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THE REDDING TRADITION OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION SCHOLARSHIP: W. CHARLES REDDING AND HIS LEGACY

PATRICE M. BUZZANELL AND CYNTHIA STOHL

W. Charles Redding's academic legacy, viewed over the course of his life, embodies the ways technical and pragmatic knowledge have developed in organizational, as well as managerial, communication. In this article, we identify four characteristics of the scholarly aspect of The Redding Tradition: belief in human progress through empirical investigations; power of critique; message exchange as the core of organizational communication; and the need to understand the socio-historical and diverse theoretical underpinnings of our field.

The Redding Tradition of scholarship represents far more than the corpus of one man's life's work. It encapsulates the evolution of organizational communication from its earliest beginnings as industrial communication and presentational skills to the contemporary framing of organizations as empirical instantiations of interpretive processes. From the 1950s onward, W. Charles Redding conducted and directed quantitative investigations designed to inform and improve organizational and business practice, while embracing a critical-interpretive frame that interrogated the search for generalized results in organizations. Redding's legacy is found in the eclectic quality of our contemporary scholarship and its focus on the interplay between individual and collective action and formal and emergent structuring. His work is simultaneously located within the spheres of technical rationality with its concern for instrumentality, prediction, and control and of practical rationality with its grounding "in the human interest in interpreting and experiencing the world as meaningful and intersubjectively constructed" (Mumby & Stohl, 1996, p. 59).

The dualities found in W. Charles Redding's writings, consulting, and teaching result in an intriguing set of tensions. For Charles, beliefs in and optimism that communication could fundamentally alter and improve workplace practices reside within a skeptical, but not cynical, nature. This skeptical human would use social scientific findings to suggest changes in communication climate or information flow and feedback policies, yet also would lay bare the dominant premises underlying his recommendations. Some might argue that the dual nature of Charles's work coincided with paradigm shifts in social sciences, including communication (e.g., Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983). His early research and theorizing took place during a time when social scientific methods and thinking accorded greater legitimacy in some circles to the liberal arts, such as communication (*Foundations for Future Development*, 1991). His later work reflected critiques and epistemological shifts occurring across academic fields. However, we believe that Charles saw the conceptual and pragmatic benefits of a field that could speak to different audiences' concerns, understand fundamental communica-

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tion processes through a variety of data sources and methods, and be committed to helping shape a rapidly changing organizational lifeworld. His strong rhetorical background continually influenced the way he saw organizations and reflected a continuing concern for "*the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols*" (Burke, 1950/1969, p. 43, cited in Tompkins, 1987 p. 78; emphasis in original).

In this article, we track four characteristic themes of scholarship in The Redding Tradition. These characteristics alone do not define Charles's legacy as he also devoted considerable attention to teaching and mentoring students, organizational members, and communication educators (see Buzzanell, in this issue of *Communication Studies*). However, the four themes display the complexity of Charles's life work and reflect his arguments for embracing, rather than privileging, neither pragmatic nor technological rationalities alone. These themes represent a belief in: (a) human progress through empirical investigations; (b) the power of critique; (c) message exchange as the core of organizational communication; and (d) the need to understand the socio-historical and diverse theoretical underpinnings of our field (see Table 1).

Belief in Human Progress Through Empirical Investigation

A hallmark of The Redding Tradition is that Charles believed in progress through the study of human communication and empirical research about that communication. His belief in progress can be defined through a set of "relatively unchanging values shared by *most* contemporary Americans" (Steele & Redding, 1962, p. 84, emphasis in original): change and progress (i.e., belief that society moves toward a better life); effort and optimism (no problem is too complicated or too big that it is not worth "determined, optimistic effort," p. 87); efficiency, practicality, and pragmatism (values in opposition to those held by dreamers); and science and secular rationality (faith in human reason, rational approach to life, planning, and applied science).

This first characteristic is displayed throughout Charles's work but, particularly through his conviction that empirical studies can produce results that not only can make organizations better places to work, but also can be sites where people can achieve personal fulfillment. This conviction supports a dedication to conceptualizing and operationalizing communication constructs and an explicit recognition that no communication theorizing or research is complete or finalized.

