A Constitutive Approach to Organizational Diversity Processes
COM 475 Final Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

In the last thirty years, the concept of diversity in organizations has rose to the forefront of communication scholarship. What had previously been a little known subject has become an everyday term and idealized concept throughout society. In terms of organizations, diversity is seen in many forms. Diversity processes range from consideration of organizational barriers, affirmative action policies and the management or celebration cultural diversity (Miller, 2015, p.216-231). As society moves through phases of affirmative action to the goal of true multicultural organizations, scholarship has focused on the language used, approaches taken, and practices implemented in the diversification of organizations. This analysis will focus on how organizational members talk about, negotiate meaning, and come to conclusions in the management of diversity. This analysis will employ a constitutive approach to organizational communication. This approach views organizations as created and re-created through communicative processes (Miller, 2015, p. 82-98). As opposed to an instrumental view of communication as the transmission of information within organizations, a constitutive approach sees communication as the foundation that structures systems of meaning and therefore organizations themselves. The constitutive approach will be further detailed in the following section. The next section will take this approach to view diversity in organizations finding current research focused on the communicative practices used in managing diversity both through the observation of organizational actors as well as through a theoretical lens. The final section will pose questions for future research with regards to the practical implications of this research as well as the shift from management to celebration of diversity in organizations.

A CONSTITUTIVE APPROACH

A constitutive view of organizational communication is predicated on a social constructionist position. This position argues that reality is an intersubjective construction created through communication (Miller, 2015, p. 83). Applied to organizations, the communicative constitution of organization (CCO) takes up this position, rejecting the idea that organizations exist separately from communication. Rather, CCO focuses on processes of organizing done through communication. An important scholar contributing to the CCO position is Anthony Giddens and his structuration theory. This theory postulates that the social world is created through participant agency guided by structures such as rules and regulations. There are six primary tenets that guide all CCO scholars, although there is much variation in the work done in this field (Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 3-5). These foundational ideas are: 1) the study of communication events, 2) an inclusive definition of organizational communication, 3) acknowledgement of the co-constructed nature of organizational communication, 4) an open definition of actors in communication, 5) communication events as the primary unit of analysis and 6) favoring neither organizing nor organization. These premises form a common ground when looking at CCO scholarship.

Constitutive approaches have been taken up by three major schools of thought: the Montreal School, the Four Flows Model, and the Social Systems Theory approach. The Montreal School of CCO begins with the concept of co-orientation--how people coordinate activity through communication (Miller, 2015, p. 85-87). The Montreal School looks at the interaction between text and conversation as well as the scaling up process as meaning of conversation is codified into text. This can be described through degrees of separation from the original speaker's intent in conversation all the way to a standardized public form. The second approach is the Four Flows model. This model attempts to understand CCO through the types of communication flows that occur during organizing (Miller, 2015, p. 90-94). The four flows

include membership negotiation, self-structuring, activity coordination and institutional positioning. These four communication processes and their interactions form necessary conditions for organizing in this model. Finally, the social systems theory approach views organizations as social systems created and sustained through decisions (Schoeneborn, 2017, 8-9). Organizations are seen as held in existence by continuous and interconnected decisions; additionally, these decisions are seen as communication events.

Today, CCO scholarship is centered on three debates (Schoeneborn, 2017, p. 10-13). The ontological question asks what an organization is. The composition question deals with the problem encountered by the assumption that organizations consist of nothing more than communication events. If this is true, how do these events form an organization? The third question of agency looks at who and what is considered an actor within CCO. In addition to these core questions, CCO scholarship may be developed in the future through reflections on methodologies used, a greater focus on practical implications, and the investigation of additional topics to better refine understanding of CCO. In the following section, the constitutive approach to organizational communication will be highlighted in chosen literature.

LITERATURE REVIEW
When looking at diversity management through a constitutive approach, much of the current literature provides insight on the way the meaning of diversity is shaped in organizations through communication. Scholarship on diversity is found in areas of decision-making processes, diversity policy, theoretical frameworks and diversity work.

When looking at how organizational members talk about diversity, the meaning of the word and vocabulary used is shaped by organizational communication. In a case study conducted by Castor (2005), two university faculty discussions of a diversity requirement were analyzed with a social constructivist approach. This approach allows Castor to focus on the interactions between individuals throughout this discussion. Castor establishes this approach as well as provides an overview of existing scholarship surrounding language use and the process of meaning-making. In regards to diversity, Castor views diversity as an account vocabulary; an account vocabulary is defined as a keyword or phrase that provide organizing principle to make sense of a given situation (2005, p. 481). Diversity was used throughout the meetings in a variety of ways, showing how these communicative interactions worked to shape the meaning of the issue at hand. This interplay reveals that diversity is not a statically defined term or ideal, but a term whose meaning is constantly constructed and negotiated through communication.

