ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOKS

The Routledge Handbook of the Communicative Constitution of Organization

Edited by Joëlle Basque, Nicolas Bencherki, and Timothy Kuhn

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK OF THE COMMUNICATIVE CONSTITUTION OF ORGANIZATION

This Handbook offers state of the art scholarship on the perspective known as the Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO). Offering a unique outlook on how communication accounts for the emergence, change, and continuity of organizations and organizing practices, this Handbook systematically exposes the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of CCO, displays its empirical diversity, and articulates its future trajectory.

Placing communication firmly at the centre of the organizational equation, an international team of expert authors covers:

- The key theoretical inspirations and the main themes of the field
- The debates that animate the CCO community
- CCO's methodological approaches
- How CCO handles classic management themes
- Practical applications

Offering a central statement of CCO's contributions to the fields of organization studies, communication, and management, this Handbook will be of interest to organization studies and communication scholars, faculty, and graduate and advanced undergraduate students, as well as anyone associated with CCO theorizing seeking a comprehensive overview of the theoretical, methodological, and practical tenets of this growing area.

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Series Editor: François Cooren

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To Jim, Elizabeth, Bob, Linda, and the entire CCO community.

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The idea for this handbook emerged in 2018 in Tallin, Estonia, during the EGOS conference, when Joëlle Basque pointed out the absence of a reference work reflecting the diversity and richness of the CCO community. From that initial suggestion, the project gradually gained more materiality over the three next years, as authors enthusiastically accepted our invitation to contribute to the handbook and turned in drafts of their papers, until we excitedly held in our hands a complete set of final chapters.

Getting to fruition a handbook project with 61 authors across over 30 chapters would not have been possible without the invaluable help of Simon Mallette-Brochu, who acted as the project's coordinator. Simon dealt with the overwhelming number of emails such a project inevitably generates and found a way to keep track of the multiple versions of each document we worked with. Saying we are grateful to him does not begin to express our appreciation of his important role in making this handbook a reality.

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FOREWORD

The Emerging Paradigm of Communication Constitutes Organization (CCO)

Linda L. Putnam

Scholars in organizational communication and organizational studies have ushered in a major paradigm shift in theory and research. Dedicated to understanding "organization" not as a container or a pre-existing entity, this approach focuses on how communication constitutes organization (CCO). In this work, the terms *organization* and *communication* are not taken for granted or held as abstractions (Putnam, Nicotera, & McPhee, 2009), rather the two become interwoven and mutually constituted. Thus, scholars focus on how an organization is composed, enacted, and sustained through communication. Moreover, in this approach, communication is not a vehicle for transmitting information "inside" an organizational container, rather it consists of language, discourses, texts, conversations, interactions, and meaning that actively constitute organizing and organization. As Brummans, Cooren, Robichad, and Taylor (2014, p. 173) highlight, "what sets [CCO] apart from other areas of inquiry is its novel way of theorizing and analyzing how organization as a discursive-material configuration is produced and reproduced from ongoing interactions".

CCO work, however, is not simply one school of thought, rather it has become a proliferation of perspectives that share a common goal and embrace similar tenets. This *Handbook* showcases these perspectives, including the three original schools (Brummans et al., 2014; Schoeneborn, Blaschke, Cooren, McPhee, Seidl, & Taylor 2014), that serve a catalyst for a large body of theoretical and empirical work on communication and organization. This volume explores these multiple perspectives through emphasizing their similarities and differences as well as their links to practice theory, discourse studies, sociomateriality, and ethnomethodology as cognate areas (see Aggerholm, Asmuß, Ladegaard Johannesen & Feddersen Smith; Albu & Stumberger; Castor; Jahn & Rice; Larson & Mengis; this volume). In this way, it focuses on the core issues that form the very foundation of CCO. Thus, it provides a "State of the Art" picture of CCO work and its expansion, including theories, research topics, methodologies, and practice. In doing so, it shows how this approach has become "institutionalized" through publications in mainstream journals, the development of field-configuring events, and extensions to interdisciplinary and international domains (Boivin, Brummans, & Barker, 2017).

In this Foreword, I revisit the history of CCO and unpack central constructs that I believe emerged from the earliest stages of its development. Then, I provide an overview of each of the three major schools of CCO, their similarities and differences regarding communication and the organization-communication relationship, and the central constructs that surfaced

from this extensive work. Finally, I ascertain how CCO has emerged a paradigm in the field and the contributions that it is making to organizational communication and organizational studies.

Revisiting the History and Development of CCO

Multiple narratives tell the story of CCO and its evolution in organizational communication studies. These histories aim to capture CCO's conceptual foundations and dominant themes (Cooren, Taylor, & Van Every, 2006), its theoretical and philosophical roots (Scherer & Rasche, 2017; Taylor & Van Every, 2000), its position in organizational discourse studies (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999, 2004, 2015; Putnam, Phillips, & Chapman, 1996), its role in the field of communication writ large (Ashcraft, Kuhn, & Cooren, 2009; Taylor, 2011) and its emergence in organizational communication studies, in particular (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Bisel, 2010; Boivin et al., 2017; Brummans et al., 2014; Putnam et al., 2009; Taylor & Van Every, 2011). Several of these scenarios are brief historical summaries (Bisel, 2010) while others aim to explicate the implicit and explicit origins of CCO (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Boivin et al., 2017).

To introduce this *Handbook*, I revisit and recast the history of CCO by tracking its development in organizational communication and organizational studies. Hence, my story departs from other CCO narratives through examining three stages of CCO emergence: (1) the early work on communicative processes of organizing and the key constructs that emanate from this period; (2) the three main CCO schools of thought and the key constructs that surface across these schools; and (3) the emergence of a generic paradigm of CCO with alternative perspectives, applications in organizational studies, and central premises. These three stages lay the groundwork for this *Handbook*, especially for the chapters on discourse, materiality, agency, order and disorder, and decision-making as well as the application of CCO to classic management themes.

Stage 1: Communication Constitutes Organizing

As many histories of CCO note (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam et al., 2009), the earliest work in organizational communication focused on messages sent through vertical or horizontal channels or transmission networks (Putnam & Cheney, 1983; Tompkins, 1984). Grounded in positivism and functionalism, these early studies treated communication and organization as distinct phenomena, as tangible social facts, or as reified objects that existed apart from the processes that created them (Putnam, 1983). The interpretive turn in the field challenged these assumptions and ushered in two threads of work that, in my mind, served as precursors to CCO: (1) communication as co-constructing organizing (that is, constituting organizing) and (2) language/discourse as the performative enactment of organization.

Interaction Patterns as Organizing. In the early 1980s, scholars focused on interaction patterns that co-created activities and jointly constituted organizing as a communication process. This approach challenged the view of an organization as a container or a reified entity through examining how patterns and sequences of communication co-constructed organizational phenomena (Putnam & Cheney, 1985). As Putnam (1983, p. 53) notes, "Communication [was] not simply another organizational activity; it created and recreated the social structures that formed the crux of organizing". Inspired by systems-interactions views of communication (Fisher, 1978) and Karl Weick's (1979) theory of organizing, scholars coded the order and development of utterances and their links to organizational constructs. For example, researchers investigated

interaction patterns that jointly constructed leadership in organizing (Fairhurst, Rogers, & Sarr, 1987), verbal messages that coordinated tasks and accomplished rules and resources (Poole & DeSanctis, 1992), and interactions that constituted negotiation and bargaining as organizing (Putnam, 1985). In the early 1990s, the use of adaptive structuration to study organizational teams moved interaction analysis beyond micro levels to ways of co-constructing institutional texts (Putnam et al., 1996, p. 393).

Hence, through focusing on patterns of coordinated interactions, scholars began to center on communication as "the capacity to create, maintain, and dissolve organizations" (Hawes, 1974; Krone, Jablin, & Putnam, 1987, p. 393). This work drew on meta-models of communication as constitutive, that is, composing, constructing, or forming phenomena (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Craig, 1999). It gave rise to a definition of organizational communication as "the study of messages, information, meaning, and symbolic activity that constitutes organizations" (Putnam & Cheney, 1985, p. 131). Embedded streams of CCO were also evident in the way that communication constructed organizational cultures, produced power and politics, and formed interorganizational networks (Ashcraft et al., 2009). Thus, the work on communication as constituting organizing began in the early 1980s and laid the foundation for studying CCO. However, scholars in this period clearly focused too strongly on examining organizing as a verb, which obscured the role of organization as a noun or an agent (Taylor, 2013). With the exception of Hawes's (1974) linguistic work on social collectives, scholars held weak conceptions of a collective rationality and were unable to show how the organization emerged from jointly produced interaction processes.

Language/Discourse as Enacting Organizing/Organization. In the 1990s and early 2000s, organizational communication scholars began to focus on discourse, conversations, and language patterns as performances that enacted both organizing and organizations (Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Even though this early work centered on talk "inside of" organizations and institutions, studies of ethnography of speaking, conversational performances, and language as texts treated communication as a way to accomplish organizing (Banks, 1994; Trujillo, 1985). In addition, researchers began to view texts and intertextuality as metaphors of the organization, ones grounded in self-reflexive discursive practices, local experiences, and global social meanings (Cheney & Tompkins, 1988; Thatchenkery, 1992; Thatchenkery & Upadhyaya, 1996).

At the same time, scholars in management and organizational studies began to focus on discourse and organization and to examine how agencies as actors constituted client identities in discursive struggles (Phillips & Hardy, 1997), how storytelling performances constructed Disneyland as a postmodern organization (Boje, 1995), how talk accomplished work (Gronn, 1983) and how conversations produced organizational change (Ford & Ford, 1995). (For full reviews, see Keenoy, Oswick, & Grant, 1997; Grant, Hardy, Oswick, & Putnam, 2004.)

Scholars also referenced the work of Boden (1994), a sociologist who developed a theory on the reflexive relationship between talk and organization. Drawn from patterns of conversational turn-taking, she showed how the sequencing of texts became laminated or layered to form structures that moved from individuals to groups to form an organization. Even though Boden's work examined talk and organization, Cooren and Taylor (1997) criticized it for failing to capture the constancy or transitional nature of the organization. However, Boden's (1994) work helped pave the way for communication "to be seen as a constitutive force of organizations" and the organization to be viewed as a "discursive construction'" (Boivin et al., 2017:, p. 334; Fairhurst & Putnam, 2004; see Castor, this volume).

Taylor's books, *Une organization n'est q'un tissue de communication: Essais theoriques* (1988) and *Rethinking the Theory of Organizational Communication* (1993), were the first publications to theorize the communication-organization relationship. His thinking drew from speech acts, conversational analysis, narratology, and pragmatics to shift the ground away from organizing as a verb to organization as a noun (see Cooren & Seidl, this volume). Inspired by the notion of autopoiesis as a self-productive system, Taylor (1993) set forth *conversation* as the process of the organization and *text* as structured events that transcended immediate conversations. In this view, communication did not just produce the organization; rather "the organization [could] be found in the maneuverings and interpretations of its many conversations" (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999, p. 9; see Dawson, this volume).