Charles's conviction can be associated with the socio-historical milieu in which he grew up. He was born in Colorado Springs, CO, in 1914, and was confirmed as a member of the Episcopal Church at St. John's Cathedral in Denver, CO (see Redding, 1984a). While attending schools in Jersey City, NJ, Grand Junction, CO, Colorado Springs, and Denver, he studied the classics. Throughout his life, Charles enjoyed integrating principles of logic and sprinkling Latin terms in his lectures, speeches, and writings. In response to a question during the videotaping of a discussion among communication experts, Charles said that he had only one undergraduate course in speech communication, argumentation, at the University of Denver, which he took because he was a debater (*Foundations for Future Development*, 1991). He rounded out his undergraduate life with sports reporting, public speaking contests, dramatics, politics, and participating in events at his social fraternity, Lambda Chi Alpha. He took more graduate coursework in psychology than in communication and was the graduate manager of speech and forensics activities (1936–1937). For the first six years of his teaching, he said that taught more composition and literature courses than speech · (*Foundations for Future Development*, 1991). He did a stint as an instructor of communica-

TABLE 1

THE REDDING TRADITION OF SCHOLARSHIP

Identifying Characteristics	Fundamental Premises	Empirical Support
Belief in Human Progress Through Empirical Investigation	Empirical studies can produce results that can make organizations better places to work (and achieve fulfillment). Communication can be measured and tested. No communication theorizing or research is complete or finalized.	Redding Notes: Continuously revised summaries on ways to handle communication issues in organizational contexts. Development of conceptual and operational definitions of communication constructs. Creation of proto-typologies, typologies, and advice about ways to further refine constructs through content analysis and other methods.
Power of Critique	Theorists and researchers should question everything, particularly assumptions, values, and decision premises.	Admonishment in speeches publications, and teaching not to accept what is commonly understood about organizational life and research findings. Interest in understanding the cultural values underlying research, pedagogy, and workplace practices.
Message Exchange as the Core of Organizational Communication	Message exchange forms the distinguishing characteristic of organizational communication as a discipline. Communication theory should be rooted in the analysis of message sending, message receiving, and message interpretation.	Advocate for investigation of messages and message-related practices in studies on communication climate, ethics, irresponsible communication, and so on. Development of ten basic postulates of organizational communication. Each postulate is message-centered.
Need to Understand the Socio-Historical and Diverse Theoretical Underpinnings of Our Discipline	Knowledge about human communication is constructed and evolves based on socio-historical-economic circumstances.	Writings and talks historical development of organizational communication and related research.

tion skills for the Navy-Marine officer training program in Seattle, WA, from 1943–1945, after his marriage to Ann Seymour. Over time, he saw more applications of speech communication to organizations and focused his attention on communication because it is the "vital core of what human life is about" (*Foundations for Future Development,* 1991). In many ways, his work paralleled the development of the communication discipline as we know it today. Speech communication started as skills-based work geared toward personal effectiveness and moved into theoretical issues and social science methods (Redding 1991a, 1985b).

Through his education, Charles gained not only a format for critique and a method of enhancing effectiveness (debate and logic), but also an appreciation for social scientific processes and the complexities of the human behavior (psychology). His published addresses took the form of problem-solution speeches (with variations similar to the Monroe Motivated Sequence) (e.g., Redding, 1979a, 1985a, 1988, 1996). In his graduate seminars, he traced the importance of educational reforms, science, and

psychological testing during and after World War II (see also Redding, 1985b). So it is not surprising that these different influences in his life coalesced in his first publication on "Speech and Human Relations" (Redding, 1937) and in his 1957 dissertation investigating (through content analytic techniques) the cultural values exhibited in the 1944 presidential campaign speaking of Dewey and Roosevelt (Steele & Redding, 1962).