Diversity management is often viewed with a focus on the diversification of a workforce through the inclusion of individuals that each meet certain criteria. Tritten and Schoeneborn (2015) move away from this orientation and argue that diversity management can benefit from a communication-centered approach. This reconceptualization focuses on the diversification of communicative practices rather than simply the diversification of individuals (Tritten, 2015, p. 312). Tritten and Schoeneborn review diversity management literature from instrumental and critical perspectives, concluding that both are primarily concerned with diversity within organizations. Referencing works that adopt the CCO approach, the authors emphasize the existence of permeable organizational boundaries and the ability of actors to contribute to organizational formation across organizational lines (Tritten, 2015, p. 310). The notion of polyphony, which describes communication as relational and dialogic, is used to identify the necessity of communication practices that enable marginalized voices to be heard (Tritten, 2015, p. 310-311). Tritten and Schoneborn build on these theories to propose a shift from diversity as

defined by individual difference to a view of diversity as a plurality of voices. This conceptualization creates the goal of diversity management as a maximization of voices and viewpoints in organizations (Tritten, 2015, p. 317).

A final piece of literature analyzes the tensions felt and communication practices utilized by professionals working to create diversity in organizations. Mease (2015) examines diversity work through interviews with diversity consultants. Mease employs the four flows approach to looking at this work. A core feature of diversity work, as stated by Mease, are two discursive paradoxes. The first addresses differing definitions of diversity from narrowly to broadly defined. Although many found the definition of diversity ambiguous, this was used by the consultants to shift and shape to meaning of diversity depending on their situation. Specifically, Mease found that these shifting definitions related to the activity coordination flow, allowing consultants to communicate in multiple ways to accomplish certain tasks. The second paradox addresses interventions aimed at either the individual or organizational level. This paradox relates to the self-structuring flow in its creation of processes and norms of organizational change. While most consultants felt organizational change superior, they had more cases of individual intervention success. This tension led most consultants to talk about success in terms of the creation of spaces or processes of change. These changes provided new norms for interaction that were felt to be beneficial in an organization's diversification. Finally, Mease highlights the importance of agency used by diversity professionals. The study focuses on the communication practices of these individuals and how those practices shape and change meaning and organizations.

Taken together, these pieces of literature focus on the communicative construction of the vocabulary of diversity, practices of diversity management and ideals of organizational diversity. Organizational communication structures the way individuals think about and conceptualize diversity, as communication is key to the creation of the social world. Communication additionally forms the practices that are implemented to diversify organizations through the creation of ideals that guide practices and the work that is done to bring about these changes.

FUTURE RESEARCH

As scholarship on the area of diversity in organizations continues to advance, future research will benefit from the use of a constitutive approach in multiple areas.

With respect to diversity as polyphony, while current research has established a theoretical basis for understanding this perspective, it would be interesting to look at the practical implications of an organization adapting this as a diversity management strategy. What would it look like to see an organization embrace the conceptualizations put forth by Tritten and Schoeneborn (2015)? While the goal of this idea is optimistic--an increase in diverse voices--the authors themselves question whether this may in practice lead to negative outcomes, such as an overwhelming of voices altogether (p. 317-318). Additionally, diversity in recent years has expanded beyond race or gender characteristics. Organizations will continue to shape and change the meaning of this concept as discussed by Castor (2005). How can the idea of diversity as polyphony be used to frame the way organizing look at diversity in a broader sense? A greater focus on the plurality of voices in organizations may lead to different practices and norms within organizations. Future scholarship will continue to be interested in how differing conceptualizations of diversity shape organizations from both a theoretical and practical standpoint.

Another area of future scholarship may focus on the role of non-human agency in diversity processes (Tritten, 2015, p. 318). While Castor (2005) addresses aspects of meaning-making with regards to diversity in one setting, more work may be done on the impact of concepts surrounding diversity and the role played by these figures in organizational settings. Scholarship may employ a Montreal School approach and the notion of scaling up to analyze how text and meaning impact diversity processes in organizations. Following the degrees of separation of the creation of diversity policy, such as in Castor's (2005) work, future research may be interested in the impact of non-human agency in organizational diversity.

Finally, as organizations progress to the ideal of a multicultural organization, there will be room for scholarship on changing communication and best practices used in the maintenance of these admirably diverse groups. While much of the scholarship today focuses on processes of creating diversity in organizations, future scholars will be able to analyze processes in organizations that feel they have achieved true diversity. It will be interesting to see the current ideas surrounding a CCO approach to diversity applied to the functioning of individuals in a multicultural organization--although there is no guarantee that this type of organization will exist any time soon. Similarly, future research on diversity through a constitutive lens will be able to move away from ideas of managing diversity to a focus on the celebration of diversity. This scholarship may focus on how diversity as a core organizational value is created and maintained through communicative processes. As the meaning and practice of diversity continues to shape and change organizations, a constitutive approach will be invaluable for organizational communication scholars in understanding the impact of diversity processes on individuals and organizations.

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