ResearchGate

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/262276148

Dyadic Communication Relationships in Organizations: An Attribution/Expectancy Approach

Article *in* Organization Science · November 2000

DOI: 10.1287/orsc.11.6.648.12537

CITATIONS
109

READS
2,429

2 authors, including:

J. Michael Crant
University of Notre Dame
33 PUBLICATIONS **8,553** CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

All content following this page was uploaded by J. Michael Crant on 20 November 2014.

The user has requested enhancement of the downloaded file.

Dyadic Communication Relationships in Organizations: An Attribution/ Expectancy Approach

Bruce Barry • J. Michael Crant
Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, 401 21st Avenue South, Nashville, Tennessee 37203, bruce.barry@owen.vanderbilt.edu
Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Indiana 46556, crant.1@nd.edu

Abstract

Research in organizational communication has examined the structure and content of interaction, but has paid little attention to research traditions outside the organizational sciences that explore the social-psychological interconnections between relationship development and interaction. In this paper we draw upon and extend those traditions to develop a model of how communication relationships develop within organizational dyads. The proposed model examines organization-based communication relationships through a synthesis of theoretical perspectives on communication richness, relational communication, interpersonal attribution, and social expectancy. We also call upon precepts of structuration theory to embed these microlevel processes in an organizational context.

The relational outcome in the model is "interactional richness," a dyad-level construct that assesses the extent to which communication within the dyad is high in shared meaning. Model antecedents are aspects of interaction through which communicators reciprocally define their relationships, including relational message properties, message patterns that emerge over time, and relational perceptions. We propose that these communication properties and behaviors give rise to relationship attributions. We then incorporate processes of expectancy confirmation and violation to explain how specific communication encounters lead individuals to reformulate attributions regarding the status of a given relationship. Research propositions articulate how attribution/expectancy processes mediate between relational communication behavior and relationship development outcomes. We also develop propositions addressing how relational communication behavior is influenced by macrolevel factors, including hierarchy, structure, and culture.

In a concluding section we discuss the model's potential contribution to research and practice, address its limitations, and offer recommendations for future research aimed at testing its embedded hypotheses.

(*Relationships*; *Communication*; *Attribution*; *Richness*)

It has long been recognized that managers spend a large amount of their time engaged in communication activities (e.g., Mintzberg 1973), and many believe that successful managers can be distinguished from less successful managers largely by their communication behavior (e.g., Luthans et al. 1985). Researchers exploring the processes by which organizational members communicate interpersonally have addressed both the structure and content of interaction, although typically as distinct lines of inquiry. Some examine organizational factors that underlie information sharing, and consider the patterns of communication and organizationally relevant outcomes that ensue. An example is information richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1984, 1986), which predicts that organizational success is related to the use of communication channels that are appropriate for a given task's information-processing requirements. Other approaches to organizational communication are message centered, favoring an emphasis on the substance of information exchange over attention to the channels through which it occurs (see Stohl and Redding 1987, and Seibold et al. 1994, for reviews).

We focus in this paper on a critical aspect of communication in organizational contexts that existing perspectives have largely ignored: the social-cognitive dynamics of ongoing interpersonal relationships that actors bring to and define within dyadic interaction. For example, how might the way a boss and subordinate perceive and make sense of their relationship affect their work-related interactions, such as problem-solving meetings or performance appraisal sessions? What social (e.g., previous encounters) and cognitive (e.g., attributions of motives) variables and processes determine these perceptions of workplace relationships, and how are these processes and perceptions related to the quality of interaction that ensues? How are these dynamics shaped by macrolevel

1047-7039/00/1106/0648/$05.00
1526-5455 electronic ISSN

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

features of the organizational context, such as structure and culture?

Theoretical and empirical studies of the communication aspects of interpersonal relationships are widely undertaken by communication theorists (e.g., Burgoon et al. 1987, Millar and Rogers 1987) and social psychologists (e.g., Berscheid et al. 1989, Duck and Pittman 1994). Management researchers have examined narrow issues of relational exchange between leaders and followers (e.g., Graen et al. 1982), and there is limited evidence that workplace friendships are related to work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Winstead et al. 1995). However, relationship dynamics have not been treated as a central feature within conceptualizations of organizational communication, although a surge of research interest in this area is evident (e.g., Chang and Holt 1996, Greenhalgh and Chapman 1995, Jehn and Shah 1994, King and Hinson 1994)

Our specific objective is to propose a model of how dyadic relationships develop within organizational contexts, and ultimately demonstrate why communications vary in efficiency and effectiveness based on perceptions of the nature and depth of the relationship between the parties over time. Our approach is integrative in the sense that it brings together disparate but related theoretical perspectives on social interaction, namely communication richness (e.g., Daft and Lengel 1986), relational communication (e.g., Stohl and Redding 1987), interpersonal attribution (e.g., Fletcher and Fincham 1991), and social expectancy (e.g., Jones 1990). Much has been empirically uncovered and written about the psychology of close relationships in everyday life, but virtually none of this work has been brought to bear on the special case of organizationally bound relationships. In the pages that follow, we describe the contribution of these perspectives to our approach to relationship dynamics in organizational dyads, and develop propositions identifying factors that contribute to relational development. The paper concludes with a discussion of the implications of our analysis for research and practice.

A Model of Relational Development

A framework that outlines social-cognitive determinants of relational development appears in Figure 1. Our approach is informed by several distinct theoretical perspectives on interpersonal behavior. First, the *interactional richness* construct, shown in the figure as the outcome of relational development, is an adaptation and extension of theories of information richness (Daft and Lengel 1984) and media richness (Sitkin et al. 1992). Second, antecedents on the left side of the model reflect the interplay between interaction and cognition that is the hallmark of relational communication theory (e.g., Bateson 1972, Burgoon and Hale 1984, 1987; Montgomery 1992, Rogers and Millar 1988). Third, in the center of the figure we invoke principles of social attribution (Heider 1958) to analyze how dyad members interpret and respond to the motivations of interaction partners. Fourth, we incorporate the perspective of social expectancy theory (e.g., Jones 1990), which focuses on how interaction patterns confirm or violate an individual's prior expectations. Expectancy processes are included as moderators that define the conditions under which relational patterns and attributions will influence the development of communication relationships. Finally, adopting the perspective of structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984), we analyze macrolevel aspects of the organizational context that may influence the social-cognitive processes that lead to interactional richness.

Rousseau (1985) argued that theory about organizational processes must explicitly address the role of level of analysis, in part because organizational phenomena require more emphasis on multilevel research. Our framework takes a meso-level approach (Capelli and Sherer 1991) toward describing the processes that ultimately lead to interactional richness. The ultimate outcome of the model, interactional richness, is a property of a dyadic relationship. However, like many organizational phenomena, to fully understand its determinants requires moving beyond one particular unit of analysis (the dyad) and incorporating contextual variables. Our framework points toward a multilevel, complex process leading toward interactional richness. Its determinants come from both interpersonal and contextual variables, and from individual, dyadic, and organizational levels of analysis. Thus, the framework and the discussion that follows will incorporate both micro and macro processes.

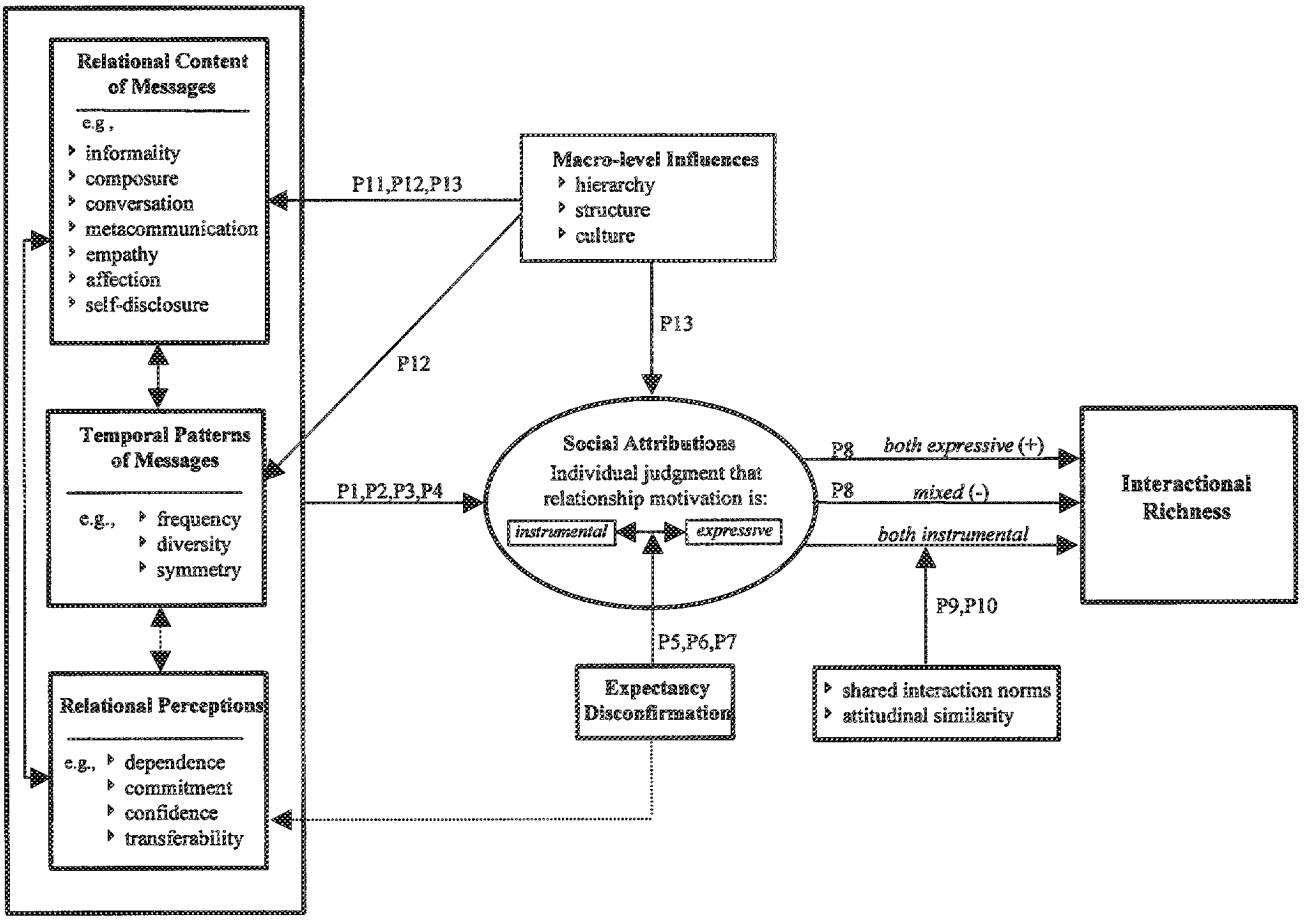
In the following sections, we discuss each of the elements of the framework, beginning with the interactional richness construct.