In his dissertation, Charles blended Aristotelian and contemporary psychological thinking about enthymematic premises and value congruence for persuasion–he planted himself in the worlds of Aristotle, Festinger, Heider, and traditional public address concerns of presidential rhetoric. He advocated precise definitions of values and value clusters so that taxonomies could be generated for social scientific investigation. Yet, he also recognized the "ambivalences" in values, and resolved these tensions by noting that values did not act in isolation and some values would become more prominent in some situations. His tendency to sustain investigation and provide tentative solutions ran throughout his work so that his earliest topics and themes were refined over time.

Charles was convinced that systematic empirical *and* critical examination of human communication in varied contexts would produce a better world. As Director of the Communication Research Center (CRC) at Purdue University, he (along with his Associate Director, Bob Goyer, and staff member, Phil Tompkins) issued Bulletin No. 3, "Purpose and Scope" of the CRC, in which he states:

However, the Center also engages in research in the fields of interpersonal communication, persuasion, basic communication theory, and communication-research methodology. Most investigations have utilized empirical, statistics, survey, or experimental methods; but no methodological approach which promises to yield fruitful results is excluded. (Communication Research Center, 1962, p. 1)

Almost two decades later, he explicitly states his position on the need for both critical and social scientific research in organizational communication:

In fact, since even the world's most respected academic philosophers have typically been able to expose mortal inconsistencies, especially at the "deepest" level (LEV-PA), allegedly committed by other equally respected philosophers, *some* kind of inconsistency, at *some* level or other, is almost certainly an inherent feature of the human mind. Obviously, the exposure of inconsistencies, whether in oneself or in others, can frequently be the most valuable aspect of what I call "ideological analysis" as an essential component of theory enactment. Not for a moment would I downgrade the importance of conducting research activities which provide masses of hard data. However, I earnestly hope that ... theorists in organizational communication will subject our own LOC-RES [researcher's own ideologies] theorizing to close philosophical/ideological analysis (definitely including the admittedly recondite LEV-PA [primitive assumptions] domain). (Redding, 1979b, p. 326, emphasis in original)

Although he retained an openness to other ways of thinking about organizational and managerial communication phenomena, the methodological approach that he favored in his own work was content analysis. This procedure fit within his way of organizing data for theoretical development as well as in his tendency to view his work as developmental rather than definitive. Content analytic thinking showed up in his call for "theory *enactment*": discovery, taxonomy, structuring, and assigning causality (Redding, 1979b, p. 319, emphasis in original). What he meant by content analysis and "taxonomy", though, was mentioned much earlier in his work. Redding (1957) defined content analysis:

Content analysis, as a research technique, is basically a close, sentence-by-sentence scrutiny of oral or written discourse for the purpose of determining what kinds of "meanings" the words may represent.

It is really a semantic analysis of symbols. It is characterized by rather elaborate systematization, with or without precise quantitative units, and with or without mathematical analysis. In brief, it is a technique for finding out how much of what is presented how. One way of looking at content analysis is to regard it as a means of putting a wide variety of different word patterns into a single category—or many categories. (p. 102)

Because he thought as a content analyst, his publications often contained passages attesting to conceptual breadth and depth plus exceptions, examples, linkages of communicative phenomena to other behavioral correlates, and taxonomies. For example, in his chapter on ideological foundations for our field, Charles developed "*A Working Schema for Ideological Analysis*" (Redding, 1979b, p. 325, emphasis in original; for construct explication including concurrent and predictive validity, see also Redding, 1988). He created proto-typologies and directions for future empirical research in many of his publications on values (Steele & Redding, 1962), irresponsible communication and unexamined premises in teaching (Redding, 1985a, 1988), and unethical messages (Redding, 1996). He viewed his work as preliminary and left the charge to others to continue and refine these beginnings (e.g., Redding 1985a, 1988, 1996).