Taylor's (1993) work was also inspired by Ruth Smith's (1993) paper on root metaphors in organizational communication. In this essay, she reviewed ways that scholars had conceptualized the communication-organization relationship based on three categories: containment (i.e., communication contained in organizations), production (i.e., one produced the other or both were mutually constitutive), and equivalence (i.e., the two were one and the same). Her essay showed that most researchers treated communication either as a phenomenon that occurred "inside" the organization or a process that produced organizing (Taylor, 2013). Differing from this approach, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) shifted these three orientations to alternatives: object (i.e., an entity that contains discourse), becoming (i.e., discourse as existing prior to and producing organization), and grounded-in-action (i.e., the organization as anchored in the continuous flow of discursive conduct in which action and structure are mutually and recursively constituted). Unlike Smith, Fairhurst and Putnam (2004) treated communication and organization as distinct phenomena (not equivalent) and set forth three ingredients of constitution—communicative action, discursive structures, and interpretive processes. They contended that the interplay of the three orientations held the key to anchoring organization in action. In effect, the "discursive constitution of organization" served as a precursor to the formal development of CCO theories (Boivin et al., 2017; see Castor, this volume).

Emergent CCO Constructs. Three key constructs that emerged from this stage of development became central to CCO thinking; namely, constitutive, performativity, and recursive relationships. The term *constitutive* means to form, frame, or make something what it is (Brummans et al., 2014; Putnam et al., 2009). It surfaces in the work on interaction patterns as constituting organizing as well as theoretical thinking about the discursive construction of organization. Used interchangeably with co-creation or co-constructed, constitutive entails more than simply arranging or combining parts, it refers to how multiple actors and actions come together and jointly enact organizing/organization. Although aligned with the system terms *production* and *reproduction*, constitutive entails a central focus on the "doing" or the ongoing developing that is not always salient in the work on production or enactment of the organization.

The second key construct that emerges from this period is *performativity,* which refers to the "how questions … the concrete activities through which particular realities are generated, sustained, and changed" (Kuhn, Ashcraft, & Cooren, 2017, p. 41). Drawing from studies of speech acts and discursive patterns, scholars focus on the ways that utterances bring activities into being (Austin, 1962; see Cooren & Seidl, this volume). Hence, discourse and language engage in doing; they are "productive, generative, and active processes", not just ways of reflecting already formed things (Kuhn et al., 2017, p. 41). As such, storytelling and conversational practices enact organizational performances, such as leading, negotiating, and changing.

Although clearly rooted in organizing, research on interaction analysis, language, and discourse processes embraces performativity as a key construct of constitution.

A recursive relationship between communication and organizing is a third major CCO construct that surfaced during this period. A recursive relationship is a repeated pattern or routine in which the output at each stage is typically applied to the input of succeeding stages. In the studies of interaction patterns, repeated processes of communication become the input for recurrent organizational activities. Recursive relationships, also evident in Giddens's (1984) structuration, emerge in successive grammatical structures, repeated discursive routines, and the idea of "defining a thing in terms of itself". A recursive relationship lies at the core of treating an organization as a self-productive system—an important issue for the three main CCO schools.

Stage 2: The Emergence of Three Major Schools of CCO

In 2000, scholars from two of the three major schools of CCO thinking produced landmark publications—*The Emergent Organization: Communication at its Site and Surface* (Taylor & Van Every, 2000) and "The Communicative Constitution of Organizations: A Framework for Explanation" (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). These publications mark the beginning of the Montreal School and the Four Flows approach, respectively. A third school originated from translations and applications of Luhmann's *Social Systems* (1995) theory to CCO thinking (Seidl & Becker, 2005, 2006; Schoeneborn, 2011). These three schools while unified in their commitment to CCO (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Boivin et al., 2017; Brummans et al., 2014; Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen, & Clark, 2011) differ in their metatheoretical underpinnings, the properties of CCO, and explanations for what constitutes an organization (Bisel, 2010; Schoeneborn et al., 2014). In effect, while CCO emerged as a field of inquiry in organizational communication, it was not a unified enterprise.

The next sections provide brief overviews of the three schools through recapping how CCO occurs in each of them and then contrasting them in terms of their notions of communication and descriptions of the communication-organization relationship (Schoeneborn et. el., 2014). It culminates by extrapolating three additional constructs that are now pivotal to CCO work.

The Montreal School of CCO. As noted above, the Montreal School draws from the recursive nature of language to show how the organization emerges from its many conversations and texts (Taylor & Van Every, 2000). Conversations co-orient around something to be done and how to do it. They consist of the sayings and doings in situated practices and are fleeting while texts, as what's done, have the capacity to be stored to transcend local interactions. Importantly, the two function recursively, that is, texts enable and constrain conversations while conversations continually update and alter texts (see Dawson, this volume).

As both linguistic and material (non-human) in form, texts have the capacity to act or to display agency since they can "make a difference" in both constituting and representing an organization (Cooren, 2004). Thus, anything that "participates in the mode of communicating of an organization" (for example, a building, logo, directive, memo, or document) embodies it and materializes it as an organization (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Texts then express missions, legitimate official positions, and enact policies as they constitute the organization.

This recursive relationship between conversations and texts leads to metaconversations and metatexts through successively embedding many different conversations and texts in each other. Metaconversations form communities or networks of practice that become loosely coupled

self-organizing systems. A person or macro actor emerges from these communities to speak for or represent the organization; thus, the organization takes on authority through authoring and enlisting texts that cross time and space, link together different worldviews, and transform texts into symbols and standardized practices (e.g., strategic plans, codes of conduct, rules and regulations). Through communication then the organization functions as a collective actor capable of making itself known to its members and representing itself to others (Brummans et al., 2014).

The many communities of practice then often speak and act as one voice through multiple actors, such as texts, artifacts, emotions, buildings, and material objects (see Basque, Hirsto, & Wagnac, this volume). Cooren and his colleagues (Cooren et al., 2014) have developed several constructs to illustrate this speaking and acting as one entity, for instance, ventriloquism (Cooren, 2010; see Nathues & Van Vuuren, this volume), presentification and re-presentification (Cooren, Brummans, & Charrieras, 2008), and incarnation (Brummans & Cooren, 2011). The organization as one then is translated back to the many through aligning it with a *third person*; that is, using references such as *they*, *it*, *he*, or *she*, to invoke its name and to legitimate and authorize a representative. Thus, "the organization is constituted as an entity. Such entities, however, have no existence other than in discourse, where their realities are created and sustained" (Taylor & Cooren, 1997, p. 429).

The Four-Flows School. In the Four-Flows School, four distinct types of communication processes or "flows" constitute the organization (McPhee & Zaug, 2000; see Iverson, Myers, & McPhee, this volume). Grounded in Giddens's (1984) structuration theory (see Cooren & Seidl, this volume), an organization is a coordinated system of dynamic interaction episodes and social practices that emerge as flows. The flows and intersections between them contribute to CCO in different ways, but each one is necessary for an organization to function. These flows set forth the conditions for organizational existence, ones that are both orderly and disorderly, cooperative and competitive, and enabling as well as constraining.

The four flows consist of membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning (McPhee & Zaug, 2000). Membership negotiation centers on the communicative practices and strategies that constitute identities, positions, and boundaries. Communication integrates members through storytelling, instruction, dismissive rules, and boundary framing (inclusion/exclusion) that reference the organization and designate who speaks on behalf of it. Reflexive self-structuring refers to interactions that produce rules and resources that steer the organization in a particular direction. These interactions generate policies, formal charts, and informal norms and practices, ones that become retained, regularized, or reflexively altered.

Activity coordination, the third flow, focuses on communication that enacts task roles and work processes through connecting and assembling joint actions. In this process, organizational members negotiate activities, engage in trial-and-error interactions, and coordinate how to work. Activity coordination then parallels co-orientation in the Montreal School. The fourth flow, institutional positioning, refers to interactions aimed at situating the organization within a system of suppliers, regulators, customers, competitors, and partners. It occurs through legitimating and distinguishing the organization from other agencies, developing and maintaining a place for it in a larger social system, and establishing a niche for it in inter-organizational relations.

The four flows together account for coordinated episodes and transactions between them, interweaving the local with the global (and vice versa), transferring patterns across space and time, and forming sub-systems linked to each other (McPhee, Poole, & Iverson, 2014). In this

way, the organization is constituted communicatively as "a level of effective integration" among sets of people engaged in social practices and positioned in a larger social system (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 62).

The Luhmannian School. Like the other schools, scholars who apply Luhmann's theories to CCO treat the organization as a closed system that maintains its own operations and creates its own boundaries (see Grothe-Hammer, this volume). For Luhmannian scholars (Seidl, 2005; Seidl & Becker, 2006; Schoeneborn, 2011), however, the organization is nothing but a communication system or a system of information (content), utterances (form and purpose), and understanding (meanings). In this thinking, communication happens when the form and purpose of interaction is understood (Luhmann, 2006, p. 47), but it is the system itself that develops understanding, which becomes detached from humans who are considered part of the environment. Communication selects from the environment what is information and what is understanding as it invites responses, redundancy, negotiation, and differentiation. Thus, communication constitutes the organization through self-referencing or self-production (see Cooren & Seidl, this volume); that is, it develops a logic of operations that differentiates the organization from its environment (Luhmann, 1995, p. 13).

More specifically, organizations are constituted by decision communication. As noted by March and Simon (1958), communication selects courses of action or decisions that produce more decisions as the medium and outcome of choice. Decision communication, though, functions paradoxically in that the selection of one alternative excludes other options and thus reveals the undecidability of choice. To counter this factor, the organization aims to conceal this paradox by producing and storing decision premises that make choice seem predictable and reasonable for a particular time or a set of powerful actors (Brummans et al., 2014).

Importantly, only communication events participate in constituting the organization. Communication authors other communicative events and form networks of interconnected decisions. In this school, unlike the Montreal and Four Flows approaches, the organization is authorless or agentless; communication events constitute it, but the organization does not act as a separate agent. It exists as a social system that is sustained and changed through decision communication (Schoeneborn, 2011).

Comparison/Contrast of the Three Schools. As these descriptions suggest, the three schools of thought are similar yet are different in several ways (see Schoeneborn et al., 2014, for a full discussion). Two areas though seem pivotal to developing CCO thinking, that is, assumptions about communication as well as the communication-organization relationship.

All three approaches cast communication as a dynamic, ongoing process that is precarious and indeterminate; however, they differ regarding the salient features that enact CCO. Drawing from the dialectic of conversation and text, scholars in the Montreal School treat communication as a transactional process that entails human and non-human agents who are co-orienting around a task. As agents produce metaconversations and metatexts, representatives come forth to speak on behalf of the organization. In this way, communication enacts relationships among human and non-human agents as both engage in organizing and in authoring the organization as a collective.

In the Four Flows School, communication refers to different interactional functions that are deemed necessary for organizations to exit. Even though this school recognizes symbolic meaning, only humans can act. Thus, unlike the Montreal School, non-humans cannot have agency. In the Luhmannian School, communication is not a type of action/transaction; rather it centers on selecting out information, choosing utterances, and developing understanding

through distinguishing the organization from the larger environment. Importantly, in this school, understanding operates retrospectively, that is, subsequent communication interprets preceding ones; hence, meaning does not reside in humans per se, but in a network of decision communications (Blaschke, Schoeneborn, & Seidl, 2012).

Although the three differ in this regard, they share a common bond that communication constitutes the organization—as speech acts/conversations/texts that form and maintain a collective whole and speak on behalf of the collective (Montreal School, Taylor & Cooren, 1997); as four interrelated flows that interface to give rise to the organization (Four Flows, McPhee & Zaug, 2000), and as interconnected decisions that produce networks of communication (Seidl, 2005). In effect, an organization emerges as a processual entity through communication as transactional exchanges (Montreal), flows or interlocking communication events (Four Flows), or decision premises, networks, and understandings that shape continued decision communication (Luhmann).