Richness Theory and The Interactional Richness Construct

As originally formulated, information richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1984, 1986) described the linkages between organizational context, the information-carrying capacity of data, and managerial communication behavior. A communication event is relatively "rich" when the act of communication provides substantial new understanding. Just as information can be more or less rich, so too can the communication channels through which information is exchanged be compared on a richness continuum. A hierarchy of media richness ranks communication channels on the basis of feedback potential,

Copyright © 2001: All rights reserved.

Figure 1 The Determinants of Interactional Richness



the variety of cues that can be transmitted, the (im)personality of the message, and the extent of language variety. Face-to-face communication is the richest medium because of its immediate feedback, combination of audio and visual channels, potential for personal messages, and variety of linguistic forms. Put a different way, the face-to-face medium has the highest level of "carrying capacity," i.e., the best potential for transmitting information that is high in richness. Telephone communication is next highest on the richness continuum, followed by personal written messages (e.g., letters and memos), formal written messages (e.g., bulletins and reports), and finally numeric documents (e.g., computer output and statistical reports). It has been suggested that the richness of electronic mail falls between telephone and written communication (Daft and Lengel 1986, Trevino et al. 1990, Trevino et al. 1987), although Schmitz and Fulk (1991) presented evidence that electronic mail is lower on the richness continuum.

Central to richness theory is a matching hypothesis, which holds that information richness varies positively with the complexity and equivocality of organizational issues; thus, managers will employ rich media in response to complex and changing circumstances—to cope with uncertainty. Less rich, or "lean" media (Trevino et al. 1990) are more appropriately employed in response to well-understood issues where rapid feedback and high-variety information cues are less essential. An extension of the matching hypothesis is the notion of media sensitivity: Managers who select media that match the richness hypothesis (media-sensitive managers) are presumed to perform better than media-insensitive managers (Daft et al. 1987). Empirical support for these predictions of richness theory has been mixed (see Fulk and Boyd 1991 and Markus 1994 for reviews). There is some evidence to support the notion that communicators choose media in accord with the level of ambiguity of the communication event (e.g., Russ et al. 1990, Trevino et al. 1987), and that doing so is related to managerial performance (Daft et al. 1987, Rice 1992).[1] Other research studies raise

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

doubts about the richness hypothesis, particularly in connection with "new" media such as electronic mail (Markus 1988, Rice and Shook 1990).

The critical element of richness theory for the present analysis is "carrying capacity"—the idea that communication acts and channels vary according to their ability to transmit information that enhances understanding (Daft and Lengel 1984) or conveys symbolic meaning (Trevino et al. 1987). We argue that beyond information and media, the notion of carrying capacity can be extended to capture the dynamics of a developing communication relationship. Just as "information richness" describes the informational depth of transmitted *data*, and "media richness" describes the information- and symbol-carrying capacity of a communication *channel*, a dyadic communication *relationship* may likewise be described in terms of the "richness" of informational flow between individuals.[2] As communication relationships develop and social distance decreases, it follows that individuals within the dyad communicate more expertly and efficiently—saying and meaning more, with more accurate reception and comprehension, using fewer words and symbols. This expertise and efficiency marks dyadic interaction as high in informational and symbolic content; hence the dyad itself is "interactionally rich."

In addition to communication *efficiency*, interactional richness may also reflect *coordination* within the dyad. Research by Bernieri and his colleagues (e.g., Bernieri et al. 1994) examining the coordination of movement within social interaction—known as "interactional synchrony"—suggests that coordination is a basic element of interpersonal rapport between two communication partners. Like rapport, interactional richness is an emergent social property at the dyad level of analysis that is determined by intradyadic processes of interaction and social perception. It is not some general notion of relational *closeness* (e.g., Berscheid et al. 1989) per se that defines interactional richness; rather, we have in mind the evolution of shared systems of meaning through prior experience, communication behavior, and the development of appropriate social-cognitive structures (e.g., relationally relevant perceptions, norms, attributions, and expectancies).

The notion of shared meaning as an important feature of relational development has been cultivated by scholars who examine close relationships involving friends and intimates. Reviewing relevant empirical studies, Duck (1994) observed that "everyday talk manifests differences in the meanings and understandings that are shared. . . .people are organizing and giving meaning to relationships by dealing with the variabilities that confront them across time in dealing with their partners" (p. 55). For organization-based relationships, we present "interactional richness" as a measurable dyad-level construct that rates not the global intensity of the relationship itself, but rather the extent to which communication within the dyad is high in shared meaning. We define the construct formally as *the extent to which communication within an interacting dyad at a given point in time is efficient (high in symbolic content), coordinated (characterized by synchronous interaction), and accurate (symbolic meaning is shared and appropriately interpreted).* Interactional richness is a characteristic of the relationship itself that is derived from the pattern of interpersonal experiences and communication characteristics that unfold over time.

Antecedents of Relational Development

Within the relational communication perspective, communication is a negotiated process through which communicators reciprocally define their interpersonal relationships (Stohl and Redding 1987). Relational communication theorists thus regard messages and relationships as interwoven (Millar and Rogers 1987, Montgomery 1992). Messages convey not only referential meaning, but also relational meaning through which individuals interpret their relationships (Fairhurst et al. 1987). Within Figure 1, research on relational communication contributes behavioral and perceptual precursors of relationship development, including (a) the relational content of specific messages exchanged within the dyad, (b) patterns of messages that emerge over time and across communication encounters, and (c) perceptions by dyad members regarding the status of the nascent relationship.

Relational Content of Messages. Relational message properties are attributes of dyadic messages that define and signal the progress of relational development. Relational messages "indicate how two or more people regard each other, regard their relationship, or regard themselves within the context of their relationship" (Burgoon and Hale 1984, p. 193). Properties of relational messages are distinct continua along which relational communication can be classified. Consistent with social penetration theory (Taylor and Altman 1987) and with Gabarro's (1978, 1990) model of working relationships, we assume that relational communication evolves from superficial to deeper levels as the affiliation develops. Over time, interactants move from tentative, exploratory forms of communication through stages where individuals exercise less caution, reveal more personality, become more friendly and casual, and eventually come to predict and interpret each other's behavior rapidly and accurately, with sensitivity to nuance.

Relational communication research provides a number

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

of measureable constructs addressing the relational content of exchanged messages; we cite some examples here and in Figure 1. *Informality* refers to the verbal tone of exchanged messages, ranging from formal or decorous at one extreme to informal or casual on the other (Burgoon and Hale 1987). *Composure* describes the extent to which messages are imbued with (or lack) signs of apprehension, anxiety, or worry about the communication encounter (Burgoon and Hale 1987). *Conversation* is a measure of the volume of extraneous information, or "small talk," beyond purposive message content related to the actual purpose of the communication encounter (Miller and Steinberg 1975). *Metacommunication* refers generally to messages that have impact on how other messages are interpreted (Montgomery 1988). More narrowly, it is "talk about talk"—the extent to which the exchange of messages includes explicit remarks about other messages contained in the conversation (e.g., remarks about the tone or meaning of purposive messages) (Gottman 1979). *Empathy* is operationalized as the extent to which communication conveys emotional sensitivity and reflects accurate other-person perception (Buck 1989, Miller and Steinberg 1975). *Affection* is the extent to which messages include explicit expressions of liking and attraction to the other dyad member (Burgoon and Hale 1987, Hinde 1979). *Self-disclosure* refers to the volume of information that is communicated to which the other party would not otherwise have access (Greenhalgh and Chapman 1993, Miller and Steinberg 1975). As relational attributes of messages, these features specify how organizational actors interpret and define their interpersonal relationship.

