



# **Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application**

Fourth Edition

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# Structuration Theory

## *Chapter Overview*

- ST at a Glance
- Introduction
- Assumptions of ST
- Elements of ST
- Application of Time and Space
- Integration and Critique

# ST at a Glance

- Social institutions are produced, reproduced, and transformed through rules
- Rules guide interactions among members and create structures
- Must examine the structures in order to make sense of the communication taking place within an organization

# Introduction

- Rules may be explicit or implicit, and they enable interaction
- Groups and organizations use social interactions to assist them in achieving goals
  - System: A group or organization and the practices they engage in to achieve goals
  - Structure: The rules and resources members use to guide behavior and sustain the system

# Introduction

- **Structuration** refers to the production, reproduction, and transformation of social environments through rules and resources in relationships.
  - Allows people to understand their patterns of behavior and the structures of their social system
  - Studying this is the key to understanding groups

# Assumptions of ST

- Groups and organizations are produced and reproduced through the use of rules and resources
  - Behaviors of group members result in change
  - Each behavior is guided by past rules
  - Structure is necessary for interaction

# Assumptions of ST

- Communication rules serve a dual function as the medium for and the outcome of interactions
  - View rules as “blueprints” for guiding behaviors
  - Communication is governed by a combination of rules

# Assumptions of ST

- Power structures are present in organizations and guide the decision-making process by providing information on how to best accomplish our goals
  - Power enables us to achieve results
  - All group members have some sort of power
  - Groups decide how power is assigned among members

# Elements of ST

- Agency and Reflexivity
  - Elements that explain the phenomena of group interactions
    - Agency: The specific behaviors in which humans engage
    - Reflexivity: A person's ability to monitor their actions
  - Allow group members to articulate reasons for their behaviors and the goals of the group
    - Discursive consciousness
    - Practical consciousness

# Elements of ST

- Duality of Structure
  - Rules and resources used to guide organizational decisions
    - Rules explain the why and how
    - Resources
      - Allocative: Ability to generate material assistance
      - Authoritative: Interpersonal characteristics employed in interactions with other group members

# Elements of ST

- Duality of Structure
  - Types of social power to describe authoritative resources
    - Reward power
    - Coercive power
    - Referent power
    - Legitimate power
    - Expert power

# Elements of ST

- Social Integration
  - The reciprocity of communication between group members
  - Expectations for future interactions are based on previous impressions

# Application of Time and Space

- Communication is viewed as existing in “real” time and space
- Structures take place in real time
- Structures are influenced by each member’s memory

# Integration

- Communication tradition
  - Cybernetic
- Communication context
  - Organizational
- Approach to knowing
  - Positivistic/empirical

# Evaluating ST

- Parsimony
  - Difficult to read and understand
- Heurism
  - Applied successfully in organizational communication and group decision making