A good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

*John Milton*

**UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH LANGUAGE**

*Tietze, Susanne; Cohen, Laurie and Musson, Gill*


What is the relationship between organizational behaviour and language? Can the study of language from a semiological point of view help us to understand the discursive construction of organizational behaviour? Is there an aspect of language that has been forgotten in the “commodification of talk” in recent times that must be revived for a fuller understanding of the relationship between language and organizations? Will it suffice to teach communication merely as a set of skills? Is it not necessary to invoke the mediatory role of interpretation to understand the interpersonal dynamics of a communicative situation? These are some of the important questions that the authors both pose and attempt to answer in this introductory volume, which is written in a style that will appeal to both an academic and a popular audience. This volume can also serve as a lucid, introductory textbook to courses in organizational communication.

While theorists of both management and communication have been content to assume that language functions as a mere channel or conduit in organizations, the authors of this book argue that this assumption is simplistic and that it is time to move to a semiological model of language in place of the functional or linear model. Messages in the functional model are understood to travel along a line from a sender to a receiver and return as feedback. This is the prototypical model of communication and can be uncovered without difficulty in the work of any theorist influenced by the problems of signal processing in engineering.

But, if the structure of language is not reducible to signals, the basic assumptions of the functionalist model will have to be rethought. Misinterpretations or acts of miscommunication in a semiological model are not merely deviations from the prescribed trajectory which occur due to faults arising from the competence of the speaker, the construction of the message, the level of noise, the inappropriateness of the medium or the lack of feedback. If language is circular, self-reflexive, and differential in structure (as the semiologists maintain), then miscommunication is not necessarily external to the act of communication but arises from the nature of language itself though the external factors assumed in the functionalist model may exacerbate the situa-
They seek to implicate the concepts of organizational communication is that the authors accord much more autonomy (as a corrective measure, I suspect) to language than to organizations. Language, they argue, does not merely reflect the underlying structure of organizations. Instead, in the semiological model, it actively shapes the structure of organizations through the Foucauldian notion of discourse. This may be a relatively recent claim in organizational theory but is commonsense in branches of linguistics like semiology, discourse analysis, and literary theory.

In other words, the authors are attempting to import the theoretical methods and conclusions of structuralist and post-structuralist thought from the so-called French ‘sciences of man’ to organizational theory. The theorists of language from whom they borrow their conceptual lenses include Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Pierce, Claude-Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Jean-Francois Lyotard.

The fundamental argument in this book is that language is a differential process. A differential process is one where meaning is generated through the play of two categories: absence and presence. Any term in a language is what it is not because of any intrinsic properties in itself but because it functions as a set of differences from other terms. In other words, the linguistic sign is arbitrary. It does not bear a physical link to an object in the world but signifies the internal differences in language. For example, the term ‘cat’ does not, in the first instance, point to a particular cat but signifies by not being a ‘rat,’ a ‘bat,’ or a ‘mat.’ It is only after the speaker has unconsciously sorted out the presence of the term ‘cat’ and the absence of the other terms that bear a phonetic or semantic resemblance to it that he/she can point to an actual cat in the world by saying “That is my cat!” or “My cat is playing on the mat.”

Sense (internal relations in language) precedes or mediates reference (the relationship between language and reality).

This book is an attempt to work out the implications of this simple idea for the students of organizational communication. While functional theories of communication privilege a referential theory of language, a semiological theory of communication seeks to invert the logical assumptions in favour of sense over reference. The task that the authors set themselves then becomes obvious. They seek to implicate the concepts of organizational communication in a semiological frame so that they can be shown to be ‘cultural’ or ‘constructed’ rather than as ‘natural.’ In other words, natural languages are not really ‘natural,’ otherwise all humans will speak the same language. The advantages of this constructed model are manifold for those interested in bringing about any form of change in the culture of management or even the management of culture.