In sum, Charles valued progress, science, unlimited human capabilities, debate about fundamental issues, and, most of all, communication. In this first theme of his research, he displayed an orientation toward technical rationality (Mumby & Stohl, 1996; see also Deetz, 1992). This knowledge often, but not always, focused on outcomes and processes that could benefit managers and professionals, as well as those training to enter business (e.g., Goyer, Redding, & Rickey, 1969; Redding, 1972, 1982, 1986; Redding & Sanborn, 1964). He hoped that our field would continue to work within the scientific method: "I suggest that specific hypotheses, deduced from highly abstract theories, can and should be tested in specific contexts (whether in laboratories or the 'real world')" (Redding, 1992, p. 87). Befitting his beliefs in progress through use of findings from empirical studies, we find that he prepared "Redding Notes," thorough and lengthy explications of constructs and specific practices that could be incorporated in the workplace, for his teaching and consulting. In the Redding Notes and other documents, he developed means of handling difficult communication situations. He never lost sight of the fact that, even today—with all our sophisticated technology and global interfaces for marketing—members of businesses and other organizations still need help with the basics. They still need reminders that saying something is not equivalent to communication or that topics discussed frequently and at length (or those not discussed) hold keys to the organizational priorities and culture (Redding, 1984b, pp. 34 & 28).

Without a faith that human communication can make apparent and can rectify individuals' and organizations' deliberate (as well as inadvertent) acts of poor communication, unhealthy communication climates, and irresponsible or unethical behavior, Charles would not have published what he did. He simply would not have wasted his time developing procedures for building better management and communication climates (e.g., Redding, 1984b). And he would not have reiterated his belief that communication could assist organization members: "let it be understood that, in my view, skills-oriented instruction, whether in college classrooms or 'adult' workshops, is a perfectly honorable and defensible enterprise" (Redding, 1992, p. 88; see also pragmatic emphasis in Redding & Tompkins, 1988).

Power of Critique

Charles combined a love of empirical work in communication with a critical analysis of the fundamental premises, particularly those associated with power and

ideology. He taught and modeled a method of critique through his writings. His requirement for organizational and managerial communication scholars was that we should question everything. In his 1972 book, *Communication Within the Organization: An Interpretive Review of Theory and Research*, Charles sought to "bring together empirical findings, theoretical concepts, and practical implications from a large and widely scattered literature. The basic frame of reference has been that of *behavioral science*" (p. v, emphasis in original). Yet, he commented on "*facile generalizations*," and combined an " 'objective' summary with 'subjective' interpretation" (p. v, emphasis in original) so that dangers in feedback responses, restrictions of information flow, foundations of democratic workplace processes in false participation, and critiques of communication climate components, among other aspects of organizational communication, are critiqued. This compendium clearly was in the realm of traditional organizational and managerial communication but his willingness to advocate for a position and to explore the assumptions of contemporary theory and research were embedded within *Communication Within the Organization:* "Although hard-nosed scientific evidence is hard to come by, anyone would be foolish to conclude that just because scientific 'proof' of effectiveness is lacking, the printed media in employee communication are ineffective and should be abandoned" (p. 3); "But the writer is convinced that any reader of this review should be reminded that heated debate *does* exist, and is continuing, on the question of the overall validity and usefulness of modern behavioral science research" (p. 5, emphasis in original); and issues questioning the processes that result in executive isolation and the power of horizontal communication to provide a context for employee dissent. No, Charles was not a critical theorist, defined by Redding and Tompkins (1988) as work that "seeks a kind of consciousness-raising among, if not emancipation for, organizational members themselves" (p. 23). But he did lay bare assumptions, findings, values, and corporate mechanisms that disempower employees and other organizational members.

Over a decade later, he criticized communication educators for their willingness to teach what is commonly understood about organizational life without challenging the assumptions (Redding, 1985a, 1988). In specific, he deplored acceptance of "don't rock the boat," of fitting into organizations, and of failing to recognize our own complacency in promoting values without sufficient critique. He expected his readers—whether scholars or practitioners—to interrogate their own beliefs: "A dominant theme of this entire book will be that our assumptions and attitudes (frequently unstated or even unknown to ourselves) are commonly the culprits behind many deficiencies in the ways we communicate" (Redding, 1984b, p. 14). He expected communication theorists to question the bases of their research and practice (see Redding, 1979a, 1979b). He also challenged communication practitioners to scrutinize corporate ideology (Redding, 1986). In his presentation to the Speech Communication Association (now the National Communication Association), Charles posed a set of questions:

For those convention-goers who elect to remain in the room for a few more minutes, I shall be proposing that trainers who are either courageous or foolish enough to attempt ideological analysis in their organizations might profit by asking themselves three questions. To wit:
1. Why bother?
2. When we scrutinize "corporate ideology," exactly what is it that we are scrutinizing? And, assuming that such an enterprise has been tolerated . . .
3. What are the likely consequences, not only for the intrepid scrutinizer, but for the organization? (Redding, 1986, p. 2)

He argued that trainers should question their corporate involvement but noted a range of possible consequences for such behaviors on micro- and macro-levels.

His most extensive published critique of the assumptions underlying organizational communication work was his *Communication Yearbook* chapter entitled "Organizational Communication Theory and Ideology: An Overview," in which he developed his claim:

we have failed to develop acceptable scientific theory (or theories). For many years powerful voices have trumpeted the doleful message that specialists in organizational communication have generated at best a hodgepodge of small-bore generalizations, or at worst nothing more than a cookbook collection of prescriptive exhortations. Let me state at once my position: the indictment, if considered in a narrow frame of reference is justified; however, when examined in a broader context, the charge seriously distorts the situation. In fact, I shall argue that (depending, of course, upon definitions of terms) the field is characterized by great numbers of entities that could be called "theories." But, more importantly, I hope to demonstrate that, in common with much of contemporary social science and especially in common with most theories in organizational behavior (including "management"), a preponderance of so-called theories in organizational communication are best understood as derivations of certain "ideologies." (Redding, 1979b, p. 309)

Charles proceeded to differentiate between grand theories and his opinion that organizational communication theorists should develop limited range theories:

The only tentative conclusion I can recommend, vague and imprecise as it certainly is, is that scholars in organizational communication should indeed move vigorously in the direction of generating "integrative" theories, but with the clear expectation that each of these theories will be appropriate for *only a limited domain* . . . (p. 312, emphasis in original)

In this chapter as well as in other works (e.g., Redding, 1972, 1986), Charles reasoned inductively. For instance, when he developed his case that organizational communication theorizing has been remiss, he gathered numerous definitions of theory before he proceeded to recommend a particular definition. He followed the same procedure when he defined irresponsible communication, communication climate, message exchange, effectiveness, and so on. In all of Charles's work, it was very clear exactly what he considered to be in the purview of the construct under examination and what was not. After he carefully explicated his construct, he then would raise his concern: "Indeed, it is commonly remarked that what passes for contemporary 'theory' in organizational communication consists chiefly of a grab bag of generalizations, with varying degrees of 'scientific' support such as the following . . ." (Redding, 1979b, p. 311). He always included himself in his critique as one who also has fallen under the spell of complacency. As one example of this tendency, he wrote, "we researchers in organizational communication (I am including myself here) have been philosophical innocents; in fact, even when we have traveled the safe, conventional avenue, which has usually been the case, we have been unaware of our basic premises" (p. 319).

His criticism was not for organizational communication scholars and practitioners alone. He also expressed concern about popular books in management offering quick fix remedies to an audience strapped for time and new ideas:

I am not suggesting that these short courses or popular books are devoid of useful instruction. However, some common themes running through them all are causes for concern. One is that the average mature adult can quickly and easily apply a set of prescriptions, thereby accomplishing the feat of turning around a lifetime of acquired habits. Another is that there really exist, locked away somewhere in a secret cabinet, communication techniques that absolutely guarantee success. And perhaps most dangerous of all are the definitions of this success. Almost invariably, success is measured by the extent to which one person can dominate others. No room here for acceptance of the integrity of other people. No room for open-minded exchange of ideas, for debate or discussion. No room for caring. Would you really want to work for a boss trained to think this way? (Redding, 1984b, p. 28)

Charles asked compelling questions: Would we want to be members of organizations that sought domination and shareholder wealth at the expense of other criteria for success? Would we continue to behave as though we wore blinders—locked into our work routines and habitual ways of thinking about or enacting organizations—without stepping back to assess the state of our field? For Charles, critique walked hand-in-hand with his desire to generalize about human behavior in a limited fashion. As such, he modeled both technical and practical rationalities, always looking for ways to make organizations more humane.

