemonic relationships that reinforce the traditional power structure of the organization.

All these views of the organizational socialization process are limited in that each obscures some aspects of organizational entry. But each view is also illuminating. Thus, early chapters of this book cover a gamut of academic approaches—from classical through human relations and human resources to systems, cultural, and

critical—as lenses through which organizational communication can be viewed. The strengths and weaknesses of each approach are considered, but no particular approach is presented as inherently superior.

My next important choice in writing this book was deciding how to organize the voluminous research literature on organizational communication. At the time I started writing this book, most textbooks had taken a "levels" approach, considering in turn organizational communication at the individual, dyadic, group, and organizational levels. I find this approach frustrating both because there are some things that happen at multiple levels (for example, we make decisions alone, in dyads, and in groups) and because there are processes that are not easily linked to any of these levels. (For example, where does communication technology fit in? At what level do we consider emotion in the workplace?) Thus, the chapters in the second half of this textbook involve a consideration of organizational communication processes.

My goals in the "processes" portion of the book are fourfold. First, I want the processes considered to be up to date in reflecting current concerns of both organizational communication scholars and practitioners. Thus, in addition to looking at traditional concerns, such as decision making and conflict, this textbook highlights communication processes related to cultural and gender diversity, communication technology, organizational change, and emotional approaches to organizational communication. Second, I want to be as comprehensive as possible in describing relevant theory and research on each topic. Thus, each "process" chapter highlights both foundational and current research on organizational communication processes from the fields, including communication, management, industrial psychology, and sociology. Third, I want students to understand that each of these communication processes can be viewed through a variety of theoretical lenses, so I conclude each chapter with a section on the insights of the approaches considered in the first half of the book. Finally, I want readers to realize that organizational communication is a concern to individuals beyond the ivory towers of academia. Thus, I have included many real-world examples both in the discussion of each process and in pedagogical features.

ORGANIZATION OF THE TEXT

This textbook explores the world of organizational communication in terms of both scholarship and application. The majority of chapters consider either approaches that have shaped our beliefs about organizational communication practice and study (Chapters 2–6) or chapters that consider specific organizational communication processes (Chapters 7–13). The first two chapters on "approaches" (Chapters 2–3) both consider prescriptive approaches on how organizational communication should operate (Classical Approaches, Human Relations, and Human Resources Approaches), while the following three approaches chapters (Chapters 4–6) consider contemporary approaches regarding how we can best describe, understand, explain, and critique organizational communication (Systems and Cultural approaches, Constitutive Approaches, and Critical Approaches). When we move on to the "processes" chapters, we first consider enduring processes that have always characterized communication in organizations in Chapters 7 to 10 (Assimilation

Processes, Decision-Making Processes, Conflict Management Processes, and Change and Leadership Processes). Then, in Chapters 11 to 13, we look at emerging processes that have come into play in recent decades (Processes of Emotion in the Workplace, Organizational Diversity Processes, and Technological Processes). These chapters are bracketed by an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) and a concluding chapter (Chapter 14) that put these approaches and processes into context by considering specific challenges in today's world and the ways in which the study of organizational communication can help us deal with these challenges.

Those familiar with this textbook will note a number of changes from the sixth edition, which will enhance student understanding of organizational communication. One major change is a brand new chapter considering constitutive approaches (Chapter 5). Ideas regarding the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) have become increasingly important in our discipline in recent years, and I decided that these developments deserved a chapter-long consideration in this new edition. Chapter 6 has also been revised to consider feminist approaches as distinct from critical theory. In addition, all of the chapters have been updated to include current research and theory, leading to the addition of well over one hundred new references, with particular emphasis on current events and contemporary research conducted by communication scholars. The seventh edition of *Organizational Communication: Approaches and Processes* continues from the first six editions many features that are designed to develop students' abilities to integrate and apply the material. The seventh edition continues to include the "Spotlight on Scholarship" features, highlighting specific research that illustrates concepts considered in the chapter—six spotlights are new to this edition. I have retained other pedagogical features from earlier editions, including explicit links among the "approach" and "process" chapters, learning objectives at the beginning of each chapter, key concepts at the end of the chapters, tables and figures to illustrate key concepts, and case studies to apply conceptual material to real-life organizational communication situations. One of my favorite features of this textbook—the "Case in Point" feature that began in the fourth edition—continues in the seventh edition. One of the most fun tasks during this process of revising the textbook has been discovering and writing about current events that reflect a variety of concerns about organizational communication. There are many new "Case in Point" features in this revision, as well as some from the previous editions with which I couldn't part.

