

Book Review: *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Organizational Communication*.

Boris H. J. M. Brummans, Bryan C. Taylor, and Anu Sivunen (Eds.) (2024).

Sage. \$185. 744 pages.

Reviewed by

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Organizational communication is not only a discipline, but also a community. It has its meeting places, such as the annual conventions of the National and International Communication Associations. It has its rituals, such as business meetings and award ceremonies during these conferences. Unfortunately, however, the field has few outlets to showcase its research.

Management Communication Quarterly is the field's only flagship journal. Moreover, for a long time, *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication* (Putnam & Mumby, 2013), which has gone through several editions, was the only comprehensive volume presenting the discipline's "state of the art."

Recently, this has started to change. In 2017, Craig Scott and Laurie Lewis edited the impressive *International Encyclopedia of Organization Communication* (Wiley) (Scott & Lewis, 2017). In 2021, François Cooren and Peter Stücheli-Herlach edited the *Handbook of Management Communication* (de Gruyter) (Cooren & Stücheli-Herlach, 2021). And in 2022, Joëlle Basque, Nicolas Bencherki, and Timothy Kuhn edited *The Routledge Handbook of the Communicative Constitution of Organization* (Basque et al., 2022). In addition, Vernon Miller and Marshall Scott Poole are about to publish a new *Handbook of Organizational Communication* (de Gruyter; see Miller & Poole, in press).

So, do we need another handbook?

The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Organizational Communication shows that the answer to this question is unequivocally *yes*. As the editors, Boris Brummans, Bryan Taylor, and Anu Sivunen note in their introduction, it is surprising that to-date, no volume has been created to present the field's qualitative methodological approaches. The above handbooks vary greatly in their coverage of methodological issues, ranging from a five-chapter section in the *Routledge Handbook of the Communicative Constitution of Organization* to none in the

Handbook of Management Communication. The absence of a comprehensive volume means that organizational communication researchers must often adapt methodological insights and approaches from other disciplines to the specifics of their discipline. For example, many of us have surely consulted anthropological outlets on questions related to ethnography, or sociological ones to learn more about participatory methods. For the most part, though, organizational communication researchers have drawn on texts published in management and organization studies, which in part stifles our field's ability to highlight the value of communicative studies of organizational phenomena. What the field needs, in other words is its own set of methodological approaches and techniques.

The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research in Organizational Communication provides exactly this. It comprises 34 chapters, in addition to a foreword by James Barker, who sadly passed away very recently, an introduction by the editors, and two afterwords. The first afterword is written by Silvia Gherardi. Gherardi was asked to reflect on this volume "from the perspective of a management scholar," but she astutely rejects this positioning and, instead, views herself as a visitor who *becomes-with* the chapters of the handbook. The second afterword is written by Eric Eisenberg and Patricia Geist-Martin, who reflect on their personal trajectories in the discipline as well as on how the field has evolved. The 34 chapters themselves are organized in four parts. Part I focuses on the wide variety of approaches to qualitative organizational research, Part II on data collection, Part III on data analysis and representation, and Part IV on the future of qualitative organizational communication research. In this final section, Mikkel Flyverbom, Paul Leonardi and Nitzan Navick introduce "digital forensics" as a way of researching digital technology in organizational communication. In the subsequent chapter, Shiv Ganesh, Cynthia Stohl, and Samantha James reflect on the field's parochialisms at a time when globalization

invades all aspects of our lives. In turn, they propose a “hybrid analytical stance” that considers not only the duality between qualitative and quantitative research, but also several other tensions that express themselves in the conduct of organizational communication research on questions related to globalization. In the third chapter of Part IV, Kate Lockwood Harris proposes ways to “organize postqualitative research” by viewing organizational communication research as a relational process, rather than by “entifying” researchers, objects of inquiry, and even the organizational communication discipline itself. In the handbook’s final chapter, Kirstie McAllum, Stephanie Fox, Laura Ginoux, Heather Zoller, Andrea Zorn and Theodore Zorn discuss what it means to conduct research post-COVID-19 in terms of selecting new projects and adapting existing ones, recruiting participants, collecting data, analyzing data (e.g., by paying more attention to materiality and disorganization), and disseminating results.

The handbook’s various chapters provide readers with discussions of useful methodological approaches for specific contexts of organizational communication research. For instance, in their chapter on phenomenological approaches, Rebecca Meisenbach and Madeline Pringle discuss “how organizational members perceive and experience organizational cultures, practices, and identities in ways that may challenge an organization’s expectations and assumptions” (p. 82). Elizabeth Wilhoit Larson’s chapter on collecting visual data shows how a variety of social collectivities with different degree of “organizationality” (Dobusch & Schoeneborn, 2015) rely on visual elements to “get organized,” thus demonstrating the relevance of visual methods for the organizational communication discipline.

Furthermore, several chapters explain how data collection and analysis methods from fields like rhetorical studies or language and social interaction can be used to study the “constitutive force” of communication in organizations and organizing processes. For example,

Charles Conrad and George Cheney discuss rhetorical approaches in Chapter 3, while Chantal Benoit-Barné and Mathieu Chaput discuss methods of rhetorical analysis in Chapter 22.

Johnathan Clifton and Jakob Rømer Barfod, in turn, discuss the usefulness of conversation analysis for qualitative organizational communication research in Chapter 23, and, in Chapter 26, Debbie Dougherty and Blessing Ekene Okafor discuss the value of critical discourse analysis.

The editors are to be commended for giving ample space to critical approaches, methodologies, and methods in this volume, including feminist approaches (Patrice Buzzanell, Spencer Margulies, Evgeniya Pyatovskaya, and Patricia Abijah), critical race theory and intersectional approaches (Jamine Austin and Tianna Cobb), postcolonial approaches (Mahuya Pal, Beatriz Nieto-Fernandez, and Silpa Satheesh), queer approaches (Jamie McDonald and Elizabeth Eger), and engaged scholarship (Kevin Barge and Anna Wiederhold Wolfe). The place given to critical scholarship in this handbook is important as few comprehensive texts exist that explain the different ways in which this kind of research can be conducted in organizational communication.

However, the handbook also presents approaches, methodologies, and methods that are unique to the field of organizational communication, such as those associated with scholarship on the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO, see Theresa Castor's chapter as well as Ellen Nathues, François Cooren, and Mark van Vuuren's chapter on ventriloquial analysis). CCO research is indeed a genuine "product" of this field. Arguably, the chapter on pragmatist approaches by François Cooren, Philippe Lorino, and Daniel Robichaud also proposes an approach born within the discipline: Rooted in the work of American philosophers such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, and John Dewey, pragmatism is not unique to organizational communication, yet the particular blend of ideas that Cooren, Lorino, and

Robichaud present builds on the ideas of the late James Taylor, one of the founders of CCO research, and offers an original theoretical, methodological, and analytical take on the study of organizational communication.

Through its chapters, as well as its foreword, introduction, and afterwords, this handbook therefore presents the methodological state of the art of qualitative organizational communication research, yet it also invites readers to think deeply about where the field may go from here. Thus, it invites us to move past the comfortable methodological habits we slip into—for example by overly (or solely) relying on thematically coded interviews.

To conclude, while the authors of this handbook are quite diverse in terms of age, gender, and race, one might question the extent to which this handbook represents the global community of qualitative organizational communication researchers, since 68% of its authors are affiliated with institutions in the United States. If we add Canada, then 72% of its authors work at institutions in North America. In fact, only three authors reside in the Southern hemisphere, and two of those work in New Zealand. Hence, the organizational communication discipline should focus on continuing to diversify, both methodologically as well as globally.

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