Emergent CCO Constructs. These three schools serve as metatheories for guiding research and explanatory thinking about CCO. As such, a metatheory functions as an umbrella of central constructs and principles that generate explanations and modes of inquiry. Each of the three has produced complex and detailed nomenclature to guide research questions, methodologies, and extended theory development. In addition, as metatheories, they give rise to constructs that govern what CCO is and is not. The three constructs previously reviewed—constitutive, performativity, and recursive relationships—form the foundation that underlies all CCO thinking. However, the schools bring to the table three additional CCO constructs; namely, *entity/collective*, *materiality* (non-humans), and *distanciation* (i.e., crossing time and space). Even though the schools differ in their views of them, the three surface as additional constructs that have become pivotal to CCO thinking.

The first construct, the *entity* or *collective*, is the focal point of the communication-organization relationship. CCO work, however, differs from typical studies of the firm, institutions, or agencies that presume an a priori existence prior to communication. In this way, it challenges the age-old problem of entitativity that casts a collective as "real" or as an abstraction that exists apart from its construction. Even though the three schools agree that communication constitutes the organization, they differ regarding what the entity or collective is.

The Montreal School treats the entity as a macro-actor formed through meta-conversations/texts produced in communities of practice; thus, it surfaces as a communicative collective developed through self-organizing networks of interactions. The organization then is incarnated by anything that presents or represents it, including a logo, a text, a building, or a spokesperson. For the Four Flows School, the entity is a collective or a functional system that is (re)produced in day-to-day interactions. These interactions (i.e., assemblages of communicative processes) create membership boundaries, engage in self-structuring, perform task activities, and communicate with other organizations (e.g., competitors, regulators). Like the Four Flows, Luhmannian scholars cast the collective as a system, but a meso-level one distinguished from society and dyadic interactions by its reliance on decision communication; thus, the organization is "a network of interrelated processes of decisions connecting to other decisions" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 293). In summary, all three schools concur that the entity/collection is produced by and exists only in and through communication.

A second important construct that emanates from CCO schools is *materiality* or *non-human* actors (see Larson & Mengis, this volume). All three schools decenter or de-emphasize the role of human agents through focusing centrally on communication as the impetus for organizing.

The Montreal School moves a step further in endowing material objects and non-human actors with agency or the capacity "to make a difference" in organizations. The other two schools recognize materiality but give it less credence in constituting the organization. The Four Flows treats materiality as potentially enabling or constraining actions, but not as having its own agency; only humans have the capability to act. Similarly, the Luhmannian school recognizes material forms (e.g., objects, bodies, sites), but treats them as part of an organization's environment and not as communication per se. In effect, while the three schools differ regarding the role that non-humans play in constituting the organization, they believe materiality is important and critical to CCO.

The third construct that surfaces from the three schools is *distanciation* or the critical role of *distance*, *time*, and *space* in theorizing how communication constitutes the organization. *Distanciation* focuses on the way that agents bind communication and organizing across time and space or in local-global interactions (McPhee et al., 2014). All three schools embrace the notion that an organization crosses time and space, now and then, here and there, not simply as a social fact or a permanent building, but as ongoing processes of being constituted and reconstituted. Based on Giddens's (1984) work, the Four Flows school embraces distanciation to examine how interactional encounters move from one social system to another, how time-space trajectories cross locales, and how virtuality becomes rooted in structures (McPhee & Canary, 2013; McPhee et al., 2014).

Drawn from Ricoeur's (1981) notion of distanciation, scholars in the Montreal School explore distance through the ways that conversations become detached from texts (Taylor & Van Every, 2000, 2011), texts surface as objects that can be stored and archived (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011), objects come to represent the organization (Koschmann, Kuhn, & Pfarrer, 2012; Kuhn, 2008), and the organization becomes incarnated in artifacts, protocols, and routines (Cooren, Matte, Taylor, & Vásquez, 2007). Mobilizing agents to speak on behalf of the organization intertwines the past, present, and future through time trajectories that draw from previous conversations and direct future actions (Koschmann et al., 2012). In this way, the Montreal School investigates two key processes that take place in distanciation—decontextualizing and depersonalizing. Decontextualizing occurs when actors detach a text from its local situation and cast it as an abstraction while depersonalizing separates the text from the individuals who produced it and cast it as 'a what' (Lohuis & van Vuuren, 2017).

In the Luhmannian School, the construct of distanciation functions implicitly, especially in decision communication that produces premises for future decisions. As networks of decisions, communication travels across time and space. Moreover, the Luhmannian School also contends that the organization assures its presence across time and space through boundary communication that continually separates it from its environment. The organization then moves across time and space as a self-referential system, mediated by a network of communication decisions that produce decisions (Seidl, 2005).

In effect, the emergence and continued development of three schools paves the way for institutionalizing CCO thinking and for spreading its reach to international and interdisciplinary domains (Boivin et al., 2017). The three schools function as meta-theories or umbrellas in which other approaches draw on explanatory insights and key constructs to investigate how communication constitutes organization (Cooren et al., 2011). Even though they differ in terms of the communication features salient in CCO, they share common assumptions and central constructs that differentiate CCO work from other perspectives. In particular, the three schools embrace the fundamental belief that organizations "do not predate communication but come into being … [through] communicative processes that attribute actorhood to the organizational endeavor" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 309). In this way, CCO has become

"a paradigmatic perspective" or "a common enterprise" in which new and alternative approaches are surfacing to address "what is an organization?".

Stage 3: The Spread of CCO and the Emergence of a Generic Paradigm

The latest stage in CCO development is more difficult to date but it surfaces in the last decade through field-configuring events, the interdisciplinary and international spread of CCO, and the emergence of alternative CCO thinking. These developments have contributed to "the institutionalization of CCO scholarship" (Boivin et al., 2017) and culminated in a generic paradigm—one that embraces central constructs and tenets of CCO work.

Several field-configuring events have contributed to the advancement of CCO perspectives. A field-configuring event (Lampel & Meyer, 2008) is a "temporary social organization" or a professional gathering of scholars from different disciplines who join together, share concerns, exchange information, and advance a field of study (Boivin et al., 2017). These events are linked to pre-conferences, panels, symposia, and forums on CCO at professional meetings. Books, publications, forums, and special issues of journals stem from ideas sparked during these field-configuring events (see, for example, Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2017; Cooren et al., 2006; Cooren, Vaara, Langley, & Tsoukas, 2014; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013; Putnam & Nicotera, 2009, as well as *Management Communication Quarterly*, 2010, 2013, 2014; *Organization Studies*, 2011). The growth of these events aids in establishing CCO as a field of inquiry and in developing alternative perspectives (Boivin et al., 2017).

These field-configuring events also foster the interdisciplinary and international spread of CCO. While the early work was primarily based in North America among organizational communication scholars, Boivin et al., (2017) note the rapid growth of CCO thinking in multidisciplinary circles, as evident in mainstream management journals and applications to traditional organizational concepts. The interdisciplinary/international spread of CCO ties to the existence of a Standing Work Group on "Organization as Communication" in the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) from 2013 to 2021 (and now renewed for 2022–2025). Since the inception of this group, scholars from business schools, sociology, corporate communication, public relations, and other disciplines have presented and responded to CCO papers, deliberated about theory and research, and explored alternative methods for studying CCO. Relatedly, the number of publications authored by interdisciplinary scholars has increased in the past decade and CCO articles have gained traction in management journals, such as *Organization Studies* (12), *Human Relations* (5), *Academy of Management Review* (3), *Journal of Management Studies* (3), and *Academy of Management Annals* (2) (see Boivin et al., 2017).

Another indicator of the interdisciplinary spread is the growth in research that applies CCO thinking to traditional organizational topics, such as leadership (Fairhurst, 2007; Fairhurst & Cooren, 2009; Holm & Fairhurst, 2018; Koch, 2017; see Bisel, Fairhurst, & Sheep, this volume), organizational identification (Cornelissen, Christensen, & Kimuthia, 2012; Piette, 2013; Seidl, 2005, 2007; see Chaput & Basque, this volume), organizational change and learning (Browning, Sitkin, Sutcliffe, Obstfeld, & Greene, 2009; Matte & Cooren, 2015), interorganizational collaboration (Arnaudi & Mills, 2012; Koschmann, 2013; Koschmann et al., 2012; see Koschmann, this volume), and networks (Blaschke, Schoeneborn, & Seidl, 2012; Blaschke, 2017).

Importantly, applying CCO to particular research concepts often leads to reframing these arenas in innovative ways. In leadership studies, CCO work on textual "authoring" led to distinguishing leadership from authority, two concepts that have been habitually conflated (Holm & Fairhurst, 2018; see Benoit-Barné & Fox, this volume). In organizational strategy, for instance, Fenton and Langley (2011) recast strategic planning as textual narratives that infuse

infrastructures, metaconversations, and coherence. Similarly, Spee and Jarzabkowski (2011) examine how a strategic text becomes de-contextualized and detached from its production and how it disciplines members, shapes subsequent managerial conversations, and enacts legitimacy and authority for future actions (see Spee, this volume). Other studies apply Luhmann's CCO thinking to investigate the routines that shape decision communication in strategy (Faure & Rouleau, 2011; Hendry & Seidl, 2003). CCO thinking has also added a communicative approach to institutional theory through reconceptualizing stakeholder theory and knowledge-based theories of the firm (Kuhn, 2008, 2012) and through tracking how communicative practices scale up from local, situated events to metaconversations as opposed to drilling down from organizational logics (Cornelissen, Durand, Fiss, Lammars, & Vaara, 2015; Sandhu, 2017).

Applying CCO to a variety of topics has led to alternative approaches that veer from the three major schools. This work draws on different European theorists (e.g., Foucault, 1979; Habermas, 1987; Honneth, 1996; Gunther, 1979) to explore power conditions (Leclercq-Vandelannoitte, 2011), ethics and moral communication (Jensen, 2017; Scherer & Rasche, 2017), and struggles for recognition (Fassauer, 2017) in the communicative constitution of organization (see Cooren & Seidl, this volume).

One alternative that has gained considerable traction is the role of communication in constituting disorder and disorganization (see Vásquez, Kuhn, & Plotnikof, this volume). In contrast to CCO studies that privilege ordering moves (Cooren, 2000), this perspective focuses on conflict, struggles, and irrationality, not as ineffective or dysfunctional, but as an unavoidable and necessary feature of organizational life (Cooren et al., 2011; Cooper, 1986). CCO models are particularly well-suited to studying dis/organization through focusing on the dialectical relationship between order and disorder in negotiating meanings, examining power (Mease, 2021), and in struggles among texts (Putnam, 2019; Vásquez & Kuhn, 2019). This alternative also shifts research agendas to concepts such as paradox, contradictions, and tensions (Putnam, Fairhurst, & Banghart, 2016) and to dis/organizing processes (Cooren & Caidor, 2019), such as producing visibility through invisibility (Albu, 2019; Stohl & Stohl, 2011), oscillating between stability and flexibility (Grothe-Hammer, 2019), and examining the interplay between equilibrium/disequilibrium in the "knotting" of multiple tensions (Sheep, Fairhurst, & Khazanchi, 2017).