The differential (linguistic) sign then is understood through the coordinates of denotation and connotation—a truth that practitioners of advertising understood much before theorists of organizations. Denotation refers to the literal meaning of a term while connotation refers to the field of associations that a sign conjures up. In addition to these two levels, signs may also take on the function of a myth. A myth, in semiological analysis, is a sign that despite being conventional in origin is naturalized by culture. Levi Strauss’ suggestion that a myth is an attempt to resolve a cultural contradiction can help us to understand that semiological systems like advertising attempt to resolve the contradiction between nature and culture.

Since most of the objects in a material culture are not really needed and are of recent invention, the mythical deployment of signs is a way whereby advertising extends the ambit of artificial products that we are willing to admit into our lives. An interesting example cited in this context is the idea of ‘prepared meals.’ When Marks and Spencer introduced this concept in Britain, they had to overcome the “cultural contradictions between real food as good and commercially prepared food as bad.”

The domain of myth analysis that semiology opens up is not just restricted to advertising but is of immediate import in how organizations view themselves. Companies like The Body Shop, Virgin, IKEA, etc., represent their strategic intent through the mythology that animates their public image. Incidentally, these are also some of the companies that take the idea of story-telling in organizations quite seriously.

Story-telling has taken on an important role in not only holding organizations together but in finding narrative representations of strategic intent that can be appreciated by employees at all levels in the organization. Of course, one must not think of an organization as a bunch of people sitting around a campfire with infinite time at their disposal to narrate and enjoy stories. The term ‘story’ needs to be understood as a much more fragmentary form here than the richer one invoked in the study of literature. Organizational stories are often terse and narrated
in an abbreviated form as modes of implicit cultural knowledge or as a libidinal bond shared by employees.

In addition to stories, the authors also list and analyse the implicit metaphors that structure organizations. Amongst the most influential metaphors that have been invoked to describe organizations are the following: the machine, the organism, the brain, culture, political systems, psychic prisons, flux and transformations, and instruments of domination. The features, applications, value, and weaknesses of these metaphorical descriptions open up enormous clarity in both the design and transformation of organizations. Since most people invariably find themselves in machine-like organizations that prize goal-oriented activity and efficiency at the cost of everything else, it may be difficult for employees stuck in such organizations to envisage the liberatory possibilities of switching metaphors in organizational theory and design. Of late, the quest for new organizational metaphors has taken on the metaphorical notions of the theatre, clouds and songs, and even spider plants!

If semiological analysis makes it possible to rethink organizational design, it becomes necessary to ask how organizational behaviour is implicated in these transformational possibilities. Would we not have to implicate both organizational structure and behaviour in ‘webs of meaning’ rather than rest our case with mere functionalist explanations? Is it not the case that organizational behaviour is generated, maintained, mediated, and changed by the grammar of metaphor, myths, narratives, and story-telling? What are the implications of this deconstructive method for gender and leadership? Would not these categories have to be rethought from a semiological point of view as well? The answer, according to the authors, is a resounding ‘yes.’

There are at least two schools of thought on the problem of gender in organizations: those who see gender as natural and those who see it as cultural. While both these schools are interested in redressing gender inequalities in the workplace, they seek to do so in different ways. The two primary questions that the authors address in the chapter on gender pertain to the differences in conversational styles between men and women in the workplace and the differences between the negotiation of masculinity and femininity in organizations. Often success at work has more to do with how gendered subjects represent themselves than with what they actually do. This problem of gendered representations also has implications for leadership since the masculine style of self-representation makes it difficult for men to ask for help at work or admit to doubts about their competence to perform a given task unlike women who are less concerned with maintaining status and more likely to get the work done amicably.

Given the large number of women who have not only entered the workplace but have also assumed leadership roles in the post-war era (despite a shortage of role models), working out the relationship between gender, leadership, and communication styles has become a matter of both theoretical and practical urgency. Women, the authors argue, should focus on their core competence in building relationships throughout the organization by using their abilities as communicators as a prelude to assuming leadership roles rather than playing the game by patriarchal rules that prize competition over the ability to connect with fellow workers.

If women are able to do this successfully, the feminization of the workplace will, in due course, change the traditional definition of leadership from one based on domination to one based on sharing and trust. It is only through a persistent process of sensitization that this breakthrough will come to pass. In other words, an organization sensitive to the communicative needs of its employees cannot but admit a considerable amount of feminization in the roles that it expects its employees to perform irrespective of whether they are men or women.

The authors conclude by analysing the ways in which language and culture are affected by the development of electronic forms of communication. The authors posit a mild form of technological determinism by reminding us that those electronic templates and wizards make available not merely ready-made forms of expression but also ready-made forms of thought. There are, however, no real Orwellian echoes here.

The primary value of scholarship that attempts to rethink the traditional questions of organizational behaviour from a semiological point of view lies in its ability to sensitize employees to the possibilities of organizational communication, transformation, and change. It may even help us to go beyond the mechanistic forms of organizational life such that the metaphorical permutations and combinations of the discourse on organizations becomes an index of organizational possibilities in the future.

Shiva Kumar Srinivasan
Faculty, Indian Institute of Management
Ahmedabad
e-mail: shivakumarsrinivasan@hotmail.com
Both these books focus on the same theme: relevance of Indian thought and culture for building an indigenous management movement, an area of study that has been neglected for decades. This review highlights the recent interest and the current mode of thinking in this new field of study.

“We normally ape the civilization, not the culture.” A thoughtful observation indeed! Sharma argues that culture is an intrinsic quality of an individual/society which cannot be assimilated by another. He clarifies, “Culture is the mental equipment of life, whereas civilization is the material equipment of life.” Thus, culture appears to be intrinsic to an individual since mental make-up can hardly be aped. But, civilization can be imitated when we measure the latter against material parameters. Hence, according to him, when Indian management tries to tread upon the path tailor-made for the West, which is in consonance with the cultural moorings of the latter, it cannot yield the desired results in India. It is like fixing a round peg in a square hole. He observes that a handful of Indian management thinkers are now showing courage in pointing out the fallacy of indiscriminate import of Western concepts and models. The East is beginning to critique the West—a reversal of direction. He then explains some differences between the cultural attributes of India and the West and in doing so draws upon Hofstede’s study on the identification of differential cultural dimensions. Sharma summarizes: India is identified as a country in which there is a moderate extent of collectivism, a high tolerance of social inequality, and a moderately masculine orientation. The Western temper, on the other hand, has a strongly individualistic and masculine orientation. This suggests why the edifice of Indian management cannot be effectively built on Western foundations.

The rest of the book deals primarily with leadership. The thrust has been to search for an Indian paradigm which should be conducive for management in India. In this endeavour, Sharma has sought to identify the qualities of a leader based on Indian wisdom literature. Some of them are: humility, truthfulness, equanimity, generosity, and charitableness. Interestingly, most of these qualities do not tally with leadership traits on which extensive work has been done in the West. The emphasis there is on qualities like intelligence, sharp memory, reasoning, etc. However, just because of such divergent emphasis, it would be unwise to conclude that in Indian wisdom literature, this set of qualities is looked down upon. In fact, it is a question of prioritization of one set over the other. He finds that, unlike in the West, leadership in India has chiefly been an activity of the right brain and emotional process rather than being primarily a left-brain, rational activity. This once again reveals the disparate cultural dimensions.

The second part on leadership draws on S K Chakraborty’s earlier work in this field. Sharma suggests that a leader, true to the Indian tradition, should be a rajarshi (king and seer). Raja (leader) represents the intellect (buddhivritti) and rishi the emotion (hridayvritti). A marriage between these two partners should augur well for the Indian management and administration. Its practice has endured in India for centuries. There should be a synthesis of both in the same individual as we had in Asoka, Shivaji, Gandhiji, and Vivekananda. We may add names from the present times like R K Talwar and J R D Tata to this list.

According to Sharma, Plato’s philosopher-king resembles the rajarshi only superficially. Although both models approach leadership from similar perspectives, yet there is a fundamental difference between the two. For instance, Plato recommends a ban on marriage and family for leaders whom he calls Guardians. These two institutions are considered by him as gateways to hell for a leader. On the contrary, in India, these two institutions have been held not only in high esteem but are also considered to be sacred. Besides, Plato had advocated that only brave men will be allowed to enter marital relations more frequently than others and will exercise more liberty of choice in such matters so that they may have as
many children as possible. Little wonder that Plato's model has never been practised.

Lastly, Sharma has used several indigenous terms and concepts. This is one reason why practising Indian managers should be able to identify more easily with the treatment offered by him. Foreign language idioms and metaphors do not produce deep-level resonance. However, this book could have become more helpful if a certain amount of fieldwork on healthy indigenous leadership practices in Indian organizations was carried out by the author. Narratives based on practical experience would have fortified his arguments.

From the volume edited by Shastri we have chosen to comment upon the valuable contributions by Jai Sinha, Subhas Sharma, Ipshita Bansal, Mrityunjay Athreya, and NCB Nath. Sinha’s paper examines elaborately the theme ‘Integrative Indigenous Management in India.’ He is skeptical about the utility of recent writings which try to build on the deeper foundations of classical Indian psycho-philosophy. This approach is not only too ‘purist’ to withstand the pressures of globalization but is also ‘un-scientific’ in his view. The class of writings which tries to blend indigenous concepts with Western empirical methods is regarded by him as more promising and scientifically-based. Perhaps, the use of questionnaire data and statistical tools is taken to be scientific. But, the subjective nature of original data itself from self-responses or interviews seems to be ignored. Sinha favours that class of academic work which tries to directly apply various Western models to solve the ills of Indian management. This can hardly represent indigenousness. His fourth grouping is a set of management writings which draws upon the Indian folk tradition which, in turn, is derived from the depths of Indian psycho-philosophy and spirituality.

The paper by Sharma on ‘Management Subhashitani: Indian Wisdom and Management Ideas’ draws upon Sanskrit Subhashitas, folklore literature, and meaningful dialogues from the Indian cinema for insights into management and tradition. As he says, these are ‘ideas-in-practice’ since they are rooted in the empirical experience of individuals, communities, and societies.

‘Effective Leadership — Insights in Manusmriti’ by Bansal is based on the writings of Manu. She proposes a three-dimensional leader behaviour pattern — concern for followers, concern for system discipline, and self-discipline of the leader. She also mentions the characteristics of an effective leader. For the latter, analogies drawn from the forces of Nature like sun, fire, moon, air, etc. appear to be reasonable. However, despite an earnest attempt, the paper lacks meaningful integration between management and Manu’s literature.

Athreya’s paper on ‘Indian Dimensions of Management’ focuses, in the first part, on the evolution of Indian-ness in management. He begins with globalization of management leading to Indian differentiation and culminating in universal integration. In the second part, he reflects on certain key elements of Indian management like self-management, work, and leadership which have been influenced by indigenous traditions. Lastly, he briefly emphasizes the duties to be discharged by Indian experts and managers towards fulfilment of these ideas.

Nath’s contribution ‘Looking at Indian Management Thought: Quo Vadis?’ is a deeper critique of academic work done so far in respect of Indian management. He wonders whether the various types of pedagogy used have produced stable conviction among Indian managers. He draws upon his experience as a top manager and suggests the following: (a) If writers of Indian management state their philosophical affiliations upfront, it would add to knowledge; (b) Adequate knowledge of Indian philosophical effort on the part of the teachers and the taught is needed; (c) Indian management can do more than confining itself to OB and HRD.

Sharma’s second paper on ‘Wisdom Matrix in Corporate Management: Generating the LIFO Response’ discusses liberation from oppression (LIFO) based on the Indian ideal of liberation (moksha). He has worked out a matrix comprising social and individual responses. This approach was given practical shape by Gandhi.

The two books indicate encouraging signs about the practicality of many thoughts rooted in classical Indian literature — both folk and psycho-philosophical. Slowly, it is gaining acceptance that wisdom literature is not divorced from successful running of business. Our Asian counterparts (like Japan, China, etc.) have already taken long strides ahead of us economically. The intrinsic faith of management in these countries on their own cultures has been vindicated. Now, the time is ripe for India also to make up for lost ground. India needs creative adaptation, not mere adoption, of her own enduring classical insights of the human dimension of management. Most of the expositions in these two books, though not profoundly scholastic, suggest the need to shed the widespread negativity in our mentality about indigenous spiritual philosophy and culture. Hasty cultural disruption...
dissipates valuable social energy. Dr A P J Kalam is of the same view: “I don’t think the American, Japanese or Singaporean solutions will work for us. Knocking at other’s doors will be futile. Instead of importing theories and transplanting concepts, we need to grow our own solutions. Instead of searching for answers outside we will have to look inside for them” (Ignited Minds, Viking, p XVI, 2002). Tagore, Vivekananda, Gandhi, Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan, and many others had said such things throughout the 20th century.

Debangshu Chakraborty
Lecturer, Department of Management
J D Birla Institute
Kolkata
e-mail:debu_0876@hotmail.com

UNDERSTANDING TRIPS: MANAGING KNOWLEDGE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES
Rao, M B and Guru, Manjula
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Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) form the core subject matter of one of the most controversial components (Agreements) of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that came into effect on the first day of 1995. In India, the Agreement on TRIPS created controversies as well as confusion and skepticism because, among other things, the country was required to move from an earlier process patent system to a product patent system thereby affecting the growth and progress of important sectors such as pharmaceuticals. The provisions of TRIPS Agreement were also feared to deprive Indian farmers and local communities of the benefits of their traditional knowledge and to make them perennially dependent on multinational companies which in the critics’ view, considered commercial gains above everything else. Certain provisions of TRIPS were also considered to affect, seriously and adversely, the government’s ability and cost of meeting national health calamities. However, many even-minded observers and analysts have argued about the benefits of the new TRIPS regime that include a generally friendlier environment for attempting innovations, protection to innovations and other intellectual properties, and an opportunity for industries such as pharmaceuticals to strengthen their market capabilities and success. Given this background, a book written at this juncture with the explicit purpose of enhancing the understanding on TRIPS and the implications of TRIPS to developing countries should be considered well-intended as well as well-timed.

In the introductory section of the book, the authors explain, although in a rather disconnected manner, certain salient features of some of the aspects and articles of the TRIPS Agreement. This section also outlines the purpose of the book and its coverage. Chapter 1 provides a brief background on TRIPS and takes us through the viewpoints of the industrialized and developing countries apart from narrating the basic features of the Uruguay Round negotiations. Chapter 2 analyses the various issues involved in the interpretation of the provisions of the TRIPS Agreement. It recognizes the significance of the preamble of the TRIPS Agreement along with its text in interpreting the agreement and suggests how the earlier international conventions and treaties such as the Berne Convention, Rome Convention, WIPO Copyright Treaty, etc. constituted the foundation of the TRIPS Agreement. Chapters 3 to 8 deal with the treatment of various Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) under TRIPS Agreement: copyright and related rights, trademarks and geographical indications, industrial designs, patents, layout designs of integrated circuits, and protection of undisclosed information. Chapter 9 examines the issue of controlling the anti-competitive practices of the holders of IPR. Chapter 10 discusses the provisions for enforcing the IPR of the holders when these are infringed. Chapter 11 relates to the transitional arrangements applicable to the member countries when they move from their earlier IPR regime to a TRIPS-compatible system. The last chapter raises certain concerns arising from the implementation of TRIPS especially in respect of the developing and the least developed countries.

According to the book, the industrialized countries argued for the TRIPS framework referring to the trade-distortion effects of the weak protection to intellectual property in the developing countries and to the benefits of all nations from a strong intellectual property protection regime. However, countries like India require a proper
balance between the interests of the producers and consumers in any multilateral agreement on intellectual property and more flexibility to address their special developmental needs.

As the authors suggest, interpretation of the provisions of the TRIPS agreement should duly recognize its background in all earlier international conventions on intellectual properties. It is observed that often the Dispute Settlement Panels and the Appellate Body of the WTO do not interpret the TRIPS provisions with consistency.

The book explains how developing countries could use provisions such as the minimum standards, national treatment, most favoured nation status, and the national versus international exhaustion of rights to achieve their expected policy outcomes. The Indian bill on ‘protection of plant varieties and farmer’s rights’ has a provision for compensation to farmers if a genetically modified seed failed to deliver. In addition, India refuses protection to seeds and plants containing terminator-type of genes. At the same time, as highlighted in the book, the Competition Bill 2000 of India fails to use the flexibility provided in TRIPS on compulsory licensing to control anti-competitive practices.

For an inquisitive reader, the book throws light on several aspects of the TRIPS Agreement. To the delight of Indian software industry, TRIPS Agreement allows for reverse engineering or de-compilation of software protected by copyright, to understand the unprotected aspects of the code and to facilitate the development of new software. However, the TRIPS Agreement provisions are said to be ineffective in dealing with on-line developments, i.e., owner of a trademark can assign the trademark with or without transferring a business to which the trademark belongs. Trademarks cannot be subjected to compulsory licensing by authorities. Protection of geographical indications is available only to wines and spirits, that too when they have not become generic. There is a lack of interest even among developed countries in protecting industrial designs. Compulsory licensing is possible on industrial designs. For a product or process to be patentable, it should be non-obvious (innovative) and useful. TRIPS Agreement preserves the rights of prior users of a subsequently patented product or process. Many of the patents granted in the US and Europe involve bio-piracy of Indian traditional knowledge. Most countries resent high drug prices and look at compulsory licensing of patented drugs favourably. Innocent infringements on layout designs of integrated circuits are not to be treated as lawful and should attract royalty obligations. Penalties against IPR infringement could include compensation to IPR holders, confiscation of the infringing goods, injunctions against the import of infringing goods or services, etc. As regards the anti-competitive practices of the IPR holders, countries differ in their approach to dealing with them. The readers will find much more of such information in the book.

A few words of caution may also be in order. The arguments in the book are often repetitive. Many technical issues related to TRIPS provisions have been introduced without explaining, through a note or otherwise, the basic meanings and implications. Often, the discussion looks complex with inadequate clarity for a reader with an average level of interest in the subject. Moreover, it is not adequately focused and shifts rapidly from one agreement/convention to the other, one article to the other, or one example to the other without a proper link. After going through the entire text of the book, if the reader is still unable to decide precisely how many sections/articles each part of the TRIPS Agreement has, he/she need not be disappointed; this could be clarified from Annexure I. Besides, while the objective of the book is to strengthen the readers’ understanding on TRIPS, most of the examples and illustrations given here seem to have a consequence of strengthening the readers’ skepticism about the TRIPS provisions. Further, a professional approach has not been adopted for the references. Finally, a thorough editing and restructuring of some of the chapters might have made the book more reader-friendly.

Despite the above weaknesses, the book will be highly useful, given the nuances of the complex legal text of the TRIPS Agreement, for those who are seeking support in interpreting the TRIPS provisions to further their business or research interests. 🖼

P Rameshan
Associate Professor (Strategy)
Indian Institute of Management
Kozhikode
e-mail: Rameshan@iimk.ac.in