

# Review of: "What Is in Organisation? Contents of a Self-Contained Container"

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**Potential competing interests:** No potential competing interests to declare.

Dear author,

I agree with most of the points made by my colleague. As a complement, here are some theoretical issues I would like to raise with you:

1. The contribution you are aiming to make with this paper is unclear, at least in that what “solving” the container-metaphor debate allows in terms of future theory developments is not made explicit. The main support you provide for your argument’s relevance is that the processual view of the communicational constitution of organizations (the “anti-container approach,” if you will) does not challenge the container metaphor but simply turns it on its head. Implied there is that these symmetrically opposed theoretical conceptions of organizations could be united in some form of dialectical synthesis and that your paper’s contribution would be to make such a move. However, this symmetry that stands as your premise can be easily challenged, and therefore the question you aim to solve (i.e., “is it ‘communication in organization’ or ‘organization in communication?’”) is shown to be inadequately formulated.

You write: “First, in its most condensed form, the ‘organization in communication’ (Schoeneborn et al., 2019, p. 475) perspective reveals itself as a simple negative of its rejected counterpart, namely the ‘communication in organization’ perspective. Thus, the container metaphor of organization is replaced by a container metaphor of communication.” This shows a misunderstanding of the processual view you claim to criticize. The claim of many of the CCO scholars you cite (Ashcraft, Cooren, Schoeneborn, Taylor, etc.) has never been that organization is *contained* in communication in the same way that it could be claimed that organizations are pre-existing containers (or sites) of communication, *because communication is not an entity, but a process*. Their view is radically different from the opposite one that organizations, as “things,” would have actions happen “inside” them (spatially); actions such as communication. Communication, as a process from which organizations emerge, does not have the same ontology as the organization, as an entity, and the “containment” it exerts on organizations is not of the same nature at all. This is why many scholars from that trend have shown a preference for the term “organizing” instead of “organization.” Communication as a process produces organizing, e.g., associating members, creating shared goals, etc.

Since the whole point of your argument seems to rest on what I would argue is an ill-conceived analogy between two competing conceptions of the relationship between organization and communication, I would advise you to construct a much more solid argument for that analogy before proceeding further.

I would also point out that I found it quite hard to understand the one sentence, in the conclusion, that seems to synthesize the paper's argument in its densest form: "What is in organization? My answer to this question is twofold. There is only decision communication; and everything else."

1. I also found it problematic how you essentially draw from very few selected texts some criticisms that you then generalize to a whole field. For example, after a discussion of the autopoietic nature of social systems *in Luhmann's theory*, you write: "This multiversal perspective also implies that both the 'communication in organization' and the 'organization in communication' perspective propagate either flat tautologies or rather problematic assumptions." One would expect that you show here how this "multiversal perspective" is present in the works of a broader group of organizational communication scholars before drawing from it some flaw that you charge both "the 'communication in organization' and the 'organization in communication' perspective" with.
2. In the same spirit, some points are very quickly made, without much support. This either weakens your argument enough that it does not provide a very engaging challenge to those who would, a priori, disagree with you (such as this reviewer), or would leave a less informed reader totally at a loss in trying to follow. You write: "Society is the compassing system of all communication, yet Luhmann insisted that the study of this compassing system must not be confused with the study of social systems, of which the compassing system is just one (Luhmann, 2012, p. xiii). This sophistry is indicative of the fact that Luhmann did not conceive of society as a container of communication." I would ask : Why is this a sophistry? Why is it indicative that Luhmann did not conceive of society as a container? Why is Luhmann insisting that the study of X must not be confused with Y? Other passages of your paper show a similar tendency for overly abridged arguments.