

# Organizational Communication in France: An Overview of Current Research

Management Communication Quarterly  
24(4) 607–611

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DOI: 10.1177/0893318910380373

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This introduction to the special forum on organizational communication in France presents the five articles featured by this forum as well as the general context of this subfield of communication studies in France. It is first pointed out that the vast majority of French communication researchers still publish exclusively in French, a situation whose negative and positive consequences are analyzed and commented. We then show that, after twenty years of existence, organizational communication in France is a vibrant and productive academic domain, with many peer-reviewed journals and books published on this topic. The five articles featured in this special forum are then presented, each representing key research agenda that are currently developed in this country: the rationalization of organizing through information and communication technologies (Anne Mayère), the performative dimension of the language of accounting (Bertrand Fauré and Arlette Bouzon), the sociogenetic of organizational texts (Romain Huët), the analysis of written practices in workplace situations (Pierre Delcambre) and the communicational approaches to organizations (Jean-Luc Bouillon). This special forum constitutes a unique occasion to learn about a very significant and interesting body of scientific studies that deserves to be better known by colleagues who do not speak or read French.

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We live in one world. Or so we would like to think. Even if English has progressively and irremediably become the de facto Lingua Franca since the end of World War II, many scholars around the world keep publishing today in their native language, especially in social sciences, philosophy, and humanities. In the case of French scholars, at least three reasons could explain such a choice/tendency to publish (almost exclusively) in their native language. First, French is still one of the most spoken languages in the world, with roughly 750 millions people speaking it as their first, second, or third language, which means that the Francophone world still appears large enough to sustain an important body of research, whether in terms of quality or quantity. Second, the world of French-speaking publication has historically been important, especially in social sciences, humanities, and philosophy, and it is still today quite active and dynamic. Third, until recently, French scholars (but the same reasoning would NOT necessarily apply to their Belgian, Swiss, or French-Canadian colleagues) had never been institutionally encouraged to publish in English, a reason that could be explained by the relevant position of French in the world and in academia.

Although one could deplore, at first sight, such an intellectual and scientific seclusion (a seclusion that is, of course, always relative, given the influence that some French scholars still have today on the world of ideas, Bruno Latour [2005], for instance), this isolation could also be considered positive since it gives these academics the opportunity to develop an original body of research that does not necessarily need to follow the mainstream and international agendas. When James Barker kindly asked us to edit this special forum on organizational communication in France, we thus thought immediately that it would be a wonderful occasion to expose what we consider to be a very significant and interesting body of scientific studies that deserves to be better known by colleagues who do not speak or read French.

Although the communication discipline was institutionalized in France in the 1970s (The Société Française des Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication, the equivalent of National Communication Association (NCA) in the United States and Canadian Communication Association (CCA) in Canada, was officially created in 1974), it is only in the 1990s that a few communication scholars started to establish what soon became an official subdiscipline called organizational communication, in direct reference to the name chosen by their North American counterparts. From 1991, a journal titled *Communication & Organisation* was launched, a journal that happens to be the only one in the world that has the words *communication* and *organization* in its title (!). Twenty years after its institutionalization, the French subfield of organizational communication is alive and kicking with many special issues published in more

generalist, peer-reviewed French-speaking journals (*Études de communication*, *Questions de communication*, *Sciences de la société*, for example).

The six authors that we invited to contribute to this forum have been selected because we think that each one of them represents a very interesting and innovative perspective on organizational communication. As you will see, some of them are definitely influenced by the English-speaking literature (which allows us to put the accusation of seclusion into perspective, to the extent that if French scholars do not tend to publish in English, many of them actually know the international literature quite well), while others mainly focus on the Francophone literature, but they are also developing objects and research agendas that we hope will appear quite original to *Management Communication Quarterly* readers.

In the first text in this forum, Anne Mayère describes an analytical framework based on a French academic movement—the Sociology of Regulation—for understanding the multiple and crossed changes that affect contemporary organizations. In the context of information and the so-called “speed economy,” new models of organization are emerging that, according to Veltz (2000), represent a real “structural turn over” where information and communication play a central role in sustaining the coordination of actions. For Mayère, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) plays an important role in this context. Grounding her research program in the “structural perspective” (Orlikowski, 2001), she proposes to understand how ICT participate in the process of rationalization of organizing through the rationalization of the production of information and communication.

The second article, written by Bertrand Fauré and Arlette Bouzon, introduces the work of French researchers in management and communication and concerns the performative properties of language at work. There is a French tradition of studying “speech act in organization” (Gramaccia, 2001), which is based on Austin’s (1962) and Searle’s (1969) work. The originality of the authors’ work in this article is in the examination of the performative dimension of the language of accounting. In this text, we can see that this French literature relates to a whole tradition of research carried out in North America, in particular the work of the Montreal school.

The next article, by Romain Huët, presents a specific approach to studying organizational texts called “the sociogenetic of texts.” This approach, found essentially in French scientific literature, proposes to analyze the social dynamics generated by the production and circulation of organizational texts such as charters of ethics, codes of conduct, declarations of commitment, and so on. More specifically, “the sociogenetic of texts” contributes to analyzing not only the variations between the first draft of a text and its final version but also the intermediary drafts (charter draft, notes produced by the actors, e-mail, minutes of the meetings etc.) and the

trajectories of organizational texts through the analysis of conflict, power, and negotiations between actors. This approach is an interesting way to understand the organizational dynamics by studying the evolution of the process of writing.

In the fourth text in the forum, Pierre Delcambre proposes to study written communication in the workplace as a development of the studies made by a French group named "Language and Work" (Borzeix, 2003; Borzeix & Fraenkel, 2001). The author is interested in the written texts produced in the working situation while recognizing that the written material at work coexists with other modes of symbolism: oral, graphic, plans, and so on. Pierre Delcambre presents his specific area of research (analysis of written practices in workplace situations) and a theoretical horizon that integrates sociolinguistics, semio-pragmatic, and discourse analysis.

Finally, the article written by Jean-Luc Bouillon closes this forum by presenting French "Communicational Approaches to Organizations." In the first part of the text, the author analyses how the French theory of conventions (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006) and the theory of social regulation (Reynaud, 1997) deal (or fail to do so) with the communicational processes in organization. In the second part, the author introduces an analytical framework ("Communicational Approaches to Organizations") based on three dimensions to understand the organizational dynamics: (a) situated communicational dimension of organization, (b) processual communication dimension, and (c) ideological communicational dimension.

### **Declaration of Conflicting Interests**

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the authorship and/or publication of this article.

### **Funding**

The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

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