The clearest example of Charles's optimistic conviction (that empirical studies may produce results that can make organizations better and more fulfilling places to work) and profound respect for the power and importance of critique (for both researchers and practitioners) was best seen in his final works on organizational ethics (e.g., Redding, 1996). In the first chapter of *Responsible Communication: Ethical Issues in Business, Industry and the Professions,* Charles not only directly asked communication scholars, "When will we wake up?" and no longer remain oblivious to the ethical dimension of organizational communication (Redding, 1996, p. 17), but he also acknowledged that "the correlation between ethical words and ethical deeds in modern organizations is alarmingly low" (p. 20). Indeed, Charles devoted the end of his long career to laying the foundation for a typology of unethical messages and message-related events commonly encountered in organizational environments. In these final articles, speeches, and manuscripts we also find evidence of the two other themes that characterize his legacy.

Message Exchange as the Core of Organizational Communication

For Charles, a focus on messages and message exchange processes formed the distinguishing characteristic of organizational communication as a discipline and a practice. He used the term, communication, to "refer to those behaviors of human beings, or those artifacts created by human beings, which result in '*messages*' being received by one or more persons" (Redding, 1972, p. 25, emphasis added). Indeed, there is no other scholar in the field of organizational communication whose work, and that of his graduate students, evinces a greater degree of coherence and adherence to "message" as the fundamental unit of analysis. A brief perusal of the 39 dissertations directed by Charles not only turns up a veritable who's who of organizational communication but also a dictionary of key terms defined in terms of messages, such as semantic information distance (Tompkins, 1962), communication climate (Dennis, 1974; Minter, 1969), supportive and defensive communication (Eadie, 1974), openness (Baird, 1973; Jablin, 1977; Stull, 1974), message distortion (Sussman, 1973), feedback (Clement, 1973; Cusella, 1978), interviewing (Cash, 1972), rhetorical sensitivity (Carlson, 1978; McCallister, 1981), communicator style (Bednar, 1980), the conduit metaphor (Axley, 1981), and message preferences (Snyder, 1982).

As we can see, from his earliest studies of campaign rhetoric through his work on the ideal managerial climate, to his final pieces on ethical communication Charles advocated the investigation of messages and message-related practices. His ten postulates of organizational communication, developed in his exhaustive work, subtitled as an "interpretive review of theory and research" are all message-centered (Redding, 1972, pp. 27–138). The postulates, basic notions that have become obvious truisms were, in their time, important new insights. They include ideas such as (a) "*meanings are*

TABLE 2

REDDING'S (1972) TEN BASIC POSTULATES OF ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

1. *"Meanings are not transferred."*
2. *"Anything [is] a potential message."*
3. *"Input (especially listening):* The input phases of communication . . . [message receiving] are, of course, an integral part of the complete communication process."
4. *"[The] message received [is the] only one that counts."*
5. *"Feedback":* Feedback is not only essential in the operation of an organization but these messages have both beneficial and harmful consequences.
6. *"The Cost Factor":* Both message-senders and message receivers must pay a price for every act of communication where "accuracy" or "effectiveness" is of more than trivial importance.
7. *"Redundancy":* Although critical in organizational messages, redundancy always is purchased at a price.
8. *"Communication Overload":* Communication overload denotes that the human being, as a message receiver, possesses limited channel capacity to handle incoming stimuli.
9. *"Serial Transmission":* These effects occur whenever messages are sent through human relays. Serial transmission effects all explicitly focus on message sending, message receiving, and message interpretation.
10. *"Organizational Climate": "The 'climate' of the organization is more crucial than are communication skills or techniques (taken by themselves) in creating an effective organization."*

Redding, 1972, pp. 27–138, emphases in original.

not transferred" (p. 27), (b) "*anything [is] a potential message*" (p. 30), and (c) the "*message received [is the] only one that counts*" (p. 37, emphases in original) (see Table 2). Significantly, although Charles positioned behavioral science as his reference point throughout this seminal work, his analyses foreshadowed our field's use and acceptance of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to the study of organizational communication. Furthermore, this text laid the foundation for contemporary organizational scholarship on interpretive processes and for a generation of organizational communication consultants and practitioners.