In effect, CCO has emerged as a generic paradigm of theory and research in organizational communication as well as organizational studies writ large. The growth of field configuring events, the spread of CCO to interdisciplinary and international scholars, the applications of CCO to traditional organizational scholarship, and the emergence of alternative perspectives—all attest to a new framework or a paradigm for conceiving of what constitutes an organization. This paradigm, rooted in communicative processes and practices, includes a set of common elements and basic premises that emanate from these three stages of development and that guide CCO theory and research.

Common Elements and Premises of the CCO Paradigm

In a scientific community, a paradigm implies a general agreement on a way of thinking, common elements, basic premises, and key constructs. Although scholars differ in their perspectives, they share an overall goal; that is, to examine how communication constitutes organization. To this end, theorists concur on common elements and premises. For CCO, communication as constituting organization is the focal point of an investigation. Common elements subsumed under this umbrella include language, conversations, texts, flows, utterances, nonverbal communication, bodies, information, metaphors, non-human agents, artifacts, and meaning/understanding. Importantly, CCO scholars focus on the interactive configurations or sets of arrangements that

emerge from the multiplicity of these elements; for example, among conversations, texts, and nonhuman actors in the Montreal School, flows and meaning in the Four Flows School, and information, utterances, understandings, and decisions in the Luhmannian School. Alternative perspectives privilege struggles among these elements, for example, tensions and contradictory discourses, meanings, and texts as constituting dis/organization.

These sets of arrangements exist in reciprocal relationships; that is, they begin and end with interconnections that reflect back on and build on each other. In some CCO approaches, these dynamic and evolving relationships exist as a dance among agencies (Montreal) or a complex interwoven social system (Luhmann). Thus, "who and what is acting is always an open question" (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1152) and texts such as strategies and mission statements act in the name of the organization (Montreal). Relationality among agents, flows, or decisions, then, underlies how the three major CCO schools decipher patterns among these elements.

Adding to these elements, three key premises characterize CCO work (Cooren et al., 2011; Schere & Rasch, 2017). First, scholarship focuses on processes or "segments of ongoing, situated streams of socio-discursive practices", not isolated episodes or singular occurrences (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1151). It examines the interactive processes and communicative practices as they evolve over time. Thus, scholars center on "what happens *in* and *through* communication to constitute (re-)produce, or alter organizational forms and practices" (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1151, emphasis in original).

A second and related premise is that CCO targets joint production, or the co-orientating and co-constructing of performances and meanings. Meanings then are negotiated as "provisional and temporary-situated accomplishments" (Cooren et al., 2011). Because they are co-produced or co-constructed among multiple actors, they typically differ from the sender's intended meaning. A third premise closely tied to the first two is that CCO scholarship focuses on *both* the processes of organizing and the constitution of the organization. Focusing only on the process of organizing privileges an individualistic view and downplays the role of communication in constituting the collective. Thus, CCO scholars center on "how people get organized" and "how organizations come to be re-enacted and reproduced through these activities" (Cooren et al., 2011, p. 1153).

These premises form the assumptive ground for the six constructs that surface from tracing CCO history. Focusing on ongoing, situated streams of socio-material practices captures the *performative* nature of communication and the role of *materiality or non-humans* (socio-material practices) in *constituting* organizational forms. The *entity* or *collective* as a self-organizing system arises from the *recursive relationships* between organizing and organization as the third premise mentioned above. These relationships then become *distanciated* or detached from their situated construction to cross time and space in constituting the collective. Hence, as a common framework, CCO scholars focus on communicative elements and their recursive relationships in constituting organizing and organization. Five of the constructs—constitutive, performative, recursive relationships, entity/collective, and distanciation—surface as essential ingredients in all CCO studies while materiality is primarily a theme characterizing the Montreal School. Overall, though, these paradigmatic features distinguish CCO thinking from other types of organizational theory and scholarship.

Another characteristic of a paradigm is a common methodology or a shared epistemology. CCO research embraces a wide array of qualitative and quantitative research approaches, including narrative analysis, network studies, ethnography, conversational analysis, semiotics, and use of artifacts and architectural elements (Cooren et al., 2011). As this list suggests, the majority of studies are qualitative in nature. Even so, CCO research is methodologically diverse which can lead to a lack of transparency in describing data collection and analytical techniques

(Boivin et al., 2017, p. 346). One common methodological concern, however, is that CCO investigators focus on communication per se; thus, they share an epistemology centered on communicative events and practices grounded in the realm of action rather than on phenomena removed from observable interactions (Cooren et al., 2011).

As a paradigm, then, CCO represents a type of *unified diversity* (Eisenberg, 1984; see Boivin & Brummans, this volume) that shares common elements, premises, and constructs, but differs in perspectives, metatheoretical underpinnings, methodologies, and links to mainstream organizational literature (Boivin et al., 2017; Cooren et al., 2011). As this volume suggests, CCO scholarship has expanded its purview and paradigmatic reach to include an array of new approaches.

CCO Contributions to the Field

As a major theoretical lens, CCO has made several contributions to both organizational communication and organizational studies. A first key contribution is that CCO as a paradigm originates in organizational communication as opposed to in social theories writ large (Boivin, 2017; Putnam & Mumby, 2014). In this way, it challenges the social constructionist and critical approaches that minimize communication and materiality. CCO concepts and dynamic interrelationships surface from language, interactions, texts, utterances, nonverbal cues, and materialities rather than from structural, psychological, or mental models. For example, CCO work on sensemaking has moved away from its roots in cognition to focusing on language and dynamic interactions that constitute collective sensemaking (Cornelissen & Clarke, 2010). Thus, as demonstrated in previous discussions of organizational strategy and institutional theory, a second (and key) contribution of CCO is its capacity to reframe and alter the nature of organizational concepts through treating them as situated performances rather than preordained structures, individual cognitions, or cultural meanings.

Three additional contributions merit attention. First, CCO studies focus on ways that communication transcends the here and now. Rather than privileging norms and rules as structural or cultural phenomena, scholars focus on how transcendence occurs, ways that networks of practices and chains of interactions cross distances, how interactions intertwine past, present, and future (Browning et al., 2009; Vásquez & Cooren, 2013). Another important contribution of CCO work is its recent focus on disorder and disorganization. Criticized for a bias for order (Bisel, 2009, 2010), CCO work has responded to its critics and branched out to examine the disruptive, disordering, and chaotic properties of communication (Vásquez & Kuhn, 2019). This contribution advances an important and largely ignored agenda in organizational studies.

A third contribution that surfaces from CCO work is the research on *organizationality*: that is, what makes communication practices more or less "organizational" (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; see Schoeneborn, Blagoev, & Dobusch, this volume). Organizationality moves beyond the conceptions of organization as a noun or a verb to examine it as an adjective or a loose and fluid social phenomenon, such as movements, communities, and terrorist networks that have degrees of organizationality (Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019). For example, Wilhoit and Kisselburgh (2015) show how a community of commuter bicyclists stabilize communicative practices of spatial resistance that form a social collective.

A fourth contribution, as noted previously, is the way CCO addresses the classic micro-macro divide in organizational studies (Kuhn, 2012). Rather than reducing one level to another or treating them as discrete arenas, CCO work centers on navigating boundaries, scaling up and down through chains of interactional episodes, and ways that communication flows transcend levels in self-structuring and coordination activities. A CCO lens, as Kuhn (2012) aptly demonstrates, alters our understanding of traditional macro topics by situating them in

micro routines of socio-material accomplishments, dialogues that nurture multiple stakeholder relationships, and discursive resources in decision-oriented episodes. Focusing on communicative performances then counters the dualisms in debates between micro-macro levels.

The Exigencies for a CCO Handbook

As this essay suggests, CCO has not only reached maturity and developed clear conceptual foundations, it is now an alternative paradigm for studying communication and organization. This paradigm encompasses meta-theories as overarching schools of thought, alternative perspectives that spin off these theories, and general agreement on the goals, elements, central premises, and key constructs of CCO.

As scholars develop alternative perspectives and engage in dialogue across fields, a *Handbook* of CCO work is needed to take stock of theory and research, track developments in methodologies, and explore CCO pedagogy and practice. The wide interdisciplinary and international appeal of CCO suggest that empirical and theoretical work in this area will continue to grow and to focus on consequential problems that affect organizations and society today (Albu, 2019; Porter, Kuhn, & Nerlich, 2017; Schoeneborn, Vásquez, & Cornelissen, in press). Yet, in some circles, CCO has become a "catch all" phrase for any work on the communication-organization relationship (Boivin et al., 2017). A *Handbook* can aid in avoiding this conceptual drift by articulating commonalities among perspectives.

Although it may be premature to draw boundary lines, CCO scholars need to center on the configurations and interactive relationships among features of communication in constituting organization. They need to target how these elements jointly produce streams of ongoing, situated interactions and socio-material practices in both organizing and organization. Finally, based on historical development, they need to attend to six foundational constructs, namely, *constitutive*, *performativity*, *recursive relationships*, *entity/collective*, *materiality*, and *distanciation*, that serve as focal points for CCO work.

The CCO paradigm has become one of the most refreshing and generative frameworks in the field. It will continue for decades to be fertile ground for reframing traditional organizational concepts, for bridging the micro-macro divide, and for generating provocative insights as to what an organization is and how communication constitutes it.

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INTRODUCTION

Nicolas Bencherki, Joëlle Basque and Timothy Kuhn

Because CCO is far from being a homogeneous theory or a clearly defined object of interest, editing a handbook on the Communicative Constitution of Organization (CCO) presents quite a challenge. Linda Putnam and Anne Nicotera (2010) suggest that CCO is not a single stance, but a "collection of perspectives" that are united by a single central question: *what is the role of communication in the ontology of an organization?* For Taylor and Van Every (2000), the question that became the quest of CCO research is even broader: it is *What is an organization?* Whichever way the question is posed, though, "the closer one looks at the literature, the less evident the answer to the question becomes" (p. ix). This frustration with traditional theorizing unites CCO scholars, though their own answers to it also diverge greatly.

Such apparent disagreement may have to do with the fact that the two key terms – communication and organization – are very differently understood. "Organization" can be taken as a noun: an organization is a thing out there that we may study. It may, however, also be taken as a verb: organiz*ing* is something that we do together, a process through which we coordinate and control activity to "get organized". Or, it may also be an adjective: "organization*ality*" is a feature that different collectives, from a crowd to a social movement, might exhibit to varying degrees (Schoeneborn et al., 2019).

The way we understand communication also varies greatly. Communication looks rather different across the "schools" that are usually distinguished in CCO scholarship – the Montréal School, the Luhmannian perspective, and the Four Flows – but important distinctions also occur within each of them (Schoeneborn et al., 2014). Communication has been variously understood as an action (for instance, following speech act theory à la Austin, 1962; or American pragmatism, see Lorino, 2018; Misak, 2013), as the synthesis of information, utterance and understanding (according to Luhmann, 1992), a linking (Cooren & Caïdor, 2019), or as a symbolic interaction (McPhee, 1998), to name a few. It may take the empirical form of narratives (Robichaud, 2003), conversations (Cooren, 2007), sensemaking activities (Taylor & Robichaud, 2004), social media posts (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Etter & Albu, 2021), internal magazines (Basque & Langley, 2018) or any other kind of "communication episode" (Blaschke et al., 2012).