Like earlier editions, this seventh edition is accompanied by an Instructor's Manual, revised by Zachary Hart of Northern Kentucky University, which includes sample syllabi; paper assignments; key terms; chapter outlines; true/false, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank, and essay test items; suggestions for effective use of the case studies; and helpful websites. The Instructor's Manual also includes "Case Study," "Spotlight on Scholarship," and "Case in Point" features from previous editions. This edition also offers predesigned Microsoft PowerPoint presentations, also created by Zachary Hart. These are available on the Instructor Companion Site, which also contains an electronic version of the Instructor's Manual and Cognero Computerized Testing.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

When you are asked to write a textbook, you don't realize the work that will be involved in writing subsequent editions of that textbook. It is challenging to maintain the focus of earlier editions and keep what is foundational yet also provide the needed updates, restructuring, and sprucing up necessary for new groups of students. However, the daunting task of revision can be made relatively painless through the efforts of a great support system. First, the team at Cengage Learning has been helpful throughout the process of revision.

The comments of a number of organizational communication scholars were instrumental in shaping the direction, content, and presentation of this textbook. These include colleagues around the country who commented on the revision project at various stages: Kathy Krone, University of Nebraska-Lincoln; Kurt Lindemann, San Diego State University; Irwin Mallin, Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne; Michael Pagano, Fairfield University; Brian Richardson, University of North Texas; Matt Sanders, Utah State University; and Sandra Starnaman, Adams State University.

I am also grateful to organizational communication scholars for their ongoing research that is of such high quality and importance to real-world problems. As I was working on this revision, I found myself marveling at the development of our discipline's scholarship in a number of journals, but especially *Management Communication Quarterly*. New ideas for the "Case in Point" feature were often garnered from the "Organizational Communication in the News" Facebook page. And I'm happy that Owen Lynch and Zach Schaefer allowed me to adapt their paper (and Owen's experiences) for the Chapter 5 case study.

Finally, my most heartfelt thanks go to my friends and family for providing an environment in which writing this textbook was a pleasurable challenge. My daughter, Kalena Margaret Miller, was born while I was writing the first edition of this textbook. I'm amazed that she is now more than halfway through college—a young woman who continues to love learning and increasingly challenges my ideas with her own experiences and insights. She is a delight and an inspiration. Other family members—Jim, Mary, Barb, Ann, and a host of others—have provided great support and helpful suggestions. And my widespread friends—both real life and Facebook—consistently remind me of the wealth of experiences we all have as we navigate the complexities of organizational communication.

Katherine Miller

The Challenge of Organizational Communication

CHAPTER 1

After Reading This Chapter, You Should …

- Be able to describe how today's world is complicated by globalization, terrorism, climate change, and changing demographics.
- Understand the concept of "requisite variety" and appreciate the need for complex thinking to cope with complex situations.
- See ways in which we can complicate our thinking about organizations both by considering a variety of organizational forms and by viewing organizations that are often paradoxical and contradictory.
- Understand the distinction between a "transmission model" of communication and a "constitutive model" of communication.
- Be familiar with the seven conceptualizations of communication and the ways in which these domains of understanding can change our view of organizational communication.