In the 1987 *Handbook of Organizational Communication*, co-edited by his colleague at Purdue, Linda Putnam and his colleague and former graduate advisee, Fred Jablin, among others, Charles was given the space and the time to develop further his agenda for organizational communication research in a chapter titled "Messages and Message Exchange Processes." Although Stohl's name appears as first author of the chapter (due solely to the generosity of Charles), it truly was Charles's vision for the field that framed this work. After making a distinction between ostensibly displayed and internally experienced messages and reviewing several schemes for categorizing messages, Stohl and Redding (1987) developed an initial taxonomy of messages based on message functions. The goal of their taxonomic development was to provide a framework for scholars to explore the multi-leveled, multi-perspectival, and multi-functional role of messages in organizations. The final paragraph of the chapter reaffirms Charles's conviction:

that both quantitative and qualitative modes of inquiry will advance our understanding of the complex universe of organizational messages. . . . Moreover, we do not wish to leave the impression that scientific methods are the only ones that will improve our understanding. Systematic, sustained programs of rhetorical criticism, whether carried out in terms of the traditional or the new rhetorics, should long ago have been turned on organizational discourse. The most important imperative is that researchers devote much more energy than they have in the past to a close study of *messages themselves.* (p. 494, emphasis in original)

Continuing this theme, Charles's 1991 response to an Academic-Industry Task Force panel, "Organizations in Distress," presented at the International Communication Association conference in Chicago, once again voiced his call that we study

organizational phenomena, in this case ideologies and ethics, through messages. He wanted to know about many issues, including

the culture—why is it and how is it . . . who is allowed to speak to whom, who is not allowed to speak to whom, and why and with what results? What messages are being transmitted with what results? That sounds old-fashioned, but let's get down and do some researching on actual message behavior. We're communication people. (Redding, 1991b).

And indeed, this is precisely what Charles did. In his final writings and in the last talk he gave to a group of graduate students at Purdue, he produced a typology of unethical messages designed to help scholars and practitioners focus on and understand the moral dimensions of what we do and say as organizational actors. Responsibility, Charles's legacy tells us, is not only is about personal, moral, and ethical standards, it is grounded in the idea that each of us must freely acknowledge authorship of his or her communicative acts. This final talk at Purdue, filled with anecdotes, examples from contemporary organizations, and references to literary, cultural, and historical events encompassed all four themes we have identified as The Redding Tradition. And, for those of us who were lucky enough to be there, this talk also displayed the passion and commitment W. Charles Redding always brought to our field and our lives.

Need to Understand the Socio-Historical and Diverse Theoretical Underpinnings of Our Discipline

In 1989, at the conference for the Central States Communication Association in Kansas City, MO, Charles began his talk with his "predictions" about the field of communication which he labeled a "paradigm" in a mixture of humor and seriousness. As he did in many of his talks, he found the future in the past:

Of course, this being the age of paradigms, no academician can afford to be caught without some sort of paradigm. And so I offer you my paradigm:
Those who would divine the future must study the past. In other words, I suggest that, like so many other things in human affairs, we can expect the future of our field to be similar in many respects to what it has been in the past. (p. 1) . . . Let's look again at our past. The institutional field of communication (or speech communication—whatever) has a history of *instability* and *fragmentation.* Almost unique among academic fields, ours has undergone several name changes. (p. 3) . . . I guess what I am asking is this: If, after fifty years, informed observers are still describing our field as new, or young; and if they are still describing the study of communication as an amorphous, fragmented conglomerate, are we justified in predicting that things are going to be all that different in the near future? In other words, when we examine our *past,* can we bravely announce that the *future* will be totally different? I suggest that the very pervasiveness of human communication is our greatest *asset*—and our greatest *liability.* (pp. 6-7, all emphases in original)

Toward the conclusion of this address, as preserved in a reading copy with handwritten notes and changes, Charles said:

I predict, then, a continuation of the status quo, only more so: An unstable, fragmented institutional discipline; a thriving, creative conceptual field of study, with contributors representing a "rainbow coalition" of many academic disciplines. And maybe, considering the synthetic nature of our field, this is all for the best. (p. 8)

In this address as well as in other talks, teachings, and writings, Charles reiterated his belief that organizational communication scholars need to understand how and why certain writings, social changes, and leaders contributed to the development of our field. He traced our lineage from popular works through dissertations and academic department formation (Redding, 1985b, 1992). He surveyed behavioral science find-

ings (see Redding, 1972) and located how and why communication would enhance organization theory.

With regard to non-academic works, he often noted the observation "that in almost every area of human inquiry, practice has preceded systemic conceptualization"; "Remember that the nonacademic writers frequently—perhaps most of the time—were the original sources for ideas that the academics appropriated for research purposes" (Redding, 1985b, pp. 15 & 32). He layered detail after detail to demonstrate his reasoning and evidence for the disciplinary history he constructed. But his students and readers also had a sense that he was there in the flesh as organizational communication history was unfolding: "If the demand is for a founder [of organizational communication], he [Major Charles T. Estes] is the one. (I speak from several years of personal experience with the man.)" (Redding, 1985b, p. 50; see also Redding, 1991a). And, of course, he was living during many pivotal events in organizational and managerial communication history. He spoke about labor unions, results of World War I, the depression of 1921, the American Plan of the 1920s, the climate of the Hawthorne plant in the 1920s, reports from and bestsellers in the 1940s, communication emphases (and lack of emphases) in the 1970s and 1980s (see Redding, 1991a, 1992; Redding & Tompkins, 1988). His writings and talks developed the ways in which human communication had been constructed based on socio-historical-economic circumstances. He framed our field and located important shifts in thinking, researching, and practice. For example, he noted that

When "business and industrial" was generally dislodged by "organizational" as a modifier, this symbolized what I nominate as the most important conceptual shift in the history of our field: the final acceptance of the blatantly obvious fact that the world is full of many kinds of organizations in addition to just those we call businesses and industries. (Redding, 1985b, p. 18)

Although that shift was in the past, he saw the future of organizational communication as a melding of multiple methods, eclectic theories, different assumptional bases, and rigor. He and Phil Tompkins (1988) stated explicitly: "We now wish to set aside our acknowledged bias and argue . . . that *all forms of inquiry* are vital to continued progress in the study of organizational communication" (p. 27, emphasis in original). This inquiry that he challenged us to continue would have to display an understanding of how the past informed the future.

CONCLUSION

Charles took his (and others') work in organizational and managerial communication very seriously. However, he also recognized that happenstance, serendipity, or just plain luck brought forces together. For Charles, these forces that precipitated theoretical and discipline development could just as easily have constructed a different sort of history and academic field. Redding (1985b) concluded his history of organizational communication as follows: "The field has stumbled into its present identity. Nothing guarantees that it will not some day stumble out of that identity, or into a totally different identity" (p. 53). Charles spent considerable time and effort shaping and nurturing the field of organizational communication. His vision of our identity required empirical studies, ideological critiques, a singular identifying quality (i.e., message exchange), and a sense of history. He had hoped that his work would contribute (but not be the definitive response) to theorizing in organizational communication. By 1979, the year of Charles's formal "retirement" from Purdue University, he had already written his legacy, "Having put out of mind the impossible dream of finding the one

and only DCMF (Divinely Certified Magic Formula), our theory builder must finally stop *thinking* about theory and start *doing* theory" (Redding, 1979b, p. 319).

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