Such variability in how it understands its own core concepts has led some to question whether CCO actually knows what it is studying (Sillince, 2009). In response, we could say

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that CCO is not defined by an object, as is the case for some fields of study. In the same way as William James (1904/1977) said of pragmatism that it is the "attitude" of looking at consequences and effects rather than at categories, in the same way CCO is perhaps better understood as a sensibility: an attention attuned to asking, for each facet of our collective life, how it came to exist in the first place, and how it continues to sustain itself and to change. In that sense, although CCO scholars have been accused of lacking a critical agenda (an issue we'll return to in a moment; see also Del Fa and Kärreman's chapter in this volume), it shares with critical studies the reflex of not taking things for granted, of looking beneath the surface at how beliefs and realities that might appear "normal" are in fact constituted and maintained through what we say and do (Deetz, 1982).

The diversity of issues CCO scholarship has taken on – as is reflected by the chapters in Part 3 of this Handbook – should not, then, be understood as a lack of focus, but rather as a desire to unscrew the idols of management and organization theory. CCO shows that an organization is not made up of discrete features that can be dealt with independently, such as authority (Benoit-Barné & Fox, 2017), collaboration (Koschmann, 2016), diversity (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017), identity (Chaput et al., 2011), social responsibility (Christensen et al., 2013) or strategy (Aggerholm et al., 2012; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2011). Instead, CCO highlights the fluidity between these issues, as they all materialize through communication and implicate each other. For instance, strategizing involves the performance of authority (Bencherki, Sergi, et al., 2019; Vásquez et al., 2018), and collaboration supposes the creation of a collective identity (Koschmann, 2013). Corporate social responsibility, for its part, supposes listening to (and thus the competition among) a diversity of voices (Cooren, 2020; Schoeneborn & Trittin, 2013) and collaborating with outside stakeholders (Christensen et al., 2011). Adopting a CCO sensibility thus avoids dealing with issues in silos – which often follow the hermetic distinction between disciplines and university departments – and encourages a more integrative view of organizational reality.

Such holistic thinking, though, still has some difficulty finding its way in some journals and conferences. Organization and management journal editors and reviewers at times fall short of understanding that communication is a mode of explanation that can illuminate organizational phenomena, rather than an object in itself. In other words, CCO papers are rarely *about* communication: instead, they adopt a communication *perspective* on a variety of questions. Alternatively, organization and management scholars may have difficulty recognizing their own concepts when they are described as communicative performances. This is exactly what CCO is about: shaking up traditional ways of describing things and showing, for instance, that Max Weber did not say all there is to know about authority (Bourgoin et al., 2020), that project management is far more than what the standard "body of knowledge" claims it to be (Sergi et al., 2020), or that strategizing is far more pervasive than it is usually believed to be (Bencherki, Sergi, et al., 2019; Cooren et al., 2015). That being said, more and more CCO papers are published in journals beyond the discipline of communication, and CCO-minded scholars sit on those journals' editorial boards, suggesting a growing embrace of a CCO sensibility.

Towards Intellectual Institutionalization

The idea that communication constitutes organizations is still presented as "new" at academic conferences and in articles, even though it is nearly 35 years old. It can be traced back to 1988, when James R. Taylor published, in French, a collection of essays collectively titled *An Organization is but a Fabric of Communication* (Taylor, 1988, our translation). However, it took nearly another decade for this idea to reach a wider, English-speaking audience, with a

Communication Theory paper by Taylor and then-PhD students François Cooren, Nicole Giroux and Daniel Robichaud, where they suggest looking for organization "between the conversation and the text" (Taylor et al., 1996). The second half of the 1990s saw a multiplication of similarly minded publications, such as Jeffrey Ford and Laurie Ford's famous piece on the way organizational change is produced through conversation (Ford & Ford, 1995). The year 2000, though, is often described as a turning point, with the publication of Taylor and Van Every's (2000) *The Emergent Organization* and Cooren's (2000) *The Organizing Property of Communication*, which both offered a systematic overview of communication's constitutive power, but also of Robert D. McPhee and Pamela Zaug's (2000) article "The communicative constitution of organizations", which was the first to make use of the term that became the perspective's name and a rallying cry for a rich and diverse community.

Whichever birthdate we assign to the CCO perspective, at anywhere between 22 and 35 years of age, it is mature enough today to fully participate in academic deliberations over communicating and organizing, and the pressing social issues that surround the intersection of the two. CCO has witnessed increasing "institutionalization" (Boivin et al., 2017), with volumes and special issues systematically laying out its foundations and materializing it (e.g., Cooren et al., 2011; Robichaud & Cooren, 2013), as well as events bringing together its representatives throughout the world. For instance, Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) identify the 2002 preconference organized by Linda Putnam and Ann Nicotera at the National Communication Association convention, and the 2008 preconference of the International Communication Association conference, organized by Cooren, Robichaud and Giroux, in honor of Taylor, as two key structuring events. In addition, the funding that Steffen Blaschke and Dennis Schoeneborn received between 2010 and 2013 from the German National Science Foundation was also instrumental in establishing CCO as a research community (see also Blaschke & Schoeneborn, 2016). In particular, it led to the creation of the "Organization as Communication" network, which later engendered a standing working group of the same name at the European Group for Organization Studies (EGOS) – and its successor, the "Communication, Performativity and Organization" standing working group – and stimulated conversations between Luhmann-inspired researchers and their peers from around the world.

Despite these important milestones, CCO had been lagging in at least one important respect. While even more recent perspectives or phenomena have had handbooks published to inventory their respective state of the art, such an effort had yet to be made for CCO. The important edited book by Putnam and Nicotera (2009) has played a pivotal role for legitimating the subfield, but its chapters mostly consist in elaborations by North American authors regarding McPhee and Zaug's (2000) pioneering article (which is reprinted as the book's second chapter), thus centering its scope around the Four Flows perspective. Since then, the constitutive perspective has diversified in an important manner, a diversity this Handbook attempts to better capture. In addition to its founding geographical poles – Montréal, Québec; Tempe, Arizona; Boulder, Colorado – it now includes researchers from across the globe, although, regretfully, CCO (and social science research more broadly) still has to pay better attention to research conducted, for instance, in Latin America, Africa or some parts of Asia. Authors within this Handbook live and work in the US and in Canada, but also in Austria, Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, the Philippines and Switzerland. They are in departments and schools of communication, education, management, organization, sociology, or work outside of academia. The typical distinction between "schools" within CCO – The Montréal School, the Luhmannian approach, and the Four Flows – only partly accounts for the diversity of ways in which research is conducted and how it leads to a myriad of theoretical proposals with equally diverse axiological agendas (Schoeneborn

et al., 2014; Winkler & Bencherki, 2020). Yet, despite this diversity, this handbook of course only includes a portion of the research being conducted within and around the CCO umbrella today. Our hope, however, is that this Handbook serves to spark conversations and help isolated researchers realize they are, in fact, part of a rich community.

Key Questions Animating CCO Scholarship

What unites this diverse community? To answer this question, we must start by pointing out some of the key differences that adopting the CCO sensitivity makes. To begin, we can distinguish CCO from its older cousin, the interpretive tradition that began much earlier in organizational communication research and with which it is regularly confused (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). Indeed, CCO scholarship is sometimes accused of not bringing anything new to the table, given that interest in the way people talk has been around for a while. A key distinction between interpretive and constitutive research is that the latter locates the organization in individual or social cognition: it is what people *understand* that interests the researcher. These understandings may be shared or even imposed upon others (this is, for instance, how Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991, understand the notion of sensemaking). In contrast, CCO researchers hold that communication *does* things, with or without the mediation of human interpreters. Stories connect different events together and present the organization as their author, signs continue to warn against danger, tables participate in calculations, conversations weave time and space together, etc. (Cooren & Bencherki, 2010; Cooren & Matte, 2010; Vásquez, 2016).

The matter is made more complex by the fact that some research adopts a constitutive lens, without necessarily drawing from CCO literature or labeling itself as such. This is the case, for instance, of organizational researchers adopting an ethnomethodological approach (e.g., Clark & Pinch, 2010; Kwon et al., 2014; Samra-Fredericks, 2010), of studies that look at how discourse intertextually weaves the organization into new configurations, or which use Boden's (1994) notion of lamination to look at the way talk recursively refers to yet other talk (Grant et al., 2005; Oswick & Richards, 2004). Boje's (1991, 2003) and Gabriel's (1991, 1995) views of narratives have also had a deep influence on CCO. Similarly, the critical stance of Mumby (2000, 2018) and Deetz (1992) feeds CCO's aspirations to this day. We can consider these studies as "CCO-friendly", as they also pay attention to what communication concretely does to constitute organizational reality, beyond the sum of individual interpretations (see Ashcraft et al., 2009).

Besides this commitment to the tangible effects of communication, it is not entirely clear that CCO has a core credo or single method on which all would agree, although different attempts to delineate shared theoretical and methodological commitments have been formulated. François Cooren, Timothy Kuhn, Joep Cornelissen and Tim Clark (2011) suggested that CCO scholarship is based on "six premises:"

1. It studies communicational events;
2. It should be as inclusive as possible about what we mean by (organizational) communication;
3. It acknowledges the co-constructed or co-oriented nature of (organizational) communication;
4. It holds that who or what is acting is always an open question;
5. It never leaves the realm of communicational events;
6. It favors neither organizing nor organization.

Kuhn (2012) offers a more succinct characterization of CCO research, and more broadly of what it means to "take communication seriously", consisting of four "tenets": portraying

communication as constitutive of social realities, seeing organizations not as containers for communication, but intrinsically *as* communication, staying in the realm of communicational events both conceptually and methodologically, and, finally, not reducing communication to "meaning convergence". In 2013, during a pre-colloquium development work of the European Group for Organizational Studies conference, Cooren also suggested that CCO has a common "origin" and named a few "precursors", including Chester Barnard (1938/1968), Mary Parker Follett (1940), Gabriel Tarde (1893/2012) and Karl Weick (1979), who each contributed defining some of its defining features (see also Cooren & Robichaud, 2019).

Yet CCO scholars are well aware that creeds, origin stories and other rituals, if they are important in constituting an organization – or a research subfield – are communicatively constituted themselves and are resources for action rather than entrenched paths (see Basque & Langley, 2018, as well as Basque, Hirsto & Wagnac, this volume). Being aware of their role in our community can help us build upon them, but also move ahead without fearing to appear ungrateful to our predecessors.

Moving past such conventional ways of describing and dividing CCO scholarship, though, some common theoretical, methodological and empirical issues are raised from the moment we suppose that organizing takes place through communicating. For instance, Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) identify three issues that animate CCO studies: the ontological question (what is an organization?), the composition problem (how can singular events assemble into an organization?), and the question of agency (how does an organization act when people act on its behalf?). Other scholars have also identified the issue of authority as a key concern for CCO research (see in particular Taylor & Van Every, 2014, and the interview with Taylor in this volume). While all of these issues are intimately interconnected, based on the chapters included in this handbook, we can reorganize the themes that have been identified before, and distinguish at least four questions that cut across current CCO investigations.

An Expanded Ontological Question

The question pursued by Taylor and Van Every (2000) over two decades ago – "What is an organization? – has since been stretched to include a broader concern for the way organizing processes and features of organizationality can be detected even beyond conventional organizations. In this sense, CCO – in particular through the contribution of its the Luhmannian branch – has incorporated the work of Arhne and Brunsson (2011) on partial organizations to develop new analytical insights (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn et al., 2019). This new intellectual equipment has allowed CCO to answer some of its most stringent critics, including Sillince (2009), who argued that CCO was unable to distinguish between organizations and other forms of collective entities.