Temporal Message Patterns. Beyond the specific, measurable attributes of individual messages, relational development may also be analyzed in terms of aggregations of messages and exchanges that take place over time and across communication events (Werner and Baxter 1994). Such attributes take the form of emergent properties that result from repeated interaction involving a given dyad. Construct definitions of temporal properties have been articulated by researchers studying close relationships (Berscheid et al. 1989), who regard them as defining characteristics of intimate associations, as well as by relational communication theorists (e.g., Millar and Rogers 1987), and researchers examining social comparison processes (e.g., Erickson 1988). Gabarro (1990) applied temporal issues to workplace dyads, arguing that working relationships proceed through four stages: orientation, exploration, testing, and stabilization. A key advantage of developmental approaches is the ability to analyze emerging relationship norms and routines, which over time accumulate and can become difficult to disentangle or change.

Operationalizable examples of temporal patterns drawn from these research perspectives include *frequency*—a measure of how often interaction within the dyad takes place; *diversity*—the variety of subjects that is the basis for exchanges within the dyad over time; and *symmetry*—an assessment of the degree to which the mechanisms of exchanges and distribution of communication outcomes are balanced. rather than skewed, between dyad members. Relationship development is facilitated to the extent that dyad members interact often, communicate on a variety of subjects, possess reasonably equivalent access to whatever communication methods are employed, and experience outcomes of interaction that do not notably favor one dyad member over the other.

Relational Perceptions. Basic to our approach is the role of social perceptions within a developing communication relationship. The study of social perceptions in dyadic contexts crosses the disciplinary boundaries of sociology, social psychology, and communication theory. Perception-centered approaches to social interaction assume that individuals treat others as they perceive them, not as they really are (Jones 1990). Of special interest here is the relational perception—cognitive appraisals by individual dyad members regarding the status and quality of the interpersonal relationship between dyad members. Relational perceptions are products of one's perceived social environment, and form the basis for decisions regarding whether or not to participate in social situations, evaluations of others within those situations, and choices regarding communication strategy (Miller et al. 1994).

In Figure 1, we identify four interpersonal perception exemplars that contribute to and are determined by relational messages and patterns. *Dependence* is an individual's perception regarding the relative dependence of self on the other dyad member compared with the dependence of the other on self (Emerson 1962, Burgoon and Hale 1987). This perceived dependence is, naturally, influenced by the broader climate of power and authority relations in the organization within which a particular dyadic relationship is embedded. *Commitment* is an individual's judgment regarding his or her level of psychological attachment to the other person and intention to maintain the dyadic relationship (e.g., Rusbult 1980). *Confidence* is the perception that the other party will not betray one's trust in future interaction (Burgoon and Hale 1987, Millar and Rogers 1987). *Transferability* is the perception that alternative relationships are available, mitigating the potential for exploitation within this affiliation (Millar and Rogers 1987). Thus, relational development

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

is influenced by the extent to which dyad members perceive equal levels of dependence, high levels of commitment, high levels of confidence in the trustworthiness of the other party, and the existence of few readily available alternative relationships.

Interrelationships Among Antecedents. Consistent with the view that relational development entails "interlocked cycles of messages, continually negotiated and codefined" (Millar and Rogers 1987, p. 118), Figure 1 includes reciprocal linkages among the three antecedent categories. Relational messages are presumed to give rise over time to temporal patterns that signal closer affiliation; by the same token, the development of these patterns over time increases the volume of relational message content within subsequent individual exchanges. The conceptual link that ties message content and patterns with relational perceptions is based on an uncertainty reduction principle. Relational messages that are informative about the status of the relationship—such as conversation and metacommunication—should have an uncertainty-reducing impact (see Berger 1988 for a review). Accordingly, exchanges endowed with relational content may yield positive relational perceptions. Over time, communication patterns accelerate relationship development through uncertainty reduction as dyad members communicate more often (frequency), more equitably (symmetry), and over a wider range of subjects (diversity). Reciprocally, relational content and temporal patterns are influenced by developing relational perceptions. As perceptions become more positive, incentives to imbue messages with relational content are created. These perceptions should also elicit changes in the temporal patterns of exchange, i.e., create incentives and opportunities for communication that is more frequent and more diverse in subject matter.

Social Attribution Processes in Organizational Relationships

In the center of Figure 1, attributions of motivation for participating in and maintaining the relationship mediate between relational antecedents and the development of interactional richness within a given dyad. Attribution theory emerged from Heider's (1958) insight that people are intuitive psychologists who perceive the causes of others' behavior. Antecedents and consequences of causal attributions have long been of interest to researchers studying interpersonal relationships. We argue that social attribution processes are central to understanding the conditions under which relational communication behavior translates into relational development.

Research suggests that causal attributions are ubiquitous; people make causal attributions regarding both their own behavior and that of others (Nisbett and Valins 1971). Information, beliefs, and motivation are the primary inputs to the attribution process (see Kelley and Michela 1980 for a review). As information about people and events is obtained, the attributor relies on his or her belief system to explain the reasons behind stimuli. A number of studies provide insight into the conditions under which one is motivated to attribute causality. For example, attributional reasoning is invoked when one encounters unexpected events or fails to attain a goal (Weiner 1985), when people perceive dependence on another person for both positive and negative outcomes (Hastie 1984), and when one anticipates future interaction with another person (Berscheid et al. 1976).

Classical attribution theory assumes a basic distinction between causal factors that are located within the perceiver—*internal* attributions—and factors that are based in the perceiver's environment—*external* attributions (Heider 1958). In dyadic communication, an internal attribution places the locus of responsibility for an interaction partner's verbal or nonverbal behavior within the partner's stable disposition or attitude set (e.g., the boss was forgiving about my mistake because he/she believes in the value of taking risks and learning from errors), while an external attribution traces the behavior to an ephemeral, situationally specific cause (e.g., the boss was forgiving because he/she knows that at the moment I'm considering leaving the organization for a new opportunity).

The psychological literature on close relationships provides substantial evidence that interacting dyads trigger the causal attribution process as messages of varying relational content are exchanged over time, and relational perceptions emerge (for a review see Fletcher and Fincham 1991). This sequence of events elicits attributional reasoning, particularly as multiple communication events unfold (Kelley 1973). Discussing intimate relationships, Newman (1981) coined the term "interpersonal attribution" to conceptualize the attribution processes of individuals in dyadic contexts. She argued that attributions in dyadic relationships must move beyond traditional dispositional/situational categories toward each party and account for behavior with respect to interactive patterns occurring between the two persons in the relationship. Howe (1987) provided evidence that interpersonal attributions are distinct from—and more complex than—attributions to internal or external causes.

Thus classical attribution theory has offered substantial contributions to understanding the causal reasoning of parties within intimate relationships; it may, however, be incomplete as a framework for understanding such reasoning in workplace relationships. This is because intimate relationships derive primarily from the strength of

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

emotional or expressive interpersonal ties between dyad members. Relationships among organization members may well feature such ties (e.g., Winstead et al. 1995), but also commonly revolve around instrumental exchange in an economic sense. Put a different way, if there is no intimacy, an intimate relationship scarcely exists. A workplace relationship, on the other hand, may be quite well-developed in the absence of intimacy because of the instrumental value of the relationship for the fulfillment of organizational roles and objectives.

We propose, therefore, that relationship attributions in organizational dyads may also be characterized along a dimension contrasting *expressive* and *instrumental* attributions. These interpersonal attributions explain an interaction partner's communication behavior in terms of perceptions of the parties' motivation for maintaining the relationship. Expressive attributions refer to beliefs that the relationship exists primarily because the parties derive emotional satisfaction from it; instrumental attributions are made when the parties are seen as motivated to maintain the relationship to fulfill role demands, meet organizational obligations, or otherwise make progress toward organizationally relevant goals. Variations on this distinction are common to a number of literatures, including the social network contrast between expressive and instrumental ties (e.g., Ibarra 1993), social psychological references to exchange vs. communal relations (Mills and Clark 1994) and intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations (Amabile et al. 1994), the distinction in sociology between *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* relations (e.g., Marwell and Hage 1970), and discussions of working vs. social relationships (Gabarro 1978).[3] Consistent with Newman's (1981) ideas about interpersonal attribution, we argue for the existence of expressive and instrumental attributions about the (aggregated) relationship rather than separate attributions regarding self and other party.

Communication Determinants of Relationship Attributions. A common assumption in the attribution literature is that an individual's attributions will affect his or her subsequent actions (e.g., Heider 1958, Kelley 1973), yielding a variety of cognitive and behavioral outcomes. For example, attributing causes to actors rather than situations affects liking for the actor, trust, and perceptions of the actor's persuasiveness (Kelley and Michela 1980) as well as conflict resolution and dysfunctional relationship behavior (Bradbury and Fincham 1992). Attributions appear to mediate behavior and affective reactions by influencing our feelings about past events, our expectations for future events, and our attitudes toward others (Kelley and Michela 1980). Thus, relational messages, patterns, and perceptions should contribute to the formation of attributions that the relationship is expressively motivated, and diminish the likelihood of instrumental attributions.

