

Chapter 5

Of Paradigms, Theories, and Models:

A Conceptual Hierarchical Structure for Communication Science and Technoself

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ABSTRACT

This chapter attempts to define and clarify differences among paradigms, theories, and models in communication science according to a hierarchical conceptual structure or pyramidal flowchart. A paradigm is an overarching, speculative world-view that represents the value system of researchers and scholars who claim to follow it loyally. A theory is a conceptual framework that is amenable to indirect empirical evaluation through interrelated models. A model is a construct defined and evidenced by one or more dimensions that are amenable to empirical verification. Examples of such structure are provided from a general example, from Family Communication, from Communication Science in general, and more specifically from Relational Competence Theory (RCT). Models from RCT are then related to models from Communication Science, including also written communication. Writing allows to link models of RCT to specific workbooks or interactive practice exercises that permit evaluation of models in a more dynamic manner than inert psychological tests. Communications based on distance writing are becoming an important component of techno-self in their multifarious applications to mental health, including promotion of health and prevention and treatment of mental illnesses. From a past auditory/verbal self, these applications imply a present/digital/visual self.

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OF PARADIGMS, THEORIES, AND MODELS

This chapter attempts to fulfill at least six distinct purposes. The primary purpose is to differentiate among paradigms, theories, and models in communication science (CS) according to a hierarchical flowchart or pyramidal framework. A secondary purpose is to show conceptual and empirical relationships between models of Relational Competence Theory (RCT; Cusinato & L'Abate, 2012; L'Abate, 2005; L'Abate & Cusinato, 2007; L'Abate, Cusinato, Maino, Colesso, & Scilletta, 2010) and recent communication paradigms, theories, and models (Baxter & Braithwaite, 2008; Greene & Bursleson, 2003; Knapp & Miller, 1994; Segrin & Flora, 2005; Turner & West, 2006; Whaley & Samter, 2007). A tertiary purpose of this article is to attempt an integration of a hierarchical structure in written communication with RCT and communication science. A fourth purpose is to integrate a model of written with verbal communication. On the basis of this integration, a fifth purpose of this chapter is to connect theory with practice through programmed writing. A sixth purpose is to connect programmed writing within to the wider technoself context of this volume.

Certain models of RCT has already been expanded to cover alexithymia (Cusinato & L'Abate, 2011), intimacy and hurt-feelings (L'Abate, 2011a), play (L'Abate, 2009g), self-help (Harwood & L'Abate, 2010), and generational and relational models of psychopathology as well (Hooper, L'Abate, Sweeney, Giansini, & Janckoski, 2012). Whether RCT can be successfully expanded in this chapter to encompass communication paradigms, theories, and models remains to be seen in this chapter. Nonetheless, an attempt will be made, first to clarify theorizing in CS according to a conceptual hierarchical framework presented in Table 1, second and third, linking models of RCT with selected models of CS (Tables 2, 3, and 4), fourth, attempting to construct a hierarchical structure for written communication that

would allow to allow an expansion of oral to written communication (Table 5), fifth, expand such a structure to model-derived programmed workbooks or interactive practice exercises in Tables 6 and 7, and sixth, link distance writing and programmed writing to a new definition of self according to recent advances in information processing and science, that is: the technoself.

To accomplish the purposes of this chapter, one needs to distinguish clearly among paradigms, theories, and models. There seems to exist a great deal of confusion in the CS literature cited above about what constitutes a paradigm, a theory, and a model (Sprey, 1990). A prime example of this confusion is evident in Baxter and Braithwaite's (2008) 29 chapters, where each chapter includes the term "theory" in its title without any distinction on whether a theory was really a paradigm, a real theory, or really a model. In CS as well as in psychological science there is a great deal of confusion about differentiating among paradigms, theories, and models. Often a paradigm is equated with a model and a theory is used as a synonymous term for either a paradigm or a model (L'Abate, 2009b, 2012). Consequently, we must differentiate conceptually among paradigms, theories, and models (Seguin, 2006), as summarized in Table 1, by defining them and distinguishing one term from the two others.

A paradigm is a conceptual, speculative, world-view that does not need direct empirical verification but that represents the value system of a theorist, researcher, or scholar. Since no one up to date dared to distinguish among different kinds of paradigm, I took the plunge into distinguishing among three different kind of paradigms, those that are meta-theoretical and those that are operational. Among meta-theoretical paradigms one must differentiate between general-integrative from those that are particular-specific. A more detailed explanation is available in L'Abate (2009b) with recent applications of this framework in L'Abate (2012).

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