Rather than attempting an impossible definition, CCO scholarship has justified its interest in the diversity of ways in which collective endeavors unfold, by pointing out that being an organization is a matter of degree rather than a clear distinction. To be able to produce such an answer, CCO did not only draw from McPhee and Zaug's (2000) four flows– membership negotiation, reflexive self-structuring, activity coordination, and institutional positioning – but also incorporated "membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanction", as well as decisions, as key features of the constitution of organizations to look for in its empirical investigations (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2011, p. 86).

CCO has also expanded its reach by never hesitating to graft onto its intellectual tree new theories and perspectives, thus freeing itself from its origin story. In addition to regular engagement with management and organization theory, among other such expansion projects, it has

dipped its toes in the fields of ethics and law (Brummans et al., 2021; Cooren, 2015, 2016; Denault & Cooren, 2016; Laasch, 2021; Matte & Bencherki, 2019), shown its relevance for public relations (Buhmann & Schoeneborn, 2021), forayed into linguistics (Asmuß, 2012), caught the attention of sociologists (Donges & Nitschke, 2018), and has entered a dialogue with philosophers such as Étienne Souriau, Gilbert Simondon and Gilles Deleuze to highlight the organization's ontological plurality and the continuous nature of its individuation (Bencherki & Elmholdt, 2018; Bencherki & Iliadis, 2019; Mease, 2021) .

By drawing from outside its traditional theorizing, CCO was thus able to explore new organizational forms, such as clandestine and anonymous organizations (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015; Schoeneborn & Scherer, 2012), social media communities (Dawson, 2018; Dawson & Bencherki, in press; Etter & Albu, 2021), art collectives (Cnossen & Bencherki, 2018), entrepreneurial projects (Kuhn, 2017; Kuhn & Marshall, 2019) or even scientific and social controversies (Porter et al., 2018). CCO has shown it is able to answer its ontological question in each of those settings, but these expansions have also helped it clarify some of its other key concepts: agency, authority and the notion of situation.

A Richer View of Agency

A key issue animating CCO research across all of its perspectives is the notion of agency (Brummans, 2018). While authors working in each of its schools might disagree on crucial facets of what agency means – an issue we will return to shortly – it is undeniable that CCO supposes questioning taken-for-granted assumptions about agency. Communication has long been associated with people's ability to act (Bencherki, 2016), but this relationship takes on a particular shade with CCO theorizing. Indeed, it is concerned with how an *organization* might act, which relates to notions of organizational action and actorhood (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011; Grothe-Hammer, 2019). These notions have traditionally been addressed in management and organization theory through an emphasis on decision-making, rule following, and ecological adaptation, with issues of ambiguity and interpretation throwing some confusion in the mix (see March, 1996). Agency is all the more important, since it connects with the very existence and status of the organization: in other words, depending on how we suppose it acts, we also question whether it *exists* – and if so, how – or whether it is "mere" fiction (Savage et al., 2018). Conventional views have often limited the role organizations play in their own action, making organizational theory "a theory without a protagonist" (King et al., 2010, p. 290).

Such pronouncements ignore the contribution CCO scholars had already been making. Indeed, for CCO scholars, the organization is a *metaconversation* (Robichaud et al., 2004). This means that it consists in a mesh of conversations that recursively incorporate prior conversations, and in doing so reify them as texts available for collective scrutiny (Taylor et al., 1996; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). The Luhmannian perspective puts the emphasis on a particular set of texts: decisions, which are iteratively based on prior decisions, at once confirming them and opening up the possibility of alternatives (Schoeneborn, 2011). For the Four Flows perspective, reflexive monitoring is a key aspect of (human) agents' ability to reproduce the structures that, in turn, constrain them, as they account for their own actions and ask for other to explain theirs, thus embedding them into a structure (Iverson et al., 2018).

In a CCO view, organizational action consists, then, in the communicative embedding of prior conversations, decisions and descriptions into other descriptions that position the organization as the author of action. In this sense, through communicative practices, some aspects of the organization – a rule, a way of doing things, a budget, etc. – may be positioned as co-authoring what people (and other beings) do and say, making them "authoritative" texts (Kuhn, 2008, 2012;

Vásquez et al., 2018). Such sharing of agency between people and the organization may take place through nested narratives (Robichaud, 2003) or through attributive practices (Bencherki & Snack, 2016), but also through communication's inherent *ventriloquial* property (Cooren, 2010; Cooren et al., 2013). Ventriloquism refers to the fact that any actor may also be described as a *passer*, as what they do or say can be positioned as a being motivated by someone or something else that speaks or acts through them, thus blurring authorship and allowing one to consider these words and deeds as the organization's (Cooren & Sandler, 2014; Nathues et al., 2020; Wilhoit, 2016).

Authority. CCO's view of agency is intimately related to its treatment of authority (see Benoit-Barné & Fox, as well as Caronia & Nasi, this volume). A key question of authority – who speaks and acts for the organization? – may indeed be rephrased as an issue of shared agency between the organization and its spokesperson. Rather than formal positions and organizational charts, such a construal of authority invites us to look at the many ways in which the organization is *presentified* and made to express its wishes (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Benoit-Barné & Fox, 2017). Authority, then, is not the property of some individuals, but rather a feature of each situation that may require people to act in a certain way all the while they are contributing to shaping it (Bourgoin et al., 2020; see also Follett, 1940). This also means that authority is not the prerogative of human beings alone, as contracts, tools, principles and other "non-humans" may also contribute to guiding collective action, a reality captured through both the notion of "textual agency" and that of "authoritative text", illustrating the proximity between agency and authority (Brummans, 2007a; Cooren, 2004a; Cooren & Matte, 2010; Hollis, 2018; Koschmann & Burk, 2016).

Situation. The notions of agency and authority help CCO scholars understand organizations, organizing and organizationality because they help it analyze how *situations* are assembled through what people and things do and say, and in return direct these actions and words. In that sense, the notion of situation is CCO's response to the "composition problem" that Schoeneborn and Vásquez (2017) and Kuhn (2012) identified. Each communication event includes attempts at shaping the ongoing situation. As that situation gradually stabilizes, it also increasingly constrains further communication events. To the extent that people "obey" what the situation requires from them, it gains *authority* over their actions (Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Bourgoin et al., 2020; Cooren, 2010).

"Composing" the organization from diverse communicative events, thus, is not something done outside of the concrete interactions that take place in each of these events. As people and things communicate, they also attribute those same actions to the situation in which they find themselves, i.e., to an organizational "third", thus presenting it as defining and guiding what they do and say (Bencherki & Cooren, 2011; Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Kuhn, 2012). They may also appropriate communicative events that took place elsewhere and at another time, to *presentify* them into their situation (Cooren, 2004b; Cooren et al., 2008; Vásquez, 2013). As particular ways of defining the situation gain autonomy, for instance through (authoritative) texts, the organization emerges as a constraining actor of its own.

Though it emerged in interactional literature, and in particular in Goffman's (1959) work, Taylor and Van Every (2011) extend the notion of situation to make it key in understanding the organization's role as "thirdness", as that to which people and things both contribute and co-orient as they define their ongoing relationship. They thus recognize the "fundamental role of framing a situation" (p. 14), as it is the situation that defines roles and identities, dictates what can and cannot be done, and how people should behave relative to one another. The organization, thus, is always "situated".

(Dis)organization

A last issue that animates CCO research is that of the relationship between organization and disorganization, or between order and disorder. Researchers' inclination to look for coherence has led them to attend to organization and order, and to consider disorder as a mere backdrop (Kuhn, 2012). In doing so, they have tended to ignore the messiness that cohabitates with organization. However, adopting a constitutive view of communication stresses the fact that order is "a local, emergent, and transitory phenomenon" (Bauman, 1992, p. 189; cited in Kuhn, 2012, p. 550).

For Four Flows researchers, while some communicative practices can lead to organizing, others may lead to disorder (Bisel, 2009), and other conditions besides communication may also affect whether it can engender order (Bisel, 2010). For their part, the Montréal School and Luhmannian perspective agree that the same communicative event can be at once organizing and disorganizing, as (dis)organization is a property of communication itself, and both order and disorder are present at once in any situation. (Dis)organization results from language's ability to escape its author's control and the possibility of other meanings to "haunt" what is said or written, thus making communication always susceptible to surprise (Vásquez et al., 2016). A similar argument is made by Grothe-Hammer and Schoeneborn (2019) using a Luhmannian lens. They note that communicating a decision always paradoxically also communicates the existence of alternatives to that decision, thus at once reproducing the organization the decision supposes, but also raising the possibility of disorganization (see also Schoeneborn, 2008).

The simultaneous existence of organization and disorganization, finally, may be seen as a matter of perspective. The same situation may promote the existence and interests of some people or things, while hindering those of others: Cooren and Caïdor (2019) give the example of a lumberjack following instructions to cut down trees in a particular area – thus displaying orderliness – causing havoc for animals and ecosystems, or possibly even leading competitors to experience disorganization if they counted on that contract.

Current Conversations in the Community

While CCO scholars broadly share a common sensitivity, adhere broadly to similar principles and are animated by the above issues, different ways of understanding and addressing these issues co-exist within the research community. Without reflecting the rich conversations and debates that take place during conferences and in the pages of journals, we can summarily identify two fundamental areas around which research perspectives branch out. Indeed, CCO scholars do not entirely agree on what counts as a meaningful communicative event, and – as we have hinted above – they theorize agency in diverging ways. While below we caricature the positions of each of the CCO "schools", these conversations do not always neatly follow these demarcation lines.

What Counts as a Meaningful Communication Event?

The first of the "premises" suggested by Cooren, Kuhn, Cornelissen and Clark (2011) is that CCO studies communication events, and already researchers are debating what unit of analysis should be object of study. The various understandings of what a communication event is lead to equally various methodological choices. For Montréal School researchers, the tendency has been to prioritize naturally occurring communication events, which are usually recorded, such as meetings and other formal or casual conversations (Bencherki et al., 2016; Cooren, 2007; Cooren et al., 2008; Robichaud, 2003).

This definition of communication events rests, to some extent, on the Montréal School's roots in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, which similarly favor naturally occurring events. Yet, it is also justified by the school's view of communication as action, and its extension of agency to non-human actants (as we will see in the next section), which, when combined, require paying attention to what language concretely *does* and how it relates to other situated actions. In that sense, traditional qualitative investigation tools such as interviews, rather than collecting "facts" or individual interpretations, would be viewed as interactional episodes between the interviewer and the interviewee, during which organizational realities are co-constructed (but interviews are also much more; see Alvesson, 2003).

That being said, the Montréal School has also been criticized for over-privileging interactions and, in particular, talk, at the expense of other forms of communication (Wilhoit, 2016). Perhaps as a testament to a generational shift and an extrication from its ethnomethodological roots, a growing number of researchers do not hesitate to explore Montréal School concepts using interviews (Jahn, 2016), visual elicitation (Wilhoit, 2017), archival methods (Basque & Langley, 2018) and other approaches, thus also broadening its definition of what counts as a communication event.