PROPOSITION 1. *The extent of relational message content (e.g., informality, composure, conversation, empathy, affection, self-disclosure, and metacommunication) is positively associated with the formation of expressive attributions, and negatively associated with the formation of instrumental attributions.*

PROPOSITION 2. *Temporal patterns of communication that signal relational development (e.g., frequency, diversity, and symmetry) are positively associated with the formation of expressive attributions, and negatively associated with the formation of instrumental attributions.*

PROPOSITION 3. *Favorable relational perceptions (e.g., dependence, commitment, confidence, and transferability) are positively associated with the formation of expressive attributions, and negatively associated with the formation of instrumental attributions.*

Thus far, we have treated expressive and instrumental motivations as mutually exclusive. Such a conceptualization is consistent with Clark and Mills' (1993) views on communal and exchange relationships, whereby people are presumed to be motivated at any single point in time by only one factor. In contrast, other theoretical traditions consider the case where constructs similar to our expressive/instrumental distinction coexist. For example, Amabile et al. (1994) found that intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are orthogonal, and one can be dually motivated by both. Ibarra (1993) made a similar point about network relationships, arguing that some network relationships can be both instrumental and expressive. In the case of developing communication relationships, a mixed pattern of relational content and temporal patterns may lead a communicant to attribute both expressive and instrumental motives to the interpersonal relationship. In such a situation, we believe that expressive motivations will dominate subsequent behavior. This view is consistent with Mills and Clark's (1982) argument that, for most people, their communal relationships—those based on a concern for the other party's needs rather than on a quid pro quo arrangement—are the relationships that are most important to them. Thus,

PROPOSITION 4. *Mixed patterns of relational message content, temporal patterns of communication, and relational perceptions will be associated with the formation of both expressive and instrumental attributions. In this case, expressive attributions will be determinative.*

Attributional Shifts: The Role of Expectancies.

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

Propositions 1—4 are static in the sense that they treat attributions as more or less likely to be formed at a given point in time depending, in part, on the structure of interaction that has taken place between the parties up to that point. Of course, relationships are not static; indeed, at the foundation of the present analysis is a set of assumptions about the development of communication linkages based on dynamic exchanges between dyad members. Even a relationship that we might regard as "stable" may still exhibit considerable change around a basic fulcrum of exchange (Dindia and Canary 1993). As relationships evolve over time, attributions reflect shifts in a perceiver's judgments about the other party and about the relationship. In our model, processes of social expectancy confirmation and disconfirmation form the basis for understanding how these shifts influence relationship development.

As defined by attribution theorists, expectancies are judgments and predictions about the behavior of others and the social context within which that behavior occurs (Jones 1990, Trope 1986). Expectancies are part of the cognitive net of perceptions and schemas through which interactants filter their interpretation of and response to each other's actions (Darley and Fazio 1980, Reis and Shaver 1988). Violations of social expectancies (i.e., disconfirmations) trigger cognitive evaluation processes that prompt explanation-seeking (Planalp and Rivers 1994) and influence subsequent information-processing, perceptions, and behavior (Burgoon and LePoire 1993). Given a preexisting dyadic relationship, individuals come to a communication encounter with expectations regarding the nature of the relationship and the appropriate tenor of interaction in light of that relationship (e.g., Miller and Steinberg 1975). The behavior that actually occurs will either confirm or violate those prior expectations.

Disconfirmed expectancies lead individuals to reinterpret the origins of perceptions and behavior that were behind the original expectancy. For example, in the realm of attitude change, when a listener hears a communicator adopt an unexpected position, the listener revises his or her explanation for the communicator's message (Eagly and Chaiken 1993). In close relationships, causal attributions are presumed to vary depending on the consistency or inconsistency of behaviors with expectations based on the status of the relationship (Fletcher and Fincham 1991). Accordingly, in the present framework, expectancy violations are the mechanism by which attributional shifts regarding the parties' motivation to maintain the relationship occur. For example, an individual who regards a particular dyadic relationship as instrumentally motivated will harbor certain expectations about the nature of relational communication within the dyad (e.g., messages low in informality, empathy, and affection, with low diversity and symmetry over time). An attributional shift (e.g., from instrumental to expressive) is triggered when the interaction partner engages in communication activity that violates those expectations.

For example, an auditing partner in an accounting firm may view his or her relationship with a partner from the consulting side of the business as being instrumentally motivated. This partner would expect most contact to occur through formal, infrequent communications containing very little self-disclosure, such as brief memorandums describing specific business issues. As the consulting partner begins to initiate more frequent, informal communication revealing more personal information (such as engaging in regular hallway conversations about family-related issues), the auditing partner's expectations will change regarding the communication relationship. This shift in expectations will be away from attributions of instrumental motivation and toward attributions of expressive motivation. Thus,

PROPOSITION 5. *Individuals adjust their attributions regarding the motivational basis for the relationship when relational messages and patterns disconfirm an expectancy about the relationship.*

But will expectancy disconfirmations always lead to attributional shifts? We argued above that adjustments to attributions about motivations for maintaining the relationship result when expectancies regarding the relationship are violated. But it is also the case that expectancies often persist even in the presence of disconfirming information (Darley and Fazio 1980). We offer two lines of argument addressing the circumstances under which attribution shifts are more or less likely to occur.

First, the persistence of expectancies is expected to be a function of the internal versus external locus of causation an individual assigns to communication behavior that violates those expectancies. Assume, for example, that person A is motivated expressively to maintain ties with person B, and believes that B is similarly motivated. If a particular communication from B runs counter to that belief—i.e., disconfirms A's social expectancies—then A may be inclined to alter his/her perception of the parties' motivation to maintain the relationship. According to classical attribution theory, A may perceive B's behavior as resulting from transient, context-specific causes originating within the person's environment (an external attribution), or may judge B's behavior as contextually nonspecific and originating within the person (an internal attribution). Internal attributions reflect judgments that the other party's behavior is intentional and stable rather

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

than a product of fleeting situational conditions. Accordingly, an internal attribution in response to behavior that is inconsistent with prior expectations is more likely to precipitate a change in the perceiver's view of the overall relationship than an external attribution in response to inconsistent behavior. Thus,

PROPOSITION 6. *A perceiver's attributions about the other party's motivation (instrumental vs. expressive) to maintain a dyadic relationship are more likely to shift when disconfirming communication behavior by the other party is attributed to internal rather than external causes.*

Second, preexisting relationship dynamics (i.e., the strength of dyadic ties in advance of a given communication encounter) may influence the persistence of interpersonal expectancies. We are unaware of research that directly addresses this issue, but offer indirect reasoning in support of a prediction about the persistence of expectancies. Assume first that organization members are typically motivated to maintain positive social ties with other organization members. It follows that expectancies will be more persistent (less prone to disconfirmation) when followed by an encounter that weakens social ties, and less persistent (more susceptible to disconfirmation) when followed by an encounter that unexpectedly strengthens social ties. Put another way, disconfirming information has greater impact when it signals a closer relationship than the perceiver originally thought, but less impact when it signals a more distant relationship. Thus,

PROPOSITION 7A. *The effect of disconfirmation on attributions and relational perceptions is greater when disconfirming information indicates that the relationship is more expressively motivated that expected.*

PROPOSITION 7B. *Expectancies are more persistent (and disconfirmations less influential) when disconfirming information indicates that the relationship is more instrumentally motivated than expected.*

Predicting Levels of Interactional Richness

Our framework takes the process of social attribution to a dyadic level of analysis, treating the match or mismatch between attributions made by parties to the relationship as determinative. Psychodynamic approaches to intimacy treat close relationships as "a collaboration in which both partners reveal themselves, and seek and express validation of each other's attributes and world views" (Reis and Shaver 1988, p. 369). The extent to which people hold similar attributions for an event has been studied in a variety of contexts, such as actor-observer biases (Bradley 1978), attributions for conflict in close relationships (Fincham and Bradbury 1987, Prager 1989), and leader-member attributional differences (Bitter and Gardner 1995). For example, one study found that satisfaction with a dyadic relationship was a function of similarity of attributions for role performance (Schaffer and Keith 1984). Among married dyads, experimental and longitudinal data indicate that attributions influence marital satisfaction and judgments of relationship quality (Bradbury and Fincham 1990).

Consistent with this reasoning, we hypothesize that convergence or divergence of instrumental or expressive attributions within the dyad influences relationship development. Three scenarios are possible: (a) both parties will make expressive attributions; (b) attributions will diverge, with one party viewing the relationship as expressively motivated, and the other party viewing the relationship as instrumentally motivated; or (c) both parties will make instrumental attributions. We expect that the potential for interactional richness is maximized when both parties make expressive attributions. In such cases, relational communication exists in good measure, and both parties share a common motivational orientation that welcomes further interaction of a personal nature.

The potential for interactional richness is weakest under the second scenario, where one party views the relationship primarily in expressive terms, and the other primarily in instrumental terms. In this situation, one party, but not the other, may be inclined to expand the use of relational communication. The result is a greater chance of mismatch in expectations, norms, and judgments regarding the relationship—a state of affairs that is inconsistent with the development of an affiliation built on shared systems of communicated meaning. Thus,

PROPOSITION 8. *Interactional richness within a dyad is highest when both parties form expressive attributions about the relationship, and lowest when parties diverge in their attributions.*

Under the third scenario, agreement that the relationship is instrumentally motivated still allows for shared meaning systems, albeit on less personal levels. Dyad members may find such a relationship to be entirely satisfactory, with intensification of relational communication not anticipated. In practical terms, when both dyad members judge the motivational basis for the relationship to be instrumental, the possibility exists that both will perceive the relationship in similar ways and generally obey common rules of interaction, even if underlying attitudes and values remain independent. Accordingly, the potential for interactional richness is uncertain, but still apparent.

