

5-19-2022

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Resume Research Questions Through the Seven Philosophical Foundations of Communication

SAGE Open
April-June 2022: 1–13
© The Author(s) 2022
DOI: 10.1177/21582440221096144
journals.sagepub.com/home/sgo


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Abstract

While there is no lack of peer-reviewed publications that focus on resumes, there is a lack of theory-based research in the genre. Most studies on resumes report observations rather than test theories to predict screener behaviors, and recent calls to action have advocated for more theory-based resume research. This paper answers the call and offers ways in which scholars can introduce theory into the existing body of knowledge in the resume genre by exploring research questions guided by the various philosophical foundations of the communication discipline. Future resume research should reference Craig's constitutive metamodel that offers more than 250 communication theories into seven philosophical foundations: semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical, and rhetorical when designing studies. Exploring resume research questions based on communication theory enables scholars to use an applied research perspective across disciplinary boundaries and advance knowledge of resumes, a key component of organizational entry. This paper opens the door for scholars to contribute to this large and important question of organizational entry by outlining resume research questions that can be explored within each of the theoretical foundations of the communication discipline.

Keywords

business communication, organizational communication, human communication, communication studies, communication, social sciences, organizational behavior, management, human resources management

Introduction

Resumes are documents used by job seekers that highlight their accomplishments, skills, and abilities. Ultimately, resume writers desire to develop distinctive documents that will represent themselves in the best possible way (Akpan & Notar, 2012; Knouse, 1994). Resumes are generally considered effective if the candidate obtains an interview after submission (Greenly, 1993; Huggins, 1977). Continuous and ongoing research studies attempt to determine the factors in resumes which will prompt favorable action on the part of employers (Deming et al., 2014; Thoms et al., 1999). There is no consensus on what makes a good resume, and many scholars will offer opinions and conflicting evidence (Culwell-Block & Sellers, 1994; Diaz, 2013; Wright et al., 2011).

Each day, thousands of employers use resumes to screen candidates, as job seekers use their resumes to highlight their accomplishments, skills, and abilities. However, there is limited theory-based research within the resume genre. Risavy (2017) notes that most studies on resumes do not test theories and advises more theory-based research to explore the genre, with possible topics ranging from how resume screeners make decisions on which candidates to interview to how

applicants should write their resumes. Further, resume content is not specifically isolated and explored as the variable of interest. DiMarco and Fasos (2019) note that only 47 studies in ProQuest published about resumes between 1894 and 2018 use the phrase “resume content” in the title of the article and few studies during that time tested theories to predict behaviors or explain observations. In short, resume research in any context continues to lack theory-based study design. For example, Sinclair and Agerström (2020) explored peripheral or central route processing for screeners but did not tie into any theories during hypothesizing or discussion for why resume screeners may select one route or the other when making decisions about which candidates to interview.

Ultimately, interactions between job applicants and screeners are rooted within communication, and several theories within communication offer explanations for

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factors throughout the process observed in studies within disciplines such as management and organizational psychology. Exploring resumes and the employee selection process through the philosophical foundations of communication proposed by Craig (1999) demonstrates how the communication discipline can contribute to existing research and offer a theoretical perspective inform other disciplines studying the resume genre. For example, resumes are often studied in human resource management or organizational behavior as part of the organizational entry process. Exploring resumes with a communication lens, both in the role the document plays in the job search process, as well as the resume's place as a symbol in society, is a worthy exercise with potential to inform practitioners and scholars from a variety of industries and academic disciplines at both the applied and theoretical levels of how the communication factors impact processes commonly studied in other disciplines. Indeed, there are many ways a communication scholar can explore the resume genre and organizational entry process through the semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical, and rhetorical traditions of the discipline. Further, encouraging researchers in organization entry, and the resume genre in particular, to review Craig's (1999) framework when forming resume research questions can provide a much-needed response to the calls of Risavy (2017) as well as DiMarco and Fasos (2019), who clearly document a need for theory-based research in the resume genre.

Semiotics

The first of the seven communication disciplinary foundations is the semiotic tradition. Semiotics is the study of signs. The primary concept in the semiotics tradition is the *sign*, which Littlejohn and Foss (2010) define as "a stimulus designating or indicating some other condition" (p. 45). The second concept is the *symbol*, defined as "a complex sign with many meanings, including highly personal ones" (p. 45). An important distinction between signs and symbols to communication scholars that can inform the resume genre is that signs are often literal, while symbols are often figurative. This means that there is a *triad of meaning* between the object, the person, and the sign, as it is up to the person to interpret the sign's meaning and assess a value. Semiotics is broken into three divisions: semantics, what the sign stands for; syntactics, the relationships between the signs; and pragmatics, how signs make a difference in a person's daily life.