The Luhmannian perspective, which had initially introduced the notion of communication event (Schoeneborn, 2011), shares with the Montréal School its tendency to explore naturally occurring events. While Luhmannian theory would target communication events surrounding *decisions*, which it views as the ones specific to organizing (see Grothe-Hammer, this volume), the fact is that empirical studies have observed a range of communicative phenomena. Research in the Luhmannian perspective has also been inclusive when it comes to the tangible form communication episodes might take and how to study them. That is why, for instance, the Luhmannian perspective comprises quantitative and network analysis of collaboration between people (Blaschke et al., 2012), interviews about how decisions are "programmed" (Grothe-Hammer & Berthod, 2017), as well as the study of documents such as presentation slides (Schoeneborn, 2013). Contrary to the Montréal School's conceptualization of communication as action, for Luhmann communication includes *understanding*, which lies in subsequent communication's uptake of preceding ones, meaning that communication can only be understood as a string of events rather than as isolated moments (as Seidl explains in Schoeneborn et al., 2014; see also Luhmann, 1995).

Finally, the Four Flows perspective is not as explicit as the others on what it identifies as a relevant communication event, which may result from its being based on structuration theory, though "Giddens was notoriously brief in his discussion of communication" (McPhee & Iverson, 2009, p. 52). For Four Flows researchers, not all communication leads to organizational constitution (Bisel, 2009). Indeed, "speech does not in itself, or even mainly, constitute an organization, and can be delusional or involve unusual registers" (McPhee in Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 301). The perspective focuses on communication that relates to (a) membership negotiation, (b) activity coordination, (c) reflexive self-structuring and (d) institutional positioning. Each of these flows, in turn, is an assemblage of communicative processes, such as, in the case of membership negotiation, "role learning, power accumulation, identification and disidentification" (McPhee in Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 294). In the case of activity coordination, McPhee gives the example of mutual adjustment as an example of underlying communicative process. Reflexive self-structuring would rely on creating membership boundaries, while institutional positioning concerns relations between the organization and others surrounding it.

In that sense, the Four Flows perspective can be described as "meta-theoretical" to the extent that it directs the attention of scholars interested in organizational constitution to relevant

communication processes, without these processes being themselves germane to the Four Flows approach. For instance, identification, which McPhee suggests is crucial to membership negotiation, has been studied by Montréal School researchers (Chaput et al., 2011). The same goes for the creation of membership boundaries, which has been shown to be a communicative achievement using both the Montréal School and the Luhmannian perspective (Bencherki & Snack, 2016; Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015). Much work has also been devoted to the way organizations present themselves online or to inter-organizational collaboration, thus addressing institutional positioning (e.g., Dawson, 2015; Koschmann, 2013). As for activity coordination, it arguably represents the bulk of CCO research, for instance through work about the coordination of resistance online or about (strategic) planning (Albu, 2019; Bencherki, Sergi, et al., 2019; Etter & Albu, 2021; Grothe-Hammer & Berthod, 2017). Thus, it appears that the Four Flows' segmentation of communication events is the most widely accepted in CCO theorizing, although it is rarely explicitly referred to as such.

An important distinction between the Four Flows approach and the two others, though, is its restriction to communication to human beings, in line with its view of agency, as we will see below. Indeed, for McPhee, communication depends on human beings' interpretive resources, and it is important to recognize – if we seek to explain organizational constitution – "that human agents' interpretive systems include resources that lead an individual to think of himself or herself as able to (fallaciously) speak for, or even to be, an organization" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 301). This contrasts with the Montréal School's desire to "open up the scene" of communication to other-than-humans (Cooren, 2008), as well as with Luhmann's provocative suggestion that "[h]umans cannot communicate [… o]nly communications can communicate" (2002, p. 169; cited in Seidl & Becker, 2006, p. 20).

Who (or What) "Has" Agency and What Place to Give to Materiality?

As already partly covered earlier (also see Putnam's Foreword, this volume), a key concern for CCO scholars is the question of agency, and each school's different take on the notion is crucial for understanding its theorizing, as well as its conception of relevant communication events and the methods it adopts in studying them. The Four Flows perspective's restriction of communication to humans, due to their interpretive capacity, is paralleled by an equal restriction of agency to humans. This restriction is justified by Giddens's definition of agency as "to be able to 'act otherwise'" (Giddens, 1984, p. 14), which is understood to mean that agents should also possess the "ability to account for and reflect on actions in meaningful ways" (Iverson et al., 2018, p. 44). Indeed, the ability of non-humans to act is mediated by the interpretation humans make of their role, and is conceptualized in terms of resources and constraints on human agency (McPhee & Iverson, 2011). Most importantly, even if it might grant some role to technology and other non-human actors, the Four Flows perspective rejects the "minimization of the difference between human agents (who alone can understand communications) and other elements and systems" (McPhee in Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 299).

Although some of its authors have similarly questioned the Montréal School's apparent conflation of human and non-human agency (Jansen, 2016), the Luhmannian perspective has a radically different perspective on agency. To begin with, Luhmannians consider human agency to be at the intersection of different systems: a human being is "made up", for instance, of organic and psychic systems, which constitute it and its ability to act (Seidl & Becker, 2006), a point echoed by some Montréal School theorizing that sits somewhat outside its canon (e.g., Bencherki & Iliadis, 2019; Brummans, 2007b). However, it also agrees with the Montréal School in "de-centering" agency from human beings to the extent that it focuses on

communication itself as productive of systems and of further communication events, which "gain agency in their own right" (Schoeneborn et al., 2014, p. 306).

The Four Flows and the Luhmannian perspectives have often formulated their views of agency in reaction to the Montréal School's liberal extension of the notion to non-human entities, which is largely a result of its borrowing from actor-network theory, and in particular from Bruno Latour (Bencherki, 2017; Cooren, 2010; Latour, 2013). This extension of agency is instrumental in the Montréal School's proposal that conversations gain endurance through their inscription in texts, such that what people say and do can move through time and space, "scaling up" to constitute an organization (Cooren & Fairhurst, 2009; Robichaud et al., 2004; Taylor & Van Every, 2000). This key idea has led Montréal School researchers to develop the notion of textual agency (Brummans, 2007a; Cooren, 2004a), and to recognize that an organization is a "plenum of agencies" (Cooren, 2006).

More recently, though, and perhaps under the influence of Luhmannian thinking (see Cooren & Seidl, 2020), Montréal School researchers have begun considering communication itself as material (rather than resting on non-human agents), and to position communication's materiality as participating in a relational ontology view of organizing (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Cooren, 2018; Kuhn et al., 2017). In other words, relationality is substantiated in communication (Cooren et al., 2012). This seemingly slight shift in the way the Montréal School views agency and materiality is consequential, in the sense that it allows viewing communication not only as constitutive of organizations within which human beings live and work, but also as constitutive of humans themselves, with a growing number of researchers interested in notions such as affect and performativity, and connecting the Montréal School with different philosophical approaches (e.g., Ashcraft, 2020; Del Fa, 2017).

Future Trajectories: Ensuring the Practical and Academic Relevance of CCO

These conversations have kept CCO scholarship on its toes, always looking to renew and refine their theorizing of the communication–organization relationship. In exploring new avenues, CCO is opening up exciting future trajectories, but is also faced with potential challenges.

As discussed in Del Fa and Kärreman's chapter in this volume, a first important area of development for CCO concerns its ability to articulate a critical posture. Indeed, CCO has been at times accused of limiting itself to describing organizational phenomena as they take place, without positioning itself regarding what constitutes good and/or ethical organizing (Reed, 2010). This lack of critical engagement is all the more surprising given that CCO, in revealing the communicative underpinnings of organizing, parallels the efforts of many critical authors (e.g., Clegg, 1987; Deetz, 1992). In developing its own critical voice, CCO can build on the efforts of "friendly" research that has pointed out, for instance, how communication enables resistance and submission (Mumby, 2005), how "ideal" professional identities are constituted (Ashcraft, 2016, 2017), how gender and class intersect in "dirty work" (Tracy & Scott, 2006), how particular forms of organizing are rendered invisible (Cruz, 2015, 2017), or how brands gain agency to reproduce capitalism (Mumby, 1998, 2018). It can also count on CCO research that has already touched upon some of the central themes of critical theory, albeit not from a critical stance as such, in particular power and authority (Bencherki, Matte, et al., 2019; Benoit-Barné & Cooren, 2009; Benoit-Barné & Fox, 2017), diversity (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017), and ethics (Cooren, 2016; Matte & Bencherki, 2019). Genuine CCO critical research is still in its nascent stage, with studies on the way alternative organizations are constituted (Del Fa, 2017; Del Fa & Vásquez, 2019), calls to decolonize the epistemologies that

underpin constitutive approaches (Vásquez et al., 2021), and the proposal that communicative relationality might allow escaping capitalism's position as the overarching and deterministic framework within which organizing unfolds (Kuhn et al., 2017). More efforts are still needed, though, to unpack CCO's critical potential.

A second area of development for CCO is for it to find its full relevance for practitioners, as van Vuuren and Knoers explain in their chapter in this volume. Indeed, while CCO can pride itself on conducting quality empirical work, few research projects truly employ its rich theorizing to reach out to practitioners and respond to their concerns (exceptions include rare action-research work; see Vásquez et al., 2018). While CCO's relevance for practice has been the topic of at least two workshops held prior to the 2014 and 2017 colloquiums of the European Group for Organizational Studies, engaging with practitioners and working with them on making theory actionable for them remains an underexplored area (not unlike CCO pedagogy, incidentally; see Kuhn & Schoeneborn, 2015).

As CCO researchers explore these avenues, however, they also face the challenge of losing their specificity. Indeed, the strength of CCO has been, so far, its ability to pinpoint the communicative processes in practices through which organizing takes place; its descriptivist stance was its distinctive trait. By developing its critical reach or its relevance to practitioners, it will need in both cases – albeit differently – to adopt instead a normative or prescriptive vocabulary, and in doing so risk diluting its distinctiveness. CCO scholars will therefore be careful to make sure to reflect on how they can formulate critique or guidance that builds on their unique analytical ability and remains a distinctive voice in the concert of organizational (communication) studies.

That being said, CCO probably has more to gain than to lose in reaching out to neighboring research communities. As, until recently, CCO scholars have been busy building and legitimating their original approach, they have also somewhat neglected their engagement with broader debates and conversations, leading some to perceive them as somewhat of a clique. In that sense, we have perhaps missed some opportunities to better explain our perspective(s) to other researchers and to demonstrate our relevance to them. Toning down the impression that CCO is an exclusive club would therefore allow us to show what we can do, but also to enrich ourselves, as we help address the challenges that preoccupy organization studies and management, other fields of communication studies, as well as other disciplines.

Outline of the Handbook

Since the beginning of this handbook project, a constant preoccupation for us as co-editors has been to include authors reflecting the diversity of our community, as witnessed during the academic conferences and events that bring us together. In particular, we wanted to reflect diversity in terms of *generations* of CCO scholars. Indeed, given the maturity of our research tradition, we see emerging young scholars representing what is now the fourth generation of CCO scholars, who bring along new concerns and new theoretical vistas, and are unburdened with some older intellectual traditions and cleavages. From early on, CCO scholars have been inspired by their students (as illustrated in Chaput and Basque's interview with James R. Taylor, in this volume) and have never hesitated to collaborate with young researchers from around the world (e.g., Nathues et al., 2020; Taylor & Virgili, 2008). In our desire to capture this vivacity, we chose to give a voice not only to the established scholars who defined the field, but also to mid-career and early-career scholars who are active contributors to our research community, as well as PhD students who enrich CCO thinking.