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

We propose that in these dyads with matched instrumental attributions, other cognitive similarities or differences come into play as moderating influences. First, regardless of whether a relationship is instrumentally or expressively motivated, dyads will to varying degrees come to adopt and obey common *norms of social interaction* (Hymes 1967). Dependence on another for the fulfillment of needs (as in a well-established dyadic relationship) elicits concern about that other person's interpersonal expectations and evaluations, leading to the formation of social norms (Jones and Gerard 1967). Thus, even where both parties regard their interaction as instrumentally motivated, the presence of interaction norms that both understand and to which both adhere should contribute to interpretative acumen and communication efficiency. We do not propose that common norms alone will elevate the interactional richness of an instrumentally driven relationship to the level of a situation where both parties are expressively motivated. However, norms in common are expected to yield some potential for enhancing a dyad's communication relationship, even when motivations are essentially instrumental. Thus,

PROPOSITION 9. *When both dyad members view the relationship as instrumentally motivated, the potential for interactional richness is enhanced to the extent that the parties' adhere to common interaction norms.*

Second, we suggest a role for corresponding *attitudes* within the dyad. Given the balance theory postulate that individuals tend to agree with people they like (see Eagly and Chaiken 1993), and the well-established finding that individuals tend to like people with whom they agree (Byrne 1971), attitudinal similarity is a relevant aspect of relational development. Convergence of attitudes is to be expected in most relationships that are expressively motivated if the relationship is to intensify and endure. However, in relationships motivated primarily by instrumentality, attitude similarity may vary widely from minimal to comprehensive. Pervasive similarity may compensate in part for the interaction deficiencies that otherwise accrue to a dyad whose exchanges are low in relational communication, especially if attitudes converge on subjects that are germane to the substance of the parties' instrumental interests (e.g., job-related and organizationally relevant issues).

PROPOSITION 10. *When both dyad members view the relationship as instrumentally motivated, interactional richness is elevated to the extent that instrumentally relevant social attitudes correspond.*

Macrolevel Influences: A Structurational View

The processes leading to (or constraining) the development of interactional richness described thus far are focused on perception, attribution, and message construction at the individual level of analysis. We have argued that interactional richness represents a dyad-level property of the interacting pair that reflects the pattern of interpersonal experiences and communication characteristics that unfold over time. Our focus, however, is not limited to an abstract explanation of the communication qualities of dyadic relationships in the universe of interactions. Rather, we are interested in the determinants and development of interactional richness among interacting pairs *within formal organizations*. The organizational context brings structural and cultural influences to bear on the interplay of perceptions and actions at the heart of our social-cognitive model. In this section, we discuss macrolevel factors that link organizational structure and culture to the process through which interactional richness evolves.

We adopt structuration theory (Giddens 1979, 1984) as the core theoretical framework guiding our analysis of the influence of macrolevel forces on the microlevel processes contained within our model. The essence of structuration theory relevant here is its analysis of the interplay of systems, structure, and social interaction as an explanation for observable patterns of social behavior (Salazar 1996). In structuration theory (see Giddens 1979, pp. 64–81; Giddens 1984, p. 23–27), *systems* are the interdependent relations between actors or groups that take the form of ongoing or patterned social interactions. *Structures* are sets of rules and resources that guide or govern these behavioral patterns or interactions—Giddens characterizes structures as "properties of social systems" (Giddens 1984, p. 25). *Structuration* refers to the ways in which social systems—patterns of relations—are reproduced in interaction over time. Giddens describes structure in terms of a critical duality: Structure is both a mechanism for the organization of social systems (the rules and resources guiding interaction) as well as an outcome of these systems (new rules that emerge from interaction). Structuration theory has been applied to organizational issues by researchers studying group processes (Poole et al. 1985, Salazar 1996), organizational climate (Bastien et al. 1995, Poole and McPhee 1983, Witmer 1997), and advanced information technology (DeSanctis and Poole 1994, Poole and DeSanctis 1990).

Structuration is an appealing tool for analyzing macrolevel influences on the formation of interactional richness because it theorizes direct links between structure, culture, and interaction. Of particular interest here is macro- to microstructuration that explains how dyadic interaction

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

is shaped by macrolevel forces. A key way this structuration occurs is when, as Giddens (1984) puts it, "the conduct of individual actors reproduces the structural properties of larger collectivities" (p. 24). However, our interest here lies not in the full sweep of macrolevel properties that might elicit or constrain dyadic interaction, but in factors that specifically will influence communication styles, interpersonal sensemaking, symbolic understanding, attributional congruence, and other antecedents of interactional richness. We focus our attention on the structurational influence of three clusters of macrolevel factors: hierarchy, organizational structure, and culture.

Hierarchy. The relative position within an organizational hierarchy of two individuals who comprise an interacting dyad is likely to affect communication processes that give rise, over time, to interactional richness. As Conrad (1983) observed, "Perceived power relationships stabilize and disrupt social structures. They are central to understanding the processes through which members of society and formal organizations act" (p. 185). Empirical research (e.g., Schilit and Locke 1982, Tjosvold et al. 1992) has demonstrated that communication strategies and interpersonal influence tactics vary depending on the hierarchical direction and other indicators of relative interpersonal power. An organization's formal hierarchy is thus structurational in the sense that individual communicators will act in ways that reproduce hierarchical structure to the extent that they treat such structures as rules that constrain interaction.

The entry point for the effects of hierarchy into our model of the determinants of interactional richness (see Figure 1) is the relational content of messages constructed within the dyad. For example, communication directed upward within a superior-subordinate dyad is less likely, other things being equal, to be high in such attributes as informality, affection, or self-disclosure, than lateral (peer-to-peer) interaction. Tangential conversation or metacommunication in a vertical (as opposed to lateral) dyad is presumably more likely to be initiated by the interactant with higher hierarchical status than the individual with lower status. In general, we believe that the relational content of intradyadic messages, which we previously suggested fosters expressive attributions about the dyadic relationship, is constrained by salient hierarchical boundaries that create rules for interaction.

PROPOSITION 11. *The salience of hierarchical organizational roles that distinguish members of an interacting dyad inhibits the relational content of intradyadic messages. Relational content will occur more frequently among dyad members whose relationship is lateral or otherwise not defined by vertical hierarchical role differentiation.*

Structure. Elements of organizational structure are similarly apt to present rules and resources that will, through the mechanism of structuration, influence patterns of communication at the dyadic level. In formulating adaptive structuration theory, DeSanctis and Poole (1994) noted that the effects of organization structure on task-level design and task priorities are likely to affect how individuals and small groups use, interpret, and apply their own locally available communication modalities. Research has also demonstrated that the methods used by organization members to achieve interpersonal influence varies with the degree to which organizational authority structures are centralized (Krone 1992). Although the structures of departments, tasks, and technologies may exhibit a multitude of effects on communication activities, we assess formal structure as most clearly related to the patterns of messages that emerge over time (the "temporal patterns of messages" in our model), and secondarily related to the relational content of messages.

In the broadest terms, we draw on the classical contrast between organic structures, which feature low levels of formalization, low decision-making centrality, and narrow spans of managerial control; and mechanistic structures, which are more formalized, more centralized, and feature wider spans of control (Burns and Stalker 1961). Organic structures are associated with greater task variety, and wider and more frequent communication activity (Daft 1992). To the extent that these structures also feature less analyzable tasks, task-related interaction is not only more frequent, but also more likely to take place through richer communication channels (Daft and Lengel 1986). As a consequence, we contend that dyadic communication will, other things being equal, occur with greater frequency and reflect a wider diversity of communication topics. Moreover, because of channel richness effects, organic structures may also facilitate relational message content in the form of communication that is informal, conversational, empathic, and imbued with metacommunication and self-disclosure.

PROPOSITION 12. *The design elements of an organic departmental or organizational structure, such as low formalization, low centralization, and narrow span of control, are positively associated with intradyadic message frequency and message diversity, as well as with the relational content of intradyadic messages.*

Culture. With respect to communication in organizations, Bormann (1983) defined culture as "the sum total of ways of living, organizing, and communing built up in a group of human beings and transmitted to newcomers by means of verbal and nonverbal communication" (p. 100). A principal source of organizational culture is found in what Denison (1990, p. 32) called

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

"perspectives"—shared rules and norms that suggest solutions to common problems and situations encountered by members of the organization. These perspectives help individuals interpret situations and represent boundaries of acceptable behavior. From a structurational perspective, collective organizational culture is reproduced through communication at microlevels as individuals adopt social practices that adhere to social rules generated by macrolevel culture. In general, theories and ethnographies of organizational culture highlight communication roles and patterns as both manifestation and signifier of a given organization's cultural properties.

We propose that organizational culture influences communication processes leading to interactional richness to the extent that behavioral norms foster or inhibit the development of close relationships. The schematic of our model (Figure 1) shows this happening in two ways. First, culturally shared assumptions regarding acceptable or desirable social practices may facilitate or constrain the incorporation of relational content (informality, conversation, empathy, self-disclosure, etc.) into messages exchanged within organizational boundaries. A strong culture oriented toward cooperative work and a blending of personal and professional relationships increases the likelihood that individuals will feel comfortable introducing relational content into dyadic exchanges—even in dyads that have not advanced far beyond what Gabarro (1990) labeled the orientation and exploration stages of a developing relationship. Conversely, a culture oriented toward crisp, exclusively task-focused interaction may stifle the incorporation of relational content.