From the semiotic perspective, the resume is a symbol of the job search process common within the United States. Semiotics is focused on how one acquires meaning through one's reality as formed by signs such as words, gestures, myths, theories, and products/services, as these signs connect experiences with thoughts that humans can interpret (Mick, 1986). This is the essence of what a well-written resume should do: represent the candidate's skills, abilities,

and accomplishments in a way that describes to potential employers that the candidate can perform the job functions of the positions they seek (Akpan & Notar, 2012). Three semiotic concepts and theories that can be used to explore resumes are nonverbal codes, theory of linguistic relativity, and the theory of elaborated and restricted codes.

Nonverbal codes, developed by Judee Burgoon (1994), contain six properties: first, nonverbal codes are analogic instead of digital, meaning that they are continuous within a spectrum or range; second, nonverbal codes can show iconicity, or resemblance to the object being symbolized; third, certain nonverbal codes elicit universal meaning; fourth, nonverbal codes provide for simultaneous transmission of multiple ideas; fifth, nonverbal signals can evoke an automatic response; and sixth, nonverbal signals can be emitted spontaneously. Each of these properties can be isolated for study and are visible within resumes, as previous studies have even observed the concepts without identifying the theory. First, resumes come in a range of quality, as some candidates are desired by everyone on a search committee, while others are immediately disregarded by the search committee. The symbolic representation of the person contained within a resume must make a strong impression, since resume screeners spend approximately 30 seconds reading to assess any given candidate (Barnum, 1987). Second, resumes attempt to mimic the skills and abilities of the writer, in an attempt to symbolize the human characteristics of the candidate, with some even demonstrating components of the Big Five personality traits (Cole et al., 2009). Third, listing items, such as degrees achieved or institutions attended, on one's resumes elicits a universal meaning within the business culture because these resume content items are expectations for many positions (Thoms et al., 1999). For example, in the United States, listing the words "Bachelor of Arts" with a year and an institutional name are generally accepted by most search committees as evidence that candidates have earned a degree from a 4-year college or university. However, while listing degrees elicits a universal meaning among resume screeners of the applicant's degree attainment, the claim of a degree is not always accurate, as candidates, even in high profile positions such as the Notre Dame head football coach, are known to lie on resumes (Fountain & Wong, 2001). Fourth, several ideas or themes about candidates' traits can be transmitted through resumes by decisions in font style (Diaz, 2013), paper stock (Greenly, 1993), length (Culwell-Block & Sellers, 1994), or grammar (Suchan & Colucci, 1989). Fifth, poorly written resumes can elicit an immediate response in that the writer is instantly removed from the search pool (Barnum, 1987). Sixth, nonverbal signals can be emitted spontaneously through the resume, as a growing field of targeted research is showing various inferences that resume readers can make when reviewing candidates. These nonverbal signals include inferences about a candidate's personality traits (Cole et al., 2009) as well as a candidate's work ethic and overall professionalism (Knouse, 1994).

The Theory of Linguistic Relativity, also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, based on the work of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, focuses on the fundamental syntactic differences that are present among language groups (Koerner, 1992). The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis states that the structure of a culture's language determines the culture's behavior and habits; therefore, how any given culture sees the world is shaped by the grammatical structure of its language. Resumes fit these criteria because they are structured in accordance with key tenets of the English language for those seeking employment within the United States. Resume writers attempt to embed the reality of their work-related abilities through language selection within the resume. For example, English visualizes time as a line with three tenses: past, present, and future. Resumes are written in accordance with these tenses: current positions are written in present, such as "effectively process over 500 orders during the daily lunch rush" for a job the candidate currently holds at McDonald's, while previous positions are written in past tense, such as "effectively processed over 500 orders during the daily lunch rush" if the candidate is no longer employed at McDonald's. Additionally, future tense is generally used only in the objective statement, such as "to apply my exceptional work ethic and teamwork skills in a position with McDonald's as a crew member" (Culwell-Block & Sellers, 1994; Greenly, 1993).