Roughly speaking, the different sections of this book can be understood as corresponding to the concerns of these different "generations". While early on CCO was preoccupied with establishing theoretical basis – as is the case in our first section, with many first- or second-generation researchers – it has since moved on to seeking to diversify its methods (second section) and to engage with the concerns of its sister fields of study, in particular management and organization studies (third section), and now seeks to find resonance with practitioners in new territories and applications (fourth section). At each step, and in each section, a greater number of younger scholars join their voice to the conversation. In that sense, 7 of the handbook's 33 chapters (21%) include a student or postdoc author, and the number would be greater if we counted recent graduates with either faculty or out-of-academia positions.

Another preoccupation for us, the co-editors, was to make a conscious effort to achieve gender parity among the books' authors. In 2022, gender parity may seem like something one may take for granted, but recent research has shown that gender equality is still a challenge in the academic world (Blithe & Elliott, 2020; Munar et al., 2017). A constant effort is thus needed to make sure women's voices are heard and given the same importance. For these reasons, authors were asked to do their best, in their teams, to accomplish both generational and gender parity. They have responded well to our call: of this handbook's 33 chapters, 26 include at least one woman among their authors (79% of all chapters), 23 include at least 50% of women among their authors (70% of chapters), and 13 are written entirely by women (40% of chapters).

Geographical parity was also a challenge in the co-editors' mind from the initiation of the project. The handbook reflects that CCO remains concentrated in North America, with Americans representing 28% of authors and Canadians 23%, for a total of 51%. Denmark follows at 18%, and all other Europeans combined reach 26%. Non-Europeans – all three of them – only represent 5% of authors. While this lack of geographical diversity could be blamed on a variety of reasons, the fact is that it does represent our community, and points to the need to continue recent efforts to "de-Westernize" CCO thinking and draw inspiration from other parts of the world, as suggested by Vásquez, Guillén & Marroquín (2021), in the case of Latin America.

The first section of the handbook offers an overview of the key theoretical debates that animate our research community. As indicated above, CCO scholarship has developed in conversation with a wide array of thinking in social theory, philosophy, and allied academic disciplines. Although the story of this engagement is often told as revolving around the three schools of CCO thought (as we've done in this Introduction), the vectors of intellectual lineage are more complicated. The field's theoretical influences are the central concern of François Cooren and David Seidl's chapter on the roots of CCO, which explores the multiple sources of inspiration undergirding the three schools of CCO thought, displaying areas of convergence as well as differentiation. Following this is Geneviève Boivin and Boris Brummans's chapter on the value that the notion of ambiguity has played in the development of CCO scholarship by turning the spotlight on the very scholars mentioned in the pages of this Handbook: the social collective of CCO researchers themselves. Far from navel-gazing, this chapter examines discourse at relevant conferences to consider how ambiguity participates in the creation of this vibrant and growing scholarly community. The third chapter in this section, by Veronica Dawson, considers how the conversation-text dialectic has served as a key conceptualization of the communicative event for CCO scholarship, particularly the line of work associated with the Montréal School. Next is Joel Iverson, Karen Myers and Robert McPhee's explication of the Four Flows framework, which employs the compelling example of Trump University to illustrate the communicative flows and their intersections. The ensuing chapter introduces the

Luhmannian school of thought, as Michael Grothe-Hammer cogently presents Luhmann's theorizing and describes how decisions can take center stage as the foundational communicative events in CCO thinking.

After considering the grounding of the field and its main conceptual traditions, the remaining chapters in the first section take up core theoretical concerns that cross the schools of thought. In Elizabeth Wilhoit Larson and Jeanne Mengis's chapter, the authors outline four approaches to the study of materiality in studies of organizing, with particular attention to CCO engagements with this complex notion. Next, Consuelo Vásquez, Timothy Kuhn and Mie Plotnikof pursue the insights to be gleaned from rejecting any opposition between order and disorder and, instead, framing dis/organization as a heuristic vision of the social practice CCO scholars study. A further exploration into the complexity of organizing is offered by Dennis Schoeneborn, Blagoy Blagoev and Leonhard Dobusch's chapter on organizationality. The notion of organizationality was introduced above, but this chapter deepens understandings of this novel concept through two case studies, which also display organizing to be more fluid than conventionally understood. Then, because authority is at issue for all the authors in this section, Letizia Caronia and Nicola Nasi unpack the notion by distinguishing between epistemic and deontic authority, illustrating these types (and their junctures) with a detailed analysis of episodes of interaction associated with antibiotic use in a hospital ward. The next chapter, by Sophie Del Fa and Dan Kärreman, is a provocation, challenging CCO scholarship to more fully embrace a critical orientation, one that entails a thoroughgoing critique of the neoliberal capitalism that serves as the foundation upon which organizing and communicating unfolds. And, finally, Jamie McDonald's chapter continues the critique of CCO's theoretical foundations, providing a model for how scholars might interrogate heteronormative conceptions of organizing by building on queer theorizing to center difference; in so doing, argues McDonald, new vistas for organization studies will emerge. Taken together, then, the 11 chapters in this first section not only display CCO scholarship's central theoretical tenets, but also demonstrate the field's willingness to challenge its fundaments in the pursuit of continuing growth.

In the second section, chapters address the burgeoning methodological diversity and the many ways in which CCO research is conducted. While CCO research regularly expresses its commitment to studying communication episodes, it has only rarely reflexively examined its own methodological choices (Nathues et al., 2020; Wilhoit, 2016). To remedy this, Theresa Castor first offers a thorough review of the many ways in which discourse has been conceptualized, and how CCO has engaged with the variety of discourse analysis. Ellen Nathues and Mark Van Vuuren then offer a hands-on approach to analyzing discourse data in a CCO perspective, and more specifically using François Cooren's ventriloquial perspective (Cooren, 2010; Cooren et al., 2013). In the third chapter in this section, Helly Kryger Aggerholm, Birte Asmuß, Leo Feddersen Smith and Henrik Ladegaard retrace CCO's roots in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis, and present readers with fruitful avenues to conduct EM/CA analysis in search for organizing. Joëlle Basque, Heidi Hirsto and Régine Wagnac then move past a focus on language as such, to invite CCO scholars to engage with organizing's temporality through the use of archival methods. Finally, Boris H.J.M. Brummans and Camille Vézy offer a poignant plea for a more "adventurous" engagement with ethnography, to capture the processuality and eventfulness of communication. Through these many chapters, this handbook's second section thus constitutes a rare opportunity to review the different strategies available to observe communication's constitutive power.

As the third section reveals, CCO theorizing, combined with appropriate methods, sheds a different light on crucial managerial and organizational notions. Chantal Benoit-Barné and Stephanie Fox address one of CCO's key concerns, authority, which finds resonance in Ryan

Bisel, Gail Fairhurst and Matthew Sheep's treatment of leadership among each of the three schools of CCO. Mathieu Chaput and Joëlle Basque, for their part, engage with another crucial theme, identity, by introducing the notion of "identity matters" as CCO's unique contribution to scholarship on the topic. Then, Viviane Sergi and Paul See each bring to our attention key evolutions in the way organizations are managed: Sergi shows how CCO can fruitfully converse with literature on project-based organizing, and Spee offers an overview of literature intersecting CCO and strategic management. The next two chapters hint at CCO's potential for more responsible organizing: Lars T. Christensen, Visa Penttilä and Neva Štumberger review the important work that has been conducted so far in connecting a constitutive view of communication with corporate social responsibility, revealing how talk may produce responsible organizational action; Shiv Ganesh, Cynthia Stohl and Samantha James, for their part, suggest the term "lenticulation" to address the role of visibility in the way we have been studying globalization. Continuing on the project of making organizations better places, Matthew Koschmann then reviews the ways in which a constitutive approach to communication can help understand collaboration between civil society organizations, and Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich and Florence Villesèche show how CCO can contribute to, but also learn from, literature on organizational diversity. Finally, the section's two last chapters engage with areas of research that CCO has overlooked for the moment: the first is that of digital media, which has only recently started to catch the attention of a new generation of scholars, even though, as Jean Saludadez argues, CCO is well equipped to shed a new light on technology; the second is organizational memory, for which Salla-Maaria Laaksonen and François Lambotte offer a rich theorizing that goes beyond simple information storage and retrieval.

Lastly, in the fourth section, chapters reveal how CCO can illuminate concrete, day-to-day practice in a variety of organizational settings. This last section is all the more important given that – as we have already mentioned – CCO scholarship has regularly been accused of falling short on formulating useful advice for managers and for the other people who, every day, make their organizations thrive. First, Mark van Vuuren and Peter Knoers, in a very original and provocative chapter, explain how the CCO view can help practitioners understand the problems they face in their work. Relying on their experience as both academics and consultants and on the many occasions they had to build bridges between theory and practice, they challenge the CCO community to engage more closely with professionals to equip them with CCO's particular lens to overcome naiveté about communication and start questioning the "taken-for-grantedness" of organizations. Next, Boukje Cnossen offers a thorough examination of organizational research in the arts, and reveals how a theorizing of both the art organization and of the impact of the artwork on it is mostly absent from this literature. She explains how a relational view, informed by a CCO perspective, can bring a unique contribution to address this omission, and provide a better comprehension of the role of artistic practices in organizing for researchers and artists alike. Using CCO to study difficult and unusual settings, Oana Albu and Neva Štumberger examine spatial assemblages in refugee camps through the work of humanitarian organizations. They describe the volatility of agencies in these contexts, and explain how a communicative understanding of space can help volunteers consider political and ethical aspects of humanitarian organizing. Also demonstrating the variety of research contexts that inspire CCO authors, Colleen Mills brings us to a very different setting where spatiality is also prominent: a food-processing factory. Through this chapter, she shows the relevance of one feature of CCO – namely the rejection of the language/materiality dualism – for practitioners. In a similar vein, Jody Jahn and Rebecca Rice engage with the high reliability organizing (HRO) literature to identify its shortcomings in theorizing the role of materiality in organizing and sensemaking in these risky contexts. They show how a CCO approach can reveal how material

objects orient the construction of the tactical possibilities HRO members see as available to them when they consider various courses of action. Last but not least, Stephanie Fox and Jody Jahn propose a CCO perspective to address a very concrete problem faced by practitioners in multidisciplinary work teams, especially in the healthcare system: how to navigate status asymmetry while deciding on action.

In addition to the agenda each chapter set for itself, this Handbook also aims at a purpose beyond its value as a pedagogical tool to introduce students to CCO: we hope it helps both delineate and galvanize the community of researchers interested in the communicative power of communication. That is why, among other reasons, we include, in lieu of a postface, an interview with James R. Taylor, whom many consider to be the father of CCO. His interview, in addition to telling the tale of CCO's early days, also reveals some of the values central to our community, such as intellectual curiosity, eclecticism, collaboration across generations and individual projects, and, most importantly, kindness to each other. In shaping this publication project the way we did, we recognize that handbooks have often played a *performative* role, in the sense that they have not so much reflected the prior existence of a community around a research topic, but rather rallied scattered research efforts and made individuals aware of their shared trajectory. By considering this performative role, the CCO community can reflexively apply its own theorizing to its efforts to structure itself as a legitimate academic field (Boivin et al., 2017).

Of course, the limited number of chapters in this handbook means that it cannot include, as authors, all the diverse people who make up our community. However, many more people will be present as their work is ventriloquized and as each chapter incorporates multiple voices in an effort to offer a broad overview of the debates taking place around its specific topic (Cooren et al., 2013; Cooren & Sandler, 2014).

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What's in a Project? Extending Inquiries into Projects with a CCO Perspective

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