Second, we hypothesize a role for culture as a factor in the social attribution processes at the heart of our model. In propositions developed earlier, we proposed that message patterns and relational perceptions influence the formation of expressive versus instrumental attributions regarding the motivation of dyad members to maintain their relationship. Organizational (or suborganizational) culture, we suggest here, has the ability to moderate or bias individual tendencies to form attributions in the face of evidence regarding relational status. For instance, a firm whose culture promotes isolated careerism and the pursuit of radical self-interest may find itself populated with individuals who respond warily to relational message content, viewing such messages as instrumental subversion rather than expressive overtures. On the other hand, in a high-involvement culture that fosters expressive activity, individuals may be inclined to perceive relational content as sincere and determinative, and hence be predisposed to undertake attributional shifts in the presence of relatively little relational evidence. One can also imagine a setting where a culture of expressively oriented communication is taken to an extreme, leading individuals to discount relational message content as culturally rather than individually constructed.

PROPOSITION 13. *Organizational and/or subunit culture influences the development of interactional richness by (a) fostering or constraining the extent to which dyadic messages are imbued with relational content, and (b) biasing how individual perceivers make relationship attributions given evidence of relational activity within the dyad.*

Discussion

Recent literature on organizational communication and conflict signals an emerging consensus that relationship issues are important but underexplored. At the same time, the popular press draws significant attention to the need for effective organizational actors to advance their careers through careful management of interpersonal relationships (e.g., Farnham 1996). Our aim in this paper was to add theoretical value to the emerging study of relationship dynamics in organizations in a way that will stimulate research and inform practice. We introduced the concept of interactional richness as an outcome of the process of relational development and proposed a conceptual model that analyzes relational and social-cognitive determinants of interactional richness.

An advantage of the approach taken here is that it moves beyond a gestalt assessment of communication relationship quality to consider the underlying social-psychological dynamics of relational development. Extant work on relationships in organizations has focused primarily on global and cross-sectional assessments of the relationship between an interacting pair: Is it close? How close? An exception is Gabarro (1978), although his perspective on CEO-subordinate relationships was inductively drawn, not theoretically based. In our model, theories of social perception and attribution are extended to the domain of relational development at work. The model is dynamic, with interactional richness ultimately determined by the commingling of dyad members' social-cognitive structures. As an extension of research on media richness, interactional richness takes existing work on the carrying capacity of communication features in a new direction.

We also point to an integrative contribution. We set out to synthesize research on communication and the social psychology of dyadic relationships into a single framework directed specifically at the analysis of relationship dynamics in organization-based interaction. Much of the

Copyright © 2001: All rights reserved.

research from which we have drawn was intended to describe close personal relationships where heightened intimacy is the measure of relational quality. Intimate relationships are much like other kinds of personal relationships in that they involve high degrees of interdependence; in that sense many aspects of the theory and empirical findings that emerge from this body of research are applicable to organizational settings. However, the close relationships literature cannot fully account for the instrumental aspects of workplace relationships that naturally occur with a hierarchical social structure and culture of economic exchange. Thus, our aim was not simply to transplant the study of interpersonal intimacy into an organizational context, but rather to explore the communication dynamics that drive both close and arms-length relationships among organization members.

Knowing more about the psychological dynamics of organizational communication is potentially of significant value to organizational participants. Interactional richness is a desirable attribute of workplace relationships to the extent that organization members value communication relationships marked by efficiency of transmission and accuracy of interpretation. The attribution/expectancy model, while grounded in technical issues of social cognition, invites the individual communicator to analyze interpersonal connections in a plausible and accessible way: in terms of the match or mismatch of interpretations about why communicator and partner are inclined to maintain their association. Moreover, the model identifies numerous specific forms of communication behavior that give rise to these interpretations. It is likely that empirical studies would reveal that some forms of relational communication are more powerful than others at eliciting relevant relationship attributions. Armed with that knowledge, organization members can learn to supplement their communication skills with a kind of "relational literacy" that enables informed choices about how interpersonal communication can foster desired forms of relationship development.

A key issue thus far unaddressed concerns the desirability of interactional richness. Our treatment of the construct thus far has portrayed it as a desirable feature of organizational communication relationships. Because high levels of interaction richness ultimately yield more efficient communications, this makes sense for most situations. However, an argument can be made that interactionally rich dyads—especially when expressively motivated—might engage in excessive levels of communication seemingly unrelated to the task (e.g., small talk). While we believe that the most efficient dyads would explicitly address this situation (e.g., through metacommunication), this potential downside of interactional richness must be acknowledged.

We also wish to mention three limitations of our analysis that reflect tradeoffs between complexity and focus. First, our visual approach (Figure 1) to the processes considered in this article oversimplifies the dynamic and recursive nature of relational development. This process is, of course, reciprocal and iterative, with outcomes a product of interactive give and take. Our decision to simplify these processes—and omit the many conceivable feedback mechanisms—was based on a desire to isolate and present the specific phenomena of interest in a manageable way.

A second limitation is our focus on communication at the dyadic level of analysis. Analytically, this orientation is appropriate because our approach is grounded in psychological theories of interpersonal process. However, our analysis is intended to apply to communication settings involving more than two participants, as well as among broader social structures such as work groups and organizations. By decontextualizing to the isolated dyad, we gain analytical clarity, but at the expense of a broader treatment of relationship dynamics in multiparty interaction.

Third, as presently formulated, the model excludes any explicit treatment of the role of individual differences. A number of psychological and biographical variables have been associated with verbal and nonverbal interpersonal communication (see Giles and Street 1994 for a review). For example, follow-up work on the information richness model has found that cognitive style and communication apprehension moderate the link between task requirements and media choice (Alexander et al. 1991, Trevino et al. 1990). Further, a communicator's competence to use particular forms of communication presumably acts as a constraint on one's choice of interaction strategy (Sitkin et al. 1992). It is reasonable to assume that some aspects of relational development are determined in part by individual differences. Incorporation of such differences is potentially quite complex, given the need in a relational model to consider personality and demography at the dyadic level of analysis.

Potential individual differences that might be fruitfully studied as moderators or predictors of interactional richness include gender, race, self-monitoring, public self-consciousness, extraversion, and agreeableness. Research on network relationships (e.g., Ibarra 1992, 1993) suggests that women and minorities have weaker network ties because of organizational factors (e.g., overall numbers and hierarchical distributions), interaction dynamics (e.g., stereotyping), and constrained choices (e.g., difficulty forming cross-sex ties). Thus, there is reason to suspect that gender and race may play a role in the development of interactional richness within organizational

Copyright © 2001: All rights reserved.

communication relationships. Self-monitoring reflects one's awareness of and responsiveness to social and interpersonal cues about situational appropriateness (Snyder and Gangestad 1982); therefore, self-monitoring might be associated with one's sensitivity to relational content and temporal patterns, and ultimately with relational perceptions. A similar argument can be made for public self-conciousness (Fenigstein et al. 1975) which refers to one's social sensitivity and other-directedness. Two factors from the five-factor model of personality—agreeableness and extraversion—also would presumably be relevant to the model, because they reflect dispositions toward behavior in social situations, such as organizational communication relationships.

Constructing an agenda to test the ideas put forth here raises issues of both measurement and research design. Most of the constructs we described have empirical precedents in other literatures, with the notable exception of interactional richness. A first step, then, is confronting the issues related to the measurement of the interactional richness construct. As we have defined it, interactional richness captures a dyad's ability to communicate with efficiency (symbolic content), coordination, and accuracy of reception and interpretation. These are not attributes of communication events within a dyad; they are elements addressing how communication events are constructed, transmitted, and interpreted by dyad members. Accordingly, interactional richness cannot be measured solely by analyzing communication data. One must examine both how an interacting pair communicates *and* how individuals comprising the pair devise and perceive those communications.

With this in mind, we envision interactional richness as measureable by both survey and behavioral approaches. Surveys have been used to assess a variety of elements of dyadic communication and relationship quality, such as relational expectations (Kelly and Burgoon 1991), self-disclosure (Jourard and Lasakow 1958), and relational closeness (Berscheid et al. 1989). Following these traditions, it is reasonable to expect that perceptions by dyad members of the information-carrying capacity of their relationship can be tapped by survey in a valid and reliable manner. Behavioral measures, such as content analysis of taped exchanges between interaction partners, also might be used to capture the richness of interaction. Such methods have been employed in the communication literature to measure variables related to dyadic interaction, such as self-disclosure (Prager 1989) and intimacy (Tesch and Whitbourne 1982). Behavioral methods allow the researcher to assess characteristics of interaction from interaction itself, rather than simply rely on self-reported judgments by interaction participants.

With respect to strategies for model testing, two distinct avenues for empirical work are apparent. Conceivably, the model could be considered in its entirety given longitudinal access to a sizeable pool of working dyads with opportunities for both survey and observational data collection. However, a logical first step would be to examine modest research questions regarding the central attribution theory assumptions that guide our approach to relational development. It seems prudent to establish the basic social-cognitive foundation of the model first through selective empirical tests that are feasibly undertaken through survey and other less costly methods.

Ultimately, the goal should be to place a relational model like the one presented here in the context of broader frameworks of organizational communication. The isolated study of interpersonal interaction is important in its own right, but understanding organizational communication requires a broader perspective that incorporates the structural and environmental influences on networks of information exchange. We see relationship dynamics, conceptualized in terms of the development of interactional richness, as a promising avenue for improving the predictive power of existing theories that adopt a broader perspective.

Acknowledgments

The authors acknowledge support for the first author from the Dean's Fund for Research at the Owen Graduate School of Management at Vanderbilt University. A version of this paper was presented at the 1997 annual meeting of the Academy of Management in Boston, MA. They thank Pat Calhoun for research assistance, and Bob Vecchio for helpful comments on an earlier draft.

Endnotes

[1]Although richness theory (Daft and Lengel 1984) originally addressed equivocality at the level of a communicator's job, empirical findings indicate that the theory's predictive power is stronger at the level of the individual task or communication event (Fulk and Boyd 1991).

[2]Our adoption of the label *richness* potentially invites confusion given existing multiple uses of the term in organizational communication research. We do, however, regard the term as appropriate on the basis of its precise meaning in the literature. Rather than limiting our analysis to global constructs describing relationship dynamics (e.g., "relational closeness" in the argot of social psychologists, or "intimacy" in the argot of communication theorists), we focus on information and symbolic content within dyadic interaction. Hence the notion of richness as "carrying capacity" is directly relevant here, and so we employ the term *interactional richness* to describe the carrying capacity of a dyadic communication relationship.

[3]The point of departure between social network studies and the present analysis lies within basic differences in the research questions of interest. In social network research, dyad-level relationship constructs are empirical tools that reveal broader patterns of social structure within the social system being investigated; these broader patterns are typically the object of theoretical interest (Fombrun 1982). In contrast, our

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

theoretical focus is at the dyadic level on the psychology of relational development through dyadic communication. Thus, social network research informs our understanding of the maintainance and measurement of interpersonal ties, but is not a window on how those ties develop through communication and social-cognitive processes.

References

Alexander, E. R., L. E. Penley, E. Jernigan. 1991. The effect of individual differences on managerial media choice. *Management Comm. Quart.*, **5** 155–173.

Amabile, T. M., K. G. Hill, B. A. Hennessey, E. M. Tighe. 1994. The work preference inventory: Assessing intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **66** 950–967.

Bastien, D. T., R. D. McPhee, K. A. Bolton. 1995. A study and extended theory of the structuration of climate. *Commun. Monographs.* **62** 87–109.

Bateson, G. 1972. *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* Ballantine, New York.

Berger, C. R. 1988. Uncertainty and information exchange in developing relationships. S. W. Duck, ed. *Handbook of Personal Relationships.* Wiley, Chichester, U.K.

Bernieri, F. J., J. M. Davis, R. Rosenthal, C. R. Knee. 1994. Interactional synchrony and rapport: Measuring synchrony in displays devoid of sound and facial affect. *Personality and Social Psych. Bull.*, **20** 303–311.

Berscheid, E., W. Graziano, T. Monson, M. Dermer. 1976. Outcome dependency: Attention, attribution, and attraction. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **34** 978–989.

——, M. Snyder, A. M. Omoto. 1989. The relationship closeness inventory: Assessing the closeness of interpersonal relationships. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **57** 792–807.

Bitter, M. E., W. L. Gardner III. 1995. A mid-range theory of the leader/member attribution process in professional service organizations: The role of the organizational environment and impression management. M. J. Martinko, ed. *Attribution Theory: An Organizational Perspective.* St. Lucie Press, Delray Beach, FL.

Bormann, E. G. 1983. Symbolic convergence: Organizational communication and culture. L. L. Putnam, M. E. Pacanowsky, eds. *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach.* Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Bradbury, T. N., F. D. Fincham. 1990. Attributions in marriage: Review and critique. *Psych. Bull.* **107** 3–33.

——, ——. 1992. Attributions and behavior in marital interaction. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **63** 613–628.

Bradley, G. W. 1978. Self-serving biases in the attribution process: A reexamination of the fact or fiction question. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **36** 56–71.

Buck, R. 1989. Emotional communication in personal relationships: A developmental-interactionist view. C. Hendrick, ed. *Close Relationships.* Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Burgoon, J. K., J. L. Hale. 1984. The fundamental topic of relational communication. *Commun. Monographs* **51** 193–214.

——, ——. 1987. Validation and measurement of the fundamental themes of relational communication. *Commun. Monographs* **54** 19–41.

——, B. A. LePoire. 1993. Effects of communication expectancies, actual communication, and expectancy disconfirmation on evaluations of communicators and their communication behavior. *Human Commun. Res.* **20** 67–96.

——, M. Pfau, R. Parrott, T. Birk, R. Coker, M. Burgoon. 1987. Relational communication, satisfaction, compliance-gaining strategies, and compliance in communication between physicians and patients. *Commun. Monographs* **54** 307–324.

Burns, T., G. M. Stalker. 1961. *The Management of Innovation.* Tavistock, London, U.K.

Byrne, D. E. 1971. *The Attraction Paradigm.* Academic Press, San Diego, CA.

Cappelli, P., P. D. Sherer. 1991. The missing role of context in OB: The need for a meso-level approach. L. L. Cummings, B. M. Staw, eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior.* JAI Press, Greenwich, CT.

Chang, H. C., G. R. Holt. 1996. An exploration of interpersonal relationships in two Taiwanese computer firms. *Human Relations.* **49** 1489–1518.

Clark, M. S., J. Mills. 1993. The difference between communal and exchange relationships: What it is and is not. *Personality and Social Psych. Bull.* **19** 684–691.

Conrad, C. 1983. Organizational power: Faces and symbolic forms. L. L. Putnam, M. E. Pacanowsky, eds. *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach.* Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Daft, R. L. 1992. *Organization Theory and Design.* 4th Ed. West, St. Paul, MN.

——, R. H. Lengel. 1984. Information richness: A new approach to managerial behavior and organizational design. L. L. Cummings, B. M. Staw, eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior.* JAI Press, Greenwich, CT.

——, ——. 1986. Organizational information requirements, media richness and structural design. *Management Sci.* **32** 554–571.

——, ——, L. K. Trevino. 1987. Message equivocality, media selection, and manager performance: Implications for information systems. *MIS Quart.* **11** 355–366.

Darley, J. M., R. H. Fazio. 1980. Expectancy confirmation processes arising in the social interaction sequence. *Amer. Psychologist* **35** 867–881.

Denison, D. R. 1990. *Corporate Culture and Organizational Effectiveness.* Wiley, New York.

DeSanctis, G., M. S. Poole. 1994. Capturing the complexity in advanced technology use: Adaptive structuration theory. *Organ. Sci.* **5** 121–147.

Dindia, K., D. J. Canary. 1993 Definitions and theoretical perspectives on maintaining relationships. *J. Social and Personal Relationships* **10** 163–173.

Duck, S. 1994. Steady as she goes: Relational maintenance as a shared meaning system. D. J. Canary, L. Stafford, eds. *Communication and Relational Maintenance.* Academic Press, San Diego, CA.

——, G. Pittman. 1994. Social and personal relationships. M. L. Knapp, G. R. Miller, eds. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* 2nd Ed. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Eagly, A. H., S. Chaiken. 1993. *The Psychology of Attitudes.* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Fort Worth, TX.

Emerson, R. M. 1962. Power-dependence relations. *Amer. Soc. Rev.* **27** 31–41.

Erickson, B. H. 1988. The relational basis of attitudes. B. Wellman,

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

S. D. Berkowitz, eds. *Social Structures: a Network Approach.* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Fairhurst, G. T., L. E. Rogers, R. A. Sarr. 1987. Manager-subordinate control patterns and judgments about the relationship. M.L. McLaughlin, ed. *Communication Yearbook 10.* Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

Farnham, A. 1996. Are you smart enough to keep your job? *Fortune* **133**(1) 34–42.

Fenigstein, A., M. Scheier, A. Buss. 1975. Private and public self-consciousness: Assessment and theory. *J. Consulting and Clinical Psych.* **43** 522–527.

Fincham, F. D., T. N. Bradbury. 1987. Cognitive processes and conflict in close relationships: An attribution-efficacy model. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **53** 1106–1118.

Fletcher, G. J. O., F. D. Fincham. 1991. Attribution processes in close relationships. G. J. O. Fletcher, F. D. Fincham, eds. *Cognition in Close Relationships.* Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.

Fombrun, C. J. 1982. Strategies for network research in organizations. *Acad. Management Rev.* **7** 280–291.

Fulk, J., B. Boyd. 1991. Emerging theories of communication in organizations. *J. Management* **17** 407–446.

Gabarro, J. J. 1978. The development of trust, influence, and expectations. A. G. Athos, J. J. Gabarro, eds. *Interpersonal Behavior: Communication and Understanding in Relationships.* Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ.

——. 1990. The development of working relationships. J. Gallegher, R. E. Kraut, C. Egido, eds. *Intellectual Teamwork: Social and Technological Foundations of Cooperative Work.* Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.

Giddens, A. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis.* University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

——. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration.* University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Giles, H., R. L. Street Jr. 1994. Communicator characteristics and behavior. M. L. Knapp, G. R. Miller, eds. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication,* 2nd edition. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Gottman, J. M. 1979. *Marital Interaction: Experimental Investigations.* Academic Press, New York.

Graen, G. B., M. A. Novak, P. Sommerkamp. 1982. The effects of leader-member exchange and job design on productivity and satisfaction: Testing a dual attachment model. *Organ. Behavior and Human Performance* **30** 109–131.

Greenhalgh, L., D. I. Chapman. 1993. The influence of negotiator relationships on the process and outcomes of business transactions. Working Paper, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH.

——, ——. 1995. Joint decision making: The inseparability of relationships and negotiation. R. M. Kramer, D. M. Mesick, eds. *Negotiation as a Social Process.* Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hastie, R. 1984. Causes and effects of causal attribution. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **46** 44–56.

Heider, F. 1958. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations.* Wiley, New York.

Hinde, R. A. 1979. *Towards Understanding Relationships.* Academic Press, New York.

Howe, G. W. 1987. Attributions of complex cause and the perception of marital conflict. *J. Personality and Social Psych* **53** 1119–1128.

Hymes, D. H. 1967. Models of the interaction of language and social setting. *J. Social Issues* **23** 8–28.

Ibarra, H. 1992. Homophily and differential returns: Sex differences in network structure and access in an advertising firm. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **37** 422–447.

——. 1993. Personal networks of women and minorities in management: A conceptual framework. *Acad. Management Rev.* **18** 56–87.

Jehn, K., P. Shah. 1994. Relationships at work: Are they worth it? Paper presented at the 54th annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Dallas, TX.

Jones, E. E. 1990. *Interpersonal Perception.* W.H. Freeman and Company, New York.

——, H. B. Gerard. 1967. *Foundations of Social Psychology.* Wiley, New York.

Jourard, S. M., P. Lasakow. 1958. Some factors in self-disclosure. *J. Abnormal and Social Psych.* **56** 91–98.

Kelley, H. H. 1973. The processes of causal attribution. *Amer. Psychologist* **28** 107–128.

——, J. L. Michela. 1980. Attribution theory and research. *Ann. Rev. Psych.* **31** 457–501.

Kelly, D. L., J. K. Burgoon. 1991. Understanding marital satisfaction and couple type as functions of relational expectations. *Human Commun. Res.* **18** 40–69.

King, W. C. Jr., T. D. Hinson. 1994. The influence of sex and equity sensitivity on relationship preferences, assessment of opponent, and outcomes in a negotiation experiment. *J. Management* **20** 605–624.

Krone, K. J. 1992. A comparison of organizational, structural, and relationship effects on subordinates' upward influence choices. *Commun. Quart.* **40** 1–15.

Luthans, F., S. A. Rosenkrantz, H. W. Hennessey. 1985. What do successful managers really do? An observational study of managerial activities. *J. Appl. Behavioral Sci.* **21** 255–270.

Markus, M. L. 1988. Information richness theory, managers, and electronic mail. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Academy of Management, Anaheim, CA.

——. 1994. Electronic mail as the medium of managerial choice. *Organ. Sci.* **5** 502–527.

Marwell, G., J. Hage. 1970. The organization of role-relationships: A systematic description. *Amer. Soc. Rev.* **35** 884–900.

Millar, F. E., L. E. Rogers. 1987. Relational dimensions of interpersonal dynamics. M.E. Roloff, G.R. Miller, eds. *Interpersonal Processes: New Directions in Communication Research.* Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Miller, G. R., M. Steinberg. 1975. *Between People: a New Analysis of Interpersonal Communication.* Science Research Associates, Palo Alto, CA.

Miller, L. C., M. J. Cody, M. L. McLaughlin. 1994. Situations and goals as fundamental constructs in interpersonal communication research. M. L. Knapp, G. R. Miller, eds. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* 2nd edition. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Mills, J., M. S. Clark. 1982. Communal and exchange relationships. *Rev. Personality and Social Psych.* **3** 121–144.

Copyright © 2001. All rights reserved.

——, ——. 1994. Communal and exchange relationships: Controversies and research. R. Erber, R. Gilmour, eds. *Theoretical Frameworks for Personal Relationships*. Erlbaum, Hillsdale, NJ.

Mintzberg, H. 1973. *The Nature of Managerial Work*. Harper and Row, New York.

Montgomery, B. M. 1988. Quality communication in personal relationships. S. W. Duck, ed. *Handbook of Personal Relationships*, John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, U.K.

——. 1992. Communication as the interface between couples and culture. S. A. Deetz, ed. *Communication Yearbook 15*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Newman, H. 1981. Communication within ongoing intimate relationships: An attributional perspective. *Personality and Social Psych. Bull.* **7** 59–70.

Nisbett, R. E., S. Valins. 1971. Perceiving the causes of one's own behavior. E. E. Jones, D. E. Kanouse, H. H. Kelley, R. E. Nisbett, S. Valins, B. Weiner, eds. *Attribution: Perceiving the Causes of Behavior*. General Learning Press, Morristown, NJ.

Planalp, S., M. Rivers. 1994. Changes in knowledge of personal relationships. G. J. O. Fletcher, J. Fitness, eds. *Knowledge Structures in Close Relationships: A Social Psychological Approach*. Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ.

Poole, M. S., G. DeSanctis. 1990. Understanding the use of group decision support systems: The theory of adaptive structuration. J. Fulk, C. Steinfeld, eds. *Organizations and Communication Technology*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

——, R. D. McPhee. 1983. A structurational analysis of organizational climate. L. L. Putnam, M. E. Pacanowsky, eds. *Communication and Organizations: An Interpretive Approach*. Sage, Beverly Hills, CA.

——, D. R. Seibold, R. D. McPhee. 1985. Group decision-making as a structurational process. *Quart. J. Speech* **71** 74–102.

Prager, K. J. 1989. Intimacy status and couple communication. *J. Social and Interpersonal Relationships* **6** 435–449.

Reis, H. T., P. Shaver. 1988. Intimacy as an interpersonal process. S. W. Duck, ed. *Handbook of Personal Relationships*. John Wiley & Sons, New York.

Rice, R. E. 1992. Task analyzability, use of new media, and effectiveness: A multi-site exploration of media richness. *Organ. Sci.* **3** 475–500.

——, D. E. Shook. 1990. Relationships of job categories and organizational levels to use of communication channels, including electronic mail: A meta-analysis and extension. *J. Management Stud.* **27** 195–229.

Rogers, L. E., F. E. Millar. 1988. Relational communication. S W. Duck, ed. *Handbook of Personal Relationships*. John Wiley & Sons, Chichester, U.K.

Rousseau, D. M. 1985. Issues of level in organizational research: Multilevel and cross-level perspectives. L. L. Cummings, B. M. Staw, eds. *Research in Organizational Behavior*. JAI Press, Greenwich, CT.

Rusbult, C. E. 1980. Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *J. Experimental Social Psych.* **16** 172–186.

Accepted by Arie Y. Lewin; received September 19, 1999.

Russ, G. S., R. L. Daft, R. H. Lengel. 1990. Media selection and managerial characteristics in organizational communications. *Management Commun. Quart.* **4** 151–175.

Salazar, A. J. 1996. An analysis of the development and evolution of roles in the small group. *Small Group Res.* **27** 475–503.

Schaffer, R. B., P. M. Keith. 1984. A causal analysis of the relationship between the self-concept and marital quality. *J. Marriage and the Family* **46** 909–914.

Schilit, W. K., E. A. Locke. 1982. A study of upward influence in organizations. *Admin. Sci. Quart.* **27** 304–316.

Schmitz, J., J. Fulk. 1991. Organizational colleagues, media richness, and electronic mail: A test of the social influence model of technology use. *Commun. Res.* **18** 487–523.

Seibold, D. R., J. G. Cantrill, R. A. Meyers. 1994. Communication and interpersonal influence. M. L. Knapp, G. R. Miller, eds. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* 2nd edition. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Sitkin, S. B., K. M. Sutcliffe, J. R. Barrios-Choplin. 1992. A dual-capacity model of communication media choice in organizations. *Human Commun. Res.* **18** 563–598

Snyder, M., S. Gangestad. 1982. Two investigations of self-monitoring processes. *J. Personality Soc. Psych.* **43** 123–135.

Stohl, C., W. C. Redding. 1987. Messages and message exchange processes. F. M. Jablin, L. L. Putnam, K. H. Roberts, L. W. Porter, eds. *Handbook of Organizational Communication*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Taylor, D. A., I. Altman. 1987. Communication in interpersonal relationships: Social penetration processes. M. E. Roloff, G. R. Miller, eds. *Interpersonal Processes: New Directions in Communication Research*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA.

Tesch, S. A., S. K. Whitbourne. 1982. Intimacy and identity status in young adults. *J. Personality and Social Psych.* **43** 1041–1051.

Tjosvold, D., I. R. Andrews, J. T. Struthers. 1992. Leadership influence: Goal interdependence and power. *J. Social Psych.*, **132** 39–50.

Trevino, L. K., R. H. Lengel, R. L. Daft. 1987. Media symbolism, media richness, and media choice in organizations. *Commun. Res.* **14** 553–574.

——, ——, W. Bodensteiner, E. Gerloff, N. K. Muir. 1990. The richness imperative and cognitive style. *Management Commun. Quart.* **4** 176–197.

Trope, Y. 1986. Identification and inference processes in dispositional attribution. *Psych. Rev.* **93** 239–257.

Weiner, B. 1985. Spontaneous causal thinking. *Psych. Bull.* **97** 74–84.

Werner, C. M., L. A. Baxter. 1994. Temporal qualities of relationships: Organismic, transactional, and dialectical views. M. L. Knapp, G. R. Miller, eds. *Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* 2nd edition. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Winstead, B. A., V. J. Derlega, M. J. Montgomery, C. Pilkington. 1995. The quality of friendships at work and job satisfaction. *J. Social and Personal Relationships* **12** 199–215.

Witmer, D. F. 1997. Communication and recovery: Structuration as an ontological approach to organizational climate. *Commun. Monographs* **64** 324–349.

View publication stats

Copyright © 2001, All rights reserved.