In March 2013, Facebook reported having 1.11 billion users—approximately one out of seven people around the globe, and clearly a higher proportion in many parts of the world. As these billion-plus users contemplate the possibilities for establishing and updating their personal information on the site, they are met with a variety of possibilities for specifying relational status including single, married, engaged, in an open relationship, divorced, widowed, in a civil union, in a domestic partnership. In the midst of the list of options, one stands out as different from the rest—"it's complicated." That simple statement could be seen as defining much of our twenty-first-century world and our lives within that world. Our relationships are complicated. Our families are complicated. Our work is complicated. Our politics and government are complicated. Our global economy is complicated. Our connections with other nation-states are complicated. Our beliefs about ourselves are complicated.

Nowhere is this complexity more apparent than in a consideration of communication processes or in a consideration of organizations, institutions, and social groupings. There is little doubt that our organizational world is much more complicated than the world of 100 years ago (think of agriculture, increasing industrialization, and the birth of the assembly line) or the world of sixty years ago (think of moving to the suburbs, long-term employment, and *Father Knows Best)* or even twenty-five years ago (think of cross-functional work teams, the early years of the Internet, and the fracturing of the proverbial glass ceiling). Mark Penn (2007) contends that we have moved from the age of Ford, in which you could have a car in "any color, as long as it's black," to the age of Starbucks, in which the variety of beverages available is truly staggering. As advertising campaigns, in-store signs, and the person ordering in front of us constantly remind us, there are thousands of ways to customize a latte or a Frappuccino®. However, this is not to say that past time periods have not taught us a great deal about ways to understand the complexity of our world today or provided us with strategies for coping with the high levels of complexity that confront us. Indeed, on a daily basis, we as individuals, families, organizations, and societies find ways to live productively in this complicated world.

This textbook takes you on a journey of understanding into the complex world of organizational communication and the role of interacting individuals and groups within that world. This journey will involve trips to the past to consider how scholars and practitioners have historically approached issues relevant to organizational communication. It will also involve the consideration of a wide range of processes that make organizations complicated and that help us cope with that complexity. These include processes of socialization, decision making, conflict management, technology, emotion, and diversity.

In this first chapter, however, we will take an initial look at ways in which today's organizational world is complicated. This initial look will be a brief and partial one, but it will introduce some of the ways in which participants in twenty-first-century organizations are confronted with confounding and challenging problems. We will then consider strategies for thinking about the concepts of "organization" and "communication" that will assist us on our journey as we explore approaches and processes in the understanding of organizational communication.

OUR COMPLICATED WORLD

There are myriad ways we could illustrate the complexity of today's world, and as we work our way through this textbook, we will discuss many of the "complicated" issues that confront us. In the last chapter, we will look at how the landscape of organizational communication has changed in recent years and will continue to change in the future. In this chapter, however, we consider four aspects of our world that were barely on the radar several decades ago but that today dominate much of our thinking—and our news coverage. They are globalization, terrorism, climate change, and changing demographics.

Globalization

It has become a truism to state that we now live in a global economy and participate in a global marketplace. As transportation and telecommunication systems improve, our world becomes ever more connected in economic, political, organizational, and personal terms. As one analyst summarized, "welcome to the new global economy: One guy sneezes, and someone else gets a cold" (Bremmer, 2012). The emergence of a global economy was facilitated by key political changes, such as the end of the cold war and the development of the European Union, and it has included the emergence of a variety of institutions to help regulate the global economy, such as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. The **globalization** movement has led to practices such as **outsourcing**, in which businesses move manufacturing and service centers to countries where labor is cheap. In a global economy, many organizations have a multinational or international presence, with employees of a single organization found in many locations worldwide. Furthermore, in a global economy, businesses are no longer centered in a few Western nations but are also spread among nations throughout the developing world.

The complexity of these global interconnections became especially clear during the global recession that began in 2007. As one analytical website summarized: "A collapse of the US sub-prime mortgage market and the reversal of the housing boom in other industrialized economies … had a ripple effect around the world" ("Global Financial Crisis," 2009). Though the United States began to emerge from its recession in 2012 and 2013, European nations took a different tack in responding to the crisis and continued to struggle during that period. And Bremmer (2012) notes that "the economy that should scare us the most right now is the Chinese one. The country is slowing down, and that's precisely because of the halting recovery and weakness in the U.S. and European systems, and the fact that the sputtering has been going on for some time."

Some commentators see globalization as a largely positive—and clearly unstoppable—development. For example, in *The World Is Flat* (2005), Thomas Friedman argues that the global economy offers exciting opportunities for entrepreneurs with the requisite skills. However, many others argue that globalization can lead to problems such as domestic job loss, the exploitation of workers in third-world nations, and environmental problems. Indeed, some scholars have raised important questions about the extent to which models of capitalism developed in the United States should be exported to nations with very different governmental and cultural systems (e.g., Whitley, 2009).

It becomes clear from all sides of the debate that our new world involves complex interconnections between business, political, and cultural systems, and these interconnections make it difficult to fully understand the ramifications of both globalization systems and the proposed means for making globalization "work" effectively. Joseph Stiglitz, who critiques economic institutions associated with globalization in his 2002 book *Globalization and Its Discontents,* noted in 2006 that there is at least hope for dealing with these complex problems. He argues that "while globalization's critics are correct in saying it has been used to push a particular set of values, this need not be so. Globalization does not have to be bad for

the environment, increase inequality, weaken cultural diversity, and advance corporate interests at the expense of the well-being of ordinary citizens" (Stiglitz, 2006, p. xv). More recently, economist Dani Rodrick has argued that it may be necessary to scale back on the "hyperglobalization" that comes from deeply integrated economic systems in order to enhance the goals of national sovereignty and democratic politics.

The field of organizational communication can contribute a great deal to these debates about globalization. The challenges of globalization are not just economic—they also concern messages, relationships, and systems of understanding. Some of the questions that organizational communication scholars now consider in the area of globalization include:

- How can organizational members communicate effectively in the contracted time and space of global markets?
- How can communication be used to enhance understanding in the multicultural workplaces that are a crucial feature of our global economy?
- How can communication processes in business, government, and nongovernmental organizations be used to protect the rights of workers in the United States and abroad?
- How does "organizing" occur in the realm of the political and economic policy debates that are critical to the long-term direction of the global economy?
- How do corporations communicate about the balance between providing goods and services at a price preferred by consumers and providing a safe and economically secure workplace for their employees?

Terrorism

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the world in profound ways. In the years following 9/11, subsequent attacks in London, Madrid, Bali, India, and elsewhere—combined with frequent news stories about attacks that have been thwarted and individuals arrested for planning more attacks—make it clear that **terrorism** will be a watchword in our lives for many years to come. In recent years, terrorism once more hit home for U.S. citizens with the attack on the Libyan consulate in Benghazi on September 11, 2012, and the 2013 bombings at the finish line of the Boston Marathon. As Oliver (2007, p. 19) notes, "in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on 9/11, the conventional wisdom was that 'everything has changed.'" However, as Rosemary O'Kane (2007) points out in her book *Terrorism: A Short History of a Big Idea,* terrorists have been around for many centuries, and terrorism can be perpetrated by individuals, groups, nation-states, and regimes. She notes that terrorism is not a particular ideology but is a set of strategies that involves the use of unpredictable violence against individuals and thus creates ongoing fear and suspicion among large groups of people. The effectiveness of terrorism today can be enhanced both by the wide range of technological tools available to terrorists and by contemporary urban environments that have high concentrations of residents and mass transportation.

Case in Point: Can Tragedy Lead to Change?

On April 24, 2013, more than 900 garment workers were killed in a catastrophic building collapse at a factory in Bangladesh's Rana Plaza. It was the world's worst industrial disaster since the massive gas leak tragedy in Bhopal, India, in 1984. Greenwald and Hirsch (2013) note that the reaction to the factory collapse followed a typical pattern: "News article after news article focuses on finding the smoking gun, as if there were only one cause and as if minus that cause, those workers would be safe today. Or coverage treats these tragedies as natural disasters with a rush of charity before public attention turns to the next event."

Greenwald and Hirsch (2013), however, believe that the tragedy in Bangladesh should be used as an impetus to spur on communication about the global apparel industry. Because corporations outsource a great deal of the labor associated with producing clothing, the cost of apparel has fallen 39% since 1994. Some may see this as a worthy outcome of globalization, but Greenwald and Hirsch ask "to what extent is our demand for a $5 T-shirt or deep discounts on jeans responsible for disasters like this?" They compare the building collapse in Bangladesh to an industrial disaster of a century earlier—the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in New York City in 1911—and note that this fire (in which 146 were killed) has "become a stand-in for the terrible problems of an industrializing nation" and led to collective protests that eventually resulted in important safety codes, regulations, and labor law reforms. Though obviously many things have changed in 100 years, the processes of globalization have led to disturbing similarities: "Our clothes come from places like Rana, where the average work is, as in 1911, a young girl working in terrible conditions for starvation wages" (Greenwald & Hirsch, 2013). Though the issues are complex and implicate issues of economics, local government, and culture, we can only hope that horrible events like this can open up dialogue regarding the moral responsibility of consumers to support workers who toil in the global marketplace.

For individuals and organizations in the post-9/11 world, the implications of terrorism are everywhere but can be especially seen in two widespread areas: the **war on terror** and **homeland security**. Perhaps the most basic concern is for an understanding of how terrorist networks and terrorist organizations are constituted, operate, and grow (Stohl & Stohl, 2007, 2011). Such an understanding would involve a consideration of how terrorist organizations recruit and socialize their members, how terrorist cells make decisions and develop leadership, and how terrorist networks form interconnections through technology and interpersonal contact. But a consideration of the war on terror has also come to encompass military interventions, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, organizational communication scholars must also be cognizant of the complex communication processes involved in military actions and bureaucracy and the complexities of dealing with military personnel and their families during and after their service. The implications of the war on terror for organizational communication also include complex political negotiations with a wide range of government entities and the creation and dissemination of organizational rhetoric to connect institutional goals with public opinion. In the communication discipline, one important direction for research has been led by Steve Corman and his colleagues at the Center for Strategic Communication at Arizona State University. These scholars have

considered the ways in which a narrative approach can be instrumental in understanding issues including Islamist extremism (Halverson, Goodall & Corman, 2011), the war in Afghanistan (Corman, 2013), and counterterrorism and public diplomacy (Corman, Trethewey & Goodall, 2008).

Organizational communication scholars can also respond to the complexities of terrorism through a consideration of homeland security. When Brian Michael Jenkins of the RAND Corporation testified before the Homeland Security Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives on January 30, 2007, he made it clear that homeland security is, at its heart, a problem of organizational communication. He notes:

> Homeland security is not a television show about mysterious government agencies, covert military units, or heroes with fantastic cell phones that summon F-16s. It is an ongoing construction project that builds upon philosophy and strategy to ensure effective organization, establish rules and procedures, deploy new technology, and educate a vast army of federal agents, local police, part-time soldiers, private security guards, first responders, medical personnel, public health officials, and individual citizens. (Jenkins, 2007, p. 1)

For organizational communication scholars, then, critical questions revolve around how to develop communication systems to enhance border security, improve tracking of possible terrorist activities, and develop the ability of first-response organizations—police departments, fire departments, hospitals, military—to act quickly and appropriately in case of terrorist threats or attacks. But organizational communication scholars can go beyond this mandate to consider the role of the individual citizen as he or she encounters this organized effort of homeland security. At times, these questions will concern public relations and crisis communication, as we consider ways in which homeland security issues can be best framed and conveyed to a wide range of people. At other times, these questions will involve how organizations can manage the daily operations of homeland security, such as airport security or the passport application process, in a way that conveys understanding for the frustrations of ordinary citizens. For example, the Spotlight on Scholarship included in Chapter 11 (Malvini Redden, 2013) highlights how standing in airport security lines heightens the emotions of today's travelers. At still other times, organizational communication scholars can contribute by enhancing our understanding of high-level policy debates in which conflicts arise between the need for security and the preservation of civil liberties.

Thus, in terms of the war on terror and in terms of homeland security, our post-9/11 world illustrates the complexity of questions that confront organizational communication scholars and students. These questions include:

- How do terror networks organize, recruit, and socialize members and communicate across time and space?
- What communication systems can and should be put into place to best ensure the security of our borders?
- How can we help prevent our fear of terror from becoming a fear of each other?
- How can we best deliberate policy and make decisions in the changed environment of our post-9/11 world?
- How can communication systems be designed to protect and enhance the well-being of individuals who serve as first responders in the war on terror?

Climate Change

Almost a decade ago, in his bestselling book *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), Al Gore argues that humanity's role in **climate change** is an issue that can no longer be denied and must be addressed by governments, businesses, and individuals. Increasing attention has been drawn by scientific data about upward shifts in overall global temperature, rising sea levels, and extreme weather events. The vast majority of scientists now agree that recent changes in our climate—caused by the phenomenon known as global warming—can be attributed to the activities of individuals and organizations. Marlon, Leiserowitz, and Feinberg (2013) report that 97% of scientific papers on the topic of climate science stated a position that global warming is happening and is—at least in part—caused by human activities. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency explains this in very basic terms:

> Our Earth is warming. Earth's average temperature has risen by 1.4°F over the past century, and is projected to rise another 2 to 11.5°F over the next hundred years. Small changes in the average temperature of the planet can translate to large and potentially dangerous shifts in climate and weather … Humans are largely responsible for recent climate change. Over the past century, human activities have released large amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere … Greenhouse gases act like a blanket around Earth, trapping energy in the atmosphere and causing it to warm. This phenomenon is called the greenhouse effect and is natural and necessary to support life on Earth. However, the buildup of greenhouse gases can change Earth's climate and result in dangerous effects to human health and welfare and to ecosystems. ("Climate Change," Environmental Protection Agency, 2013)

Scientists have already observed widespread effects from climate change. Sea levels are rising, glaciers are shrinking, and permafrost is melting. These changes in the natural environment lead to additional changes in plant and animal life, as growth patterns change in response to shifting environmental conditions. These changes are occurring on land and underwater, as climate change affects vast ecosystems and threatens the survival of some, such as coral reefs. Global warming also influences weather events, such as hurricanes, which gain strength over warmer ocean waters. But these changes are not necessarily consistent across the globe or even predictable. For example, the year 2012 included record winter cold in Europe, record spring heat in the United States, wildfires in Chile, massive flooding in Australia, extreme drought in the U.S. Southwest and parts of South America, torrential rains in China, and Superstorm Sandy in the eastern U.S. coast.

The role of organizational communication in climate change and global warming is widespread. Much of the human contribution to climate change can be traced to factors that began with the Industrial Revolution, such as our systems of energy production, factory manufacturing, and petroleum-fueled transportation. Thus, when searching for ways to reverse or at least slow the process of climate change, these industrial organizations play key roles. Organizational communication is also implicated in the debates about global warming and what to do about it. These debates are global ones because countries such as China and India are rapidly becoming increasingly industrialized, and there are arguments about nations' obligations to reduce greenhouse gases. In all countries, including the United States, debates about the balance between economic opportunity and environmental health

are rife. These debates are further complicated by the gap between scientific and public perceptions regarding climate change. Though scientific opinions regarding climate change are nearly unanimous, almost 60% of the American public report that they either believe climate change is not caused by humans or unsure about the issue (Marlon et al., 2013). Thus, organizational communication is implicated in the representation of ideas about climate change to the general public.

Organizational communication is also important in dealing with many of the effects of global warming, such as the increased incidence of forest fires and extreme weather events. For example, Silverstein (2012) questions whether organizations such as public utilities have the decision-making capability and infrastructure needed to deal with serious disasters such as hurricanes. Finally, addressing global warming and climate change can open up opportunities for businesses that want to raise their level of environmental responsibility and sell themselves as **"green" companies** to consumers. Although there is debate about the extent to which "going green" is a move that businesses should take for the overriding goal of protecting the planet (Marcus & Fremeth, 2009) or only when it can affect the bottom line (Siegel, 2009), it is clear that an increasing number of organizational executives are making decisions about their businesses with environmental considerations in mind.

Thus, the field of organizational communication must be ready to deal with the complex questions that stem from climate change and global warming, including:

- How can organizations reinvent themselves to reduce or eliminate their contributions to global warming?
- How can government representatives engage in productive debate about ways nations can work together to influence climate change?
- How can entrepreneurs address the "greening of organizations" as an opportunity for both profit and social responsibility?
- As climate change increasingly affects local weather events and patterns, how should local, state, national, and international agencies coordinate their activities to cope with the human consequences of global warming?
- How do organizational and government representatives speak to various publics about ways in which energy policy and practices influence the environment?
- How can organizations effectively enhance awareness of the ways in which individuals can make a difference in influencing the process of climate change?

Changing Demographics

Compared to issues like globalization, terrorism, and climate change, the concept of **demographics** sounds pretty tame. Demographics refer to statistical descriptions of characteristics of a population, such as age, race, income, educational attainment, and so on. In one sense, these descriptions are simplistic, but they are also undeniably important. Demographics describe who we are in the most basic of terms and thus can have a foundational impact on how we communicate with each other, how we organize, and how we address critical problems in our social world as well as what those problems are in a given time and place.

The most typical way to think about demographics is to consider distributions of the characteristics of people and to look at those distributions in a comparative sense across either time or location. In the United States, the demographic trends are found through the national census completed each decade and through the tracking of other research centers. Consider a few recent trends, many drawn from results of the 2010 U.S. Census:

- The United States is anticipated to be a "majority minority" nation by 2050. This shift is driven especially by the growth in the Hispanic population, which has been steadily increasing through both immigration and reproduction patterns. By 2050, it is estimated that the Hispanic portion of the U.S. population will grow to as high as 29% ("A Milestone en Route to a Majority Minority," 2012).
- Married couples now constitute less than half of all American households, and only one fifth of households are the traditional image of married couples with children. This pattern marks a sharp contrast to the middle of the twentieth century—in 1950, 78% of households included married couples and 43% of households were traditional nuclear families ("Married Couples Are No Longer a Majority," 2011). Interestingly, though, U.S. household size has grown because of the increase in multigenerational households ("Census 2010: Household Size Trends," 2011).
- The rural U.S. population is now the lowest it has ever been—16% now compared to 72% a century ago. In contrast, a third of Americans live in cities and over half of Americans live in suburbs. The fastest-growing places in America are small cities in the suburbs of large metro areas in the Sunbelt region ("Rural U.S. population lowest in history," 2011).
- In 1930, 5.4% of the U.S. population was 65 years or older; by 2007, the number more than doubled to 12.6% of the population. It is anticipated that by the year 2050, more than 20% of the U.S. population will be 65 or older ("Statistics on Aging," Administration on Aging, 2007).

In terms of sheer description, then, the United States is a dramatically different place than it was in decades past, and these different descriptors of who we are, where we live, who we live with, and how long we live lead to dramatically different experiences as we encounter organizations and communicate in them. For example, consider the issue of age. Scholars often divide populations into **generational cohorts** that indicate similarities in birth year and associated similarities in experience (Schuman & Scott, 1989). Thus, my mother's experiences as a member of the "World War II Cohort" are very different from mine as a member of the "Late Baby Boomer Cohort" or my daughter's as a member of the "Millennial Cohort." In terms of work experience, members of the World War II Cohort are known for dependability, long-term employment, and relationships with organized labor. Members of my cohort are known for their ambition but also their cynicism. Members of my daughter's generation are coming to be known as technologically savvy but also a bit spoiled in the ways of work. Clearly, a similar demographic analysis could be applied to ethnicity, family structure, social class, or household location.