Introducing Communication Theory: Analysis and Application

Fourth Edition

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Narrative Paradigm

Chapter Overview

- Narrative Paradigm at a Glance
- Introduction
- Assumptions of Narrative Paradigm
- Key Concepts
- Integration and Critique

Narrative Paradigm at a Glance

- Humans are storytelling animals

- Narrative logic is preferred to traditional logic

- People judge the credibility of speakers based on the coherence and fidelity of their stories

Introduction

- **Narrative paradigm** is the belief that humans are storytellers and that values, emotions, and aesthetic considerations ground our beliefs and behaviors.
  - We are more persuaded by a good story than a good argument
  - *Paradigm*, not *theory*
- A contrast with the rational world paradigm (paradigm shift)

Assumptions of Narrative Paradigm

- Humans are naturally storytellers

- Decision about a story's worth are based "good reasons"

- Good reasons are determined by history, biography, culture and character

Assumptions of Narrative Paradigm

- Rationality is based in people's judgments of a story's consistency and truthfulness

- We experience the world as filled with stories and we must choose among them

Assumptions of Narrative Paradigm

NARRATIVE PARADIGM	RATIONAL WORLD PARADIGM
1. Humans are storytellers.	1. Humans are rational beings.
2. Decision making and communication are based on "good reasons."	2. Decision making is based on arguments.
3. Good reasons are determined by matters of history, biography, culture, and character.	3. Arguments adhere to specific criteria for soundness and logic.
4. Rationality is based in people's awareness of how internally consistent and truthful to lived experience stories appear.	4. Rationality is based in the quality of knowledge and formal reasoning processes.
5. The world is experienced by people as a set of stories from which to choose among. As we choose, we live life in a process of continual re-creation.	5. The world can be reduced to a series of logical relationships that are uncovered through reasoning.

Table 20.1: Contrast Between Narrative and Rational World Paradigms

Key Concepts

- Narration
    - Verbal or nonverbal
    - Definition of narration is very broad
    - All communication is narrative

Key Concepts

- Narrative rationality
  - Principles of narrative rationality:
    - Coherence
    - Fidelity

Key Concepts

- Coherence
  - Coherence is based on three types of consistency
    - Structural coherence
    - Material coherence
    - Characterological coherence

Key Concepts

- Fidelity
  - "Rings true" to a listener

Key Concepts

- The logic of good reasons
  - Primary method for assessing narrative fidelity
  - Presents a listener with a set of values that appeals to her or him

Key Concepts

- Logic of reason questions
  - Are the statements in the narrative that claim to be factual, really factual?
  - Have any relevant facts been omitted or distorted?
  - What are the patterns of reasoning?
  - How relevant are the arguments in the story to any decision the listener may make?
  - How well does the narrative address the important and significant issues of this case?

Key Concepts

- Logic of *good* reason questions:
  - What are the implicit and explicit values?
  - Are the values appropriate to the decision that is relevant to the narrative?
  - What would be the effects of adhering to the values embedded in the narrative?
  - Are the values confirmed or validated in lived experience?
  - Are the values of the narrative the basis for ideal human conduct?
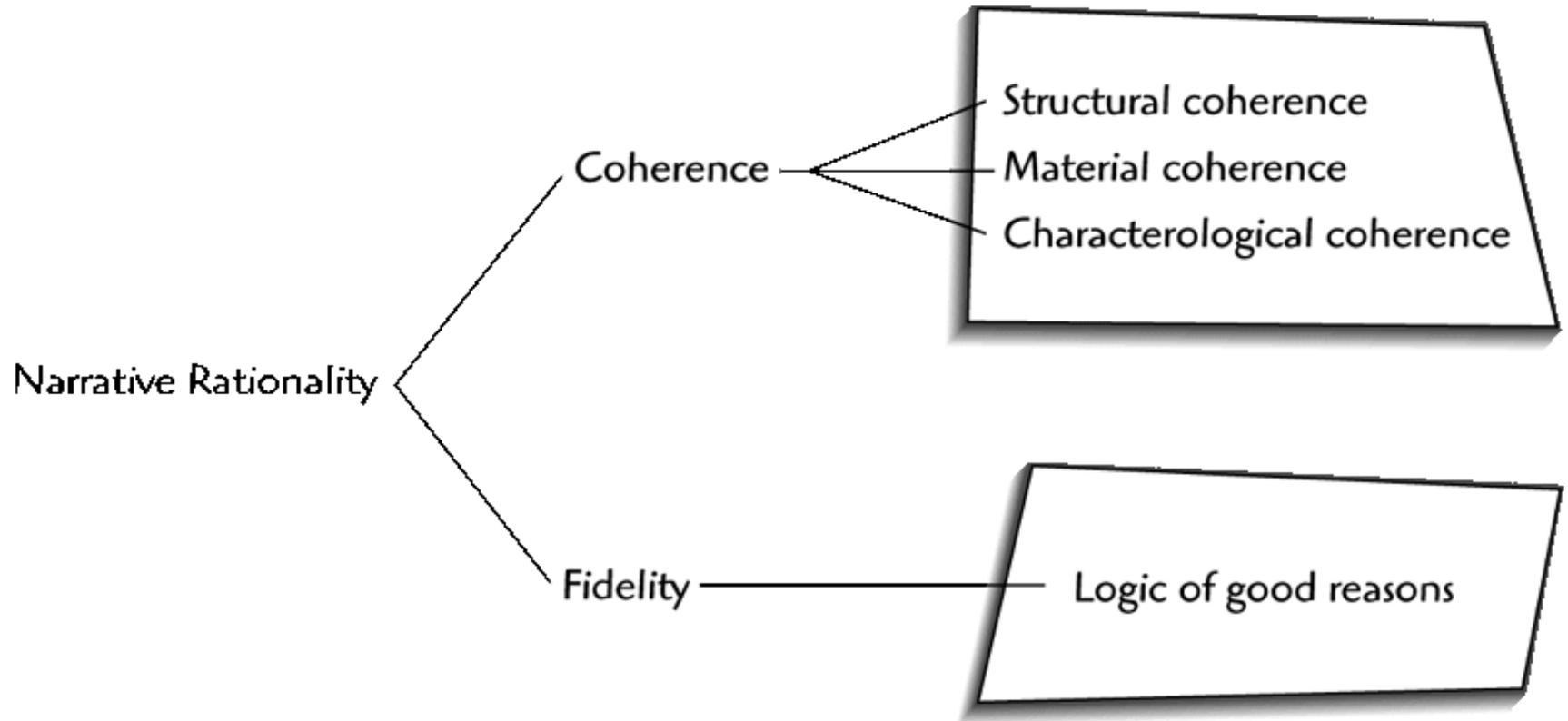
Key Concepts

Figure 20.1: Elements of Narrative Rationality

Integration

- Communication tradition
    - Rhetorical
- Communication context
    - Public/rhetorical
- Approach to knowing
    - Interpretive/hermeneutic

Evaluating Narrative Paradigm

- ## Scope
    - ### Definition of narrative too broad
    - ### Not all communication is narrative

- ## Logical Consistency
    - ### Inconsistent claims

Evaluating Narrative Paradigm

- Utility
  - A conservative bias

- Testability
  - Related to scope problems

- Heurism
  - Captivating
  - Contributed to study of human communication