

## Chapter 9

# The Rubric of Rubik's Communication Cube in Online Graduate Courses: Seeing the Forest (Theory) and Trees (Practice)

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### ABSTRACT

*The Rubik's Communication Cube (RCC) is a learning metaphor for improving understanding of the communications narrative. The authors summarize seven theories: (1) economics networks, (2) social networks, (3) innovation, (4) high-trust leadership, (5) negotiation, (6) goal-setting, and (7) motivation. Besides the authors' 20 best practices list, the authors argue that the best practice of developing a communication management measurement system (CMMS) is critically important. The authors propose a testable, parsimonious communication-online performance learning (COPL) model that includes the constructs of goal-setting, negotiation, trust, communication satisfaction, learning motivation, and learning performance. If teachers and students were to negotiate interactively communication plans based on an ethos of trust coupled with goal-setting for each online graduate student (OGS), then this interdependent Rubik's Communication Cube would enhance and advance each OGS's learning motivation and ultimately learning performance.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Imagine? No, Imagine! When you hear the term *Rubik's Cube*, what visual vision enters your mind? Do you see the neatly and nicely organized, monochromatic colors on each of the six sides (the theory)? Or do you see the messy, chaotic mixed colors on each of the six sides (the practice)? Or do you see the interactive, dynamic movement from the monochromatic colors to the messy mixed colors and vice versa (where theory informs practice and practice informs theory)?

To develop a communications narrative (Craig, 1999, 2007, 2008), the authors adopted Rubik's Cube as an interpretative *communications metaphor*. Metaphor, along with simile and analogy, are literary devices for embellishing and enhancing understanding (Geary, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003). However, cognitive scientists and social scientists have reframed metaphor more broadly that includes all comparisons (Geary, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). As Geary (2011) observed, "Metaphor lives a secret life all around us.... We utter about one metaphor for every ten to twenty-five words, or about six metaphors a minute" (pp. 3-5).

Institutions and organizations have been differentiated using metaphors (Morgan, 1997; North, 1990; Scott, 2014). North (1990) identified metaphorically two different types of institutions (formal institutions are laws and informal institutions are social norms) as the rules of a game and organizations as the players engaged according to those rules. To interpret how researchers and practitioners should think about organizations, Morgan identified these eight thought-provoking, metaphorical images: (a) machines, (b) organisms, (c) brains, (d) cultures, (e) political systems, (f) psychic prisons, (g) flux and transformation, and (h) domination.

Dance has been identified as a prevalent metaphor for understanding communication (Clampitt, 1991). Similarities between dance and communication include (a) multiple purposes such as entertaining, inciting, informing, or persuading, (b) coordination of meanings such as partners learning to move together, (c) co-orientation such as partners sensing and anticipating one another's actions, and (d) roles such as partners intuiting the boundary limits of where to move and boundary timing of when to move (Clampitt, 1991). Other metaphors involve learning as communications such as Wormeli's (2009) *Metaphors and Analogies: Power Tools for Teaching Any Subject*, where *tools* are the metaphor.

By adopting and adapting the Rubik's Communication Cube metaphor, the authors are expanding the possibilities from thinking "outside the box" to thinking "outside the cube." These expanded possibilities reinforce Craig's (1999) observation:

*Communication theory is enormously rich in the range of ideas that fall within its nominal scope.... Interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary borrowings are, of course, useful practices in themselves and ought to be encouraged in order to mitigate the fragmentation of knowledge among disciplines. (pp. 119-125)*

However, Craig (2008) warned that "metaphors are useful in some ways and yet deeply misleading if taken too literally" (p. 80).

The chapter's objectives are guided by what the authors label as the Gutierrez-Santiuste, Gallego-Arrufat, and Simone (2016) clarion call: "Minimizing the obstacles students encounter in their online communication is a priority for professors committed to the quality of virtual instruction in a collaborative learning community in higher education" (p. 115). Thus, this chapter answers these two questions: (1) How do interdisciplinary theories inform the communication practices of online graduate courses? and (2) How do education organizations manage and measure the communication practices of online

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