A third semiotic theory that can inform resume research is Basil Bernstein's (1964) Theory of Elaborated and Restricted codes. This theory demonstrates how the language employed in everyday talk reflects and shapes the assumptions of a social group. In the theory, the word *code* refers how language is organized and used by members of a social group. Resume language is a reflection of the writer's skills and abilities, and the social group it hopes to influence is the selection committee, with the intent to earn the writer an interview (Huggins, 1977).

Restricted codes have a narrow range of options and are common sources of information within a culture. The goal of restricted codes is to orient users to general knowledge and definitions. The word *resume* is an example of a restricted code. Ask most of the United States' population, and the definition of resume would remain consistent in terms of its role in obtaining employment. Certain components of the resume are also restricted codes: name, education, computer skills, will all follow similar labeling structures and format (Diaz, 2013).

Elaborated codes provide a wide range of different ways to look at something and enable communicators to make their ideas and intentions more explicit. A Midwest university Career Services offices utilizes an elaborated code system for resume bullet statements to teach students how to write resumes (SVSU Office of Career Services, 2019). This three-tiered coding system instructs resume writers that the richness and specificity of information provided within resume bullet statements increases the likelihood of the resume writer earning an interview. Since elaborated codes

such as bullet statements have the ability to expand and become more explicit, it is through the expansion of unique experiences that candidates may be able to separate themselves from others within the candidate pool (Wright et al., 2011). These lived experiences tie into the next philosophical foundation of communication that can inform future resume research, phenomenology.

Phenomenology

The second communication tradition is phenomenology, which emphasizes personal experience. There are three basic principles of phenomenology: first, knowledge is found in direct experience; second, meaning of something is dependent upon how a person has interacted with it in his or her own life; and third, language provides meaning to the experience (Craig, 1999). From a communication perspective, phenomenological problems and studies are often conducted using qualitative methods, potentially filling a gap within existing resume literature (DiMarco & Fasos, 2019; Risavy, 2017). Phenomenology is based on an individual's personal experience; therefore, there is not one true meaning as a post-positivist attempts to measure, but instead, there are multiple meanings, which makes phenomenology more interpretive in nature. These ideas of multiple interpretations are important from a resume perspective because of the growing trend to award more money and offer a higher starting salary for an entry-level position to candidates who complete a paid internship or co-op experience during their degree program (National Association of Colleges and Employers, 2021). Financially, experience is rewarded by organizations when making offers to candidates, and the tradition of phenomenology can help explain what is special about previous experience that makes it lucrative for students to achieve and desirable for organizations to hire.

Three theories from phenomenology offer paths for exploring resume questions. Paul Ricoeur's (1973) Theory of Distanciation would recommend isolating the text of the resume from the situation in which it is being applied. In other words, scholars should study the words of the resume and not consider which job it was being submitted for when conducting resume research. Conversely, Stanley Fish (1980) rejects the separation of text from the context, and his reader-response theory focuses on the lived experience of the reader, which implies that the resume screeners' interpretations are the key element to applicants receiving an interview request. A third theory from phenomenology that can be applied to resume research is Philosophical Hermeneutics, which posits that one's experiences cannot be separated from one's perception of reality (Gadamer, 2008). Whether it is looking at Gadamer's (2008) Philosophical Hermeneutics and identifying how much previous experience influences the screener's interpretation of the resume, looking at the larger cultural contexts as the influencer as Fish (1980) suggests, or simply isolating the words of the resumes of successful applicants

to look for commonalities per Ricoeur (1973), resumes can be researched through the phenomenological lens to explore how lived experience of resume writers and resume screeners influences an invitation to interview. Some research that has already been conducted on resumes notes how resume screeners rely on personal experiences and intuition when evaluating candidates. For example, Sinclair and Agerström (2020) identified that resume screeners who relied on intuitive decision-making for candidate selection relied more on how applicants presented themselves in the personal letter and less on diagnostic biographical information such as GPA. Sinclair and Agerström (2020) offered no theoretical explanation for the results; however, studying resumes and resume screener behaviors through the communication tradition of phenomenology can further this line of research.

Cybernetics

Cybernetics, or the study of networks, is the third tradition of communication (Craig, 1999). Cybernetics studies the complex systems within networks and how various elements interact with each other. Key terms used within the cybernetic tradition include *system*, *network*, and *feedback loop*. These terms are important for resume research because the documents interact within the system and network as job candidates use their resume at the system level to gain organizational entry; at the network level to attract attention from hiring managers or selection committee members; and at the feedback loop because there is communication on whether or not the resume achieves its goal: to earn an interview (Huggins, 1977).

There are also five variations within Cybernetics: Basic System Theory, which views systems as actual objects that can be observed; cybernetics, a branch of Basic System Theory which focuses on feedback loops and controls; information theory, which studies how messages are transmitted within the system; general systems theory, which looks at similarities among all systems on a global scale; and second-order cybernetics, which proposes that one cannot truly study a network from the outside and must be immersed within it (Craig, 1999). The wide range of questions available also means that many methods can be used to study cybernetic questions. For example, a post-positivist may measure messages through an organization using a pre-test/post-test model in information theory, but a qualitative researcher may complete a case study of the second-order cybernetic perspective of the lived experience of employees within a certain organization.

From a resume standpoint, basic system theory research questions would look at the resume as a piece of the applicant screening process. Cybernetics, involving the feedback loops and controls, would look at how resumes are returned to the job applicants, asking, for instance, do applicants receive genuine feedback or is there a standard response sent to all candidates? Information theory

questions about resumes would examine how resumes are transmitted through the organization. Does every search committee member view the resumes for commentary? Through what medium are the resumes transmitted? Expanding the view out through general systems theory, one must look at the global usage of resumes: how do resumes appear in various cultures? Is the role resumes play as a method of organizational entry in the United States the same or different in Kuwait? Finally, if one is going to study resumes through second-order cybernetics, research design would require qualitative methods, for example, a participant observation study in which a search committee member or resume writer is involved as both a researcher and committee member because of the immersion requirement required to gain a full appreciation of the communication phenomenon being studied.

Two foundational cybernetic theories that focus on the communicator provide interesting lenses for resume research. The first is the concept of co-orientating, introduced by Theodore Newcomb (1953), that identifies a basic A-B-X system as a co-orientation between two people (A and B) with an object (X). In terms of a resume writer, the goal of the resume is to orient the search committee toward the writer's professional highlights in order to be considered the best candidate to join the organization, and in this case, the identification of "best candidate" is the common concern for both the selection committee, who wants to *hire* the best candidate, and the resume writer, who wants to *be* the best candidate in order to join the organization as an employee.

Of course, the system interactions are seldom that simple, leading to Information-Integration Theory, which examines the ways communicators collect information about their environment and form attitudes (Anderson, 1971). Information-Integration theory is based on two key variables: *valence*, the direction of the new information in terms of supporting or refuting the pre-established attitude, and *weight*, and the amount of credibility for the source. Essentially, valence influences the direction any new information may push one's beliefs in terms of either supporting or challenging the original belief, while weight impacts how much the new information may impact the belief (Sharot & Garrett, 2016). For a resume writer, the goal is to encourage a positive valence from the reader. This must be achieved by connecting one's skills and abilities to a specific job description. For instance, generic resumes that attempt to be "one size fits all" and submitted to multiple positions without customization would be designed counter to the theory. Therefore, a potential research question based on Information-Integration Theory could measure the effectiveness of generic vs. specific resumes and whether or not search committees have a preference for one over the other.

Another theory from the cybernetic tradition, the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Theory, has potential for exploring the resume genre, particularly in the

way resume screeners perceive information within each applicant's resume. CMM posits that communication is a performative act designed to create and control context, as opposed to the idea that communication is simply a reference to other things (Pearce, 2005). The interaction between resume screeners and how they interpret resume information can be explored in CMM, as it regards communication as a coordinator for which complex meanings and actions can be exchanged during social interactions, or in the case of a resume review, the meanings of a candidate's suitability for a job and the screener's decision to offer an interview. Resumes, particularly those written with information-rich bullet statements, have the potential to bridge the gap between meaning and action. Resume bullet statements written with specific, concise information have the ability to assign meaning about the writer to a hiring manager. For example, if a candidate writes "Earned Employee of the Month Honors in July 2020 after creating an attractive marketing display which increased sales by 45% during the third quarter," a hiring manager may view this as a positive episode and one that can be repeated should that candidate have similar interactions within the new organization.

Related to CMM, Rules Theory postulates that communication is governed through two types of rules: constitutive and regulative (Shimanoff, 2009). *Constitutive* rules give communicators the ability to interpret meaning, and *regulative* rules govern how to respond or behave. One benefit of regulative rules is that they provide a *logical force* in which meaning is constructed; therefore, it is possible that writing information-rich bullet statements can lead to a positive impression from a resume screener because the meaning of superior performance is adequately constructed within the writing. Furthermore, writing cause and effect bullet statements has potential to lead to *practical force* in which predictions of future actions are based on prior actions, and cause and effect bullet statements may lead resume screeners to conclude that their candidates may produce similar results if hired for work. For instance, a bullet statement that reads "utilized Adobe InDesign to design over 50 individual marketing pieces for clients," could lead organizations to believe that a similar level of performance can be expected if the person is hired into a new position. In addition to creating bullet statements of cause and effect, the third key concept of CMM, *stories*, is available through writing narrative accomplishments such as "created a brochure that was awarded a Gold Addy by the American Federation of Advertising (AFA)." Narrative bullet statements that convey a story could be positively linked to receiving an interview request because a resume screener's prior experience with AFA may lead to such a statement forming a positive impression; therefore, it may be possible for a candidate to achieve shared coherence and gain a connection, even though no verbal communication has occurred, and the experience is entirely asynchronous and without any immediate feedback. Future studies within the resume genre should be conducted to

determine if the potential relationships between resume screeners and resume information, as predicted by the cybernetic theories, are possible to measure.

Sociopsychological

The sociopsychological tradition of communication focuses on the individual as a social being and was the fourth category proposed in Craig (1999). The sociopsychological tradition is the closest to the field of Psychology when compared to the other traditions within the communication field. According to Littlejohn and Foss (2010), much of the work developed in communication under the sociopsychological category focuses on "persuasion and attitude change – message processing, how individuals plan message strategies, how receivers process message information, and the effects of messages on individuals" (p. 53).

There are three primary branches in sociopsychological theory: *behavioral*, which focuses on the actions people perform; *cognitive*, which is how individuals gain, process, and retain knowledge; and *biological*, which involves how genetics impacts a given person's communication traits. The primary focus of contemporary sociopsychological theories in communication is cognitive in origin and attempts to provide insight into how people process information. Several of the resume studies described in the longitudinal reviews of DiMarco and Fasos (2019) and Risavy (2017) recorded observations that can be explained within the sociopsychological theories of communication.

One sociopsychological theory focused on communicators that has been used in practical studies involving job seekers is Trait Theory, specifically a model proposed by John Digman (1990) that proposes five factors drive an individual's behavioral preferences and style. Commonly known as the Big Five, the five personality factors are neuroticism, how often one feels stress or anxiety; extraversion, from the Jungian personality trait of one's ability to draw energy from the external environment or being in groups; openness, one's ability to share feelings and thoughts which is related to Jungian's concept of intuitiveness; agreeableness, one's ability to have empathy or sympathy toward others that is similar to Jungian's concept of feeling; and conscientiousness, one's ability to be self-motivated and organized that is similar to Myers-Briggs extension of the Jungian personality type called Judging (Digman, 1997). One of the key areas of research that has operationalized Digman's (1990, 1997) Trait Theory has been the work of Cole et al. (2009), which attempted to determine if hiring managers could predict or identify Big Five personality characteristics simply by reading the resume. The ability to convey desired personality traits for employment, such as extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience, while minimizing the impression of neuroticism, can increase the resume writer's chances of being selected to continue in the hiring process (Cole et al., 2009).

Constructivism, a sociopsychological theory attributed to Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget, suggests that independent and separate realities exist between an individual's mind and the environment (Harlow et al., 2007). In constructivism, one's reality is framed within one's mind, and knowledge is constructed by building upon what one knows by adding new information. Constructivism is another area for resume research to explore, as questions exploring the way in which resume bullet statements build an independent reality about the resume writer in the minds of resume screeners that lead to an interview offer could inform best practices for content development. Given that constructivism is basically a strategy-choice theory, research questions could also focus on the writer and attempt to determine reasons for why and how certain experiences were highlighted by the resume writer, while other experiences were not expanded upon during resume development.

To assist with resume development, John O. Greene's (1984) Action Assembly Theory (AAT) is a sociopsychological theory that could be a useful basis for pedagogy research. AAT is a message production theory with a goal to create a parsimonious, logical process model for how messages are produced. As explained by the author, AAT refers to "processes of selection of memory and elements and subsequent construction of novel behaviors" (Greene, 1984, p. 289), and focuses on message production, also known as output. Greene's (1984) AAT addresses the lack of theory about how messages are generated, and AAT presents an initial model of cognitive structures and processes underlying the production of verbal and nonverbal behaviors in ongoing interaction. In other words, the tenets of AAT are built around the fact that human beings think, at multiple levels, about the messages that they produce before they release the messages externally. AAT explains how messages/behaviors/outputs are put together in the mind through a cognitive process and released as messages. Understanding this cognitive process for message development can help inform pedagogy for teaching the writing of effective resumes.

According to AAT, message structure is broken into two basic units: procedural records and outcome representations. Procedural records are information about how to perform a specific behavior. Procedural records are "formed when a given action results in a particular outcome" (p. 293). In other words, human beings are capable of making and storing procedural records based on experience. Procedural records are broken into actions (might do), outcomes (might happen), and situations (contexts). It is also important to note that procedural records themselves are small but can be linked together to form longer action sequences. For example, learning how to best input a procedural record for writing effective resumes into resume writers will lead to maximum retention of the information, and ultimately lead to an outcome of the creation and development of better resumes.

AAT processing is broken into two basic units: activation processes and assembly processes. The activation process

involves the selection of specific procedural records to be utilized. Three parameters identified by Greene (1984) include: "level of activation, the time required for activation, and the demands on processing capacity required for activation" (p. 299). The level of activation refers to frequency and recent use of actions along with the context that is needed. For example, it would be easier for an undergraduate to activate procedural records for appropriate language for the role of student while sitting in a classroom than sitting in a bar. Speed of activation is dependent upon practice. For processing capacity, Greene (1984) argues that "activation of procedural records occurs in parallel with no depends upon central processing capacity" (p. 300). The assembly process organizes the set of activated procedural records into the observed outcome representation; it requires "central processing capacity" (p. 300). Therefore, while the action process may not be conscious, the assembly process does require conscious thought. Additional implications for assembly process are that advanced planning and practice can increase speed, strength, and accuracy of the outcome representation it conveys. For example, rehearsing lines and practice make Broadway plays better than high school productions because of the many years of practice and repetition.

Output (or Outcome) representations refer to the actual behaviors that result from activation of a procedural record. Greene (1984) outlines four output representations, ranging from the most abstract to the most specific. First, interactional representation is described as a "representation of interaction-goal pursuits in social situations" (p. 296). An example would be the desire to impress a search committee upon first introduction. Second, ideational representation "specifies the content of a particular move, or transition" (p. 297). This would be the specific idea one wishes to convey to the selection committee. For example, a resume writer might want the selection committee to think they are a highly motivated person. Third, utterance representation is "syntactic, lexical, and phonological" and explains how messages are transferred from a thought to a communication action, such as spoken words (p. 297). For example, the actual words, and order of them, used to convey the ideational presentation of the thought are output as utterance representations. To demonstrate a strong work ethic in which the resume screener can understand, a resume writer may wish to demonstrate to a selection committee a list of achievements: "I have been able to accomplish a lot so far, including ____, ____, and ____." This general idea would need to be output through the resume bullet statements as specific items. Additionally, this utterance representation should manifest itself during the live interview, as the interviewee uses words and stories to build a favorable impression in the minds of the selection committee. Finally, in sensorimotor representation, "efferent commands are prepared" and "is itself a hierarchy of increasing levels of specificity" (p. 297), as it can range from environmental cues to tone of message production. For example, meeting the selection committee in their office vs. a loud

public location, such as a chamber of commerce breakfast, would be environmental, while speaking in a soft, calm voice would be an example of tone. In both cases, the sensorimotor representation of the environment will influence communication acts and cognitions, which must be accounted for as the speaker prepares messages for external release.

It is also important to note that outcome representations may be connected and that “unitized assembly of procedural records would come to function as a single element” and that “associative links may develop between procedural records relevant to different levels of the output representation” (Greene, 1984, p. 298). From the resume writing standpoint, the ritualistic activity involves the analysis of job description, customization of resume to fit the needs of the organization, and submission of the document through a medium such as an online job application system, e-mail, or postal carrier.

Procedural records have three basic properties to remember: they occur at many levels of abstraction; for example, knowing cultural norms of what information to include on a resume in the United States and avoiding culturally unacceptable items such as birth date and ethnic origin; they are independent of each other; for example, knowing how to write an objective statement vs. bullet effective statements that highlight previous accomplishments and achievements; and they are dependent upon time with more frequently used records being stronger than ones that haven't been used in a long time; for example, a new college graduate may have taken several resume workshops but that procedural record may be lost if one does not update their resume for 20 years.

Research questions founded within AAT could focus on the resume pedagogy of teaching and learning, as knowing how to properly format and design a resume would be one, independent, procedural record. Knowing how to write an effective bullet statement that contains specific and measurable information would be a separate, independent, procedural record. However, in order to write a resume, one must be able to activate the procedural records of formatting and writing as part of a larger sequence of actions, while assembling their resume information in a logical action-outcome sequence that leads to a successfully organized resume that effectively impresses a selection committee who extends an interview request. Resume researchers can isolate AAT and explore if it is possible for instructors of resume writing, such as career office professionals, to instill effective resume writing techniques into the procedural records of their students in order for students to achieve the desired outcome representation of a resume that generates invitations to interview for job postings.

To offer a cognitive motivation for the behavior of resume screeners during the review process, Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT), a sociopsychological theory developed by Charles Berger and Richard Calabrese (1975) and expanded by William Gudykunst (1998) to Anxiety-Uncertainty Management (AUM), can be explored in future resume research. URT focuses on how individuals gain knowledge

about others to reduce their uncertainty. Similar to cognitive dissonance, URT assumes that individuals experience psychological discomfort in unclear situations. When faced with the unknown, URT posits that individuals will seek to reduce their level of uncertainty because of stress caused by the ambiguity. Additionally, the level of care one puts into actions will increase during times of uncertainty.

Considering the resume genre, a resume that contains limited information about a candidate's skills or abilities creates a level of stress in a resume screener who must evaluate a candidate's qualifications to do a specific job in order to extend an interview request. If the resume screener is left with limited information, the uncertainty level is high, and the desire to call the candidate in for an interview may be lowered. However, if the candidate has a rich resume full of clear, specific examples, and qualifications, a resume screener's level of uncertainty about the candidate's ability to perform the job may be reduced, and the resulting confidence in the candidate's skills and abilities may lead to an interview request. Future resume research can explore URT to assess whether resume screeners are using resume information to reduce uncertainty, and if so, what relationship exists between resume content, uncertainty reduction (if it occurs), and the screener's intent to extend an offer to interview.

Sociocultural

While the sociopsychological approach to communication focuses on the individual, the sociocultural tradition explores how people interact with each other and within the world as its primary units of analysis. The sociocultural approach is academically related to the field of sociology, which studies group interactions. The sociocultural tradition theorizes communication as the production of social order and focuses on cultures, identities, rituals, structures, and societies (Craig, 1999). Due to the large role of culture and context, studies in the sociocultural tradition are often qualitative in nature. Littlejohn and Foss (2010) go as far as to claim, “sociocultural work is generally, though not always, holistic” (p. 55).

Core divisions within the sociocultural tradition that can contribute to resume research include symbolic interactionism, the study of communication as a way of exploring social relationships which emphasizes groups; social construction, which proposes that identity is built from the surroundings, and not within the individual; sociolinguistics, the study of language and words within a group or culture; philosophy of language, which proposes that word meaning is dependent upon its context; ethnography, the study of how groups build language and culture working together; and ethnomethodology, the study of groups while being a member of the group (Craig, 1999). From a resume perspective, sociocultural theories can help provide insight for studying rituals such as the job applicant screening process and the ways in which resume writers, resume screeners, selection committee members, and hiring managers interact. Sociocultural theories

focusing on the communicator that could inform resume research include Symbolic Interactionism (SI), The Presentation Self, The Communication Theory of Identity, and Identity Negotiation Theory.

Symbolic Interactionism (SI) Theory, founded by George Herbert Mead (1972/1934), introduces the concept of self and proposes that as people interact with each other, shared meanings for certain terms and actions come into play. The two core elements are self, the communicator, and objects, which is any aspect of a person's reality and can be a thing, quality, event, or state of affairs. Essentially, per SI, one's reality is made up of the sum of one's social objects. For a resume writer, screener's reality of the candidate is dependent upon the writer's representation of the person as depicted within the resume.

The second theory, The Presentation Self, is attributed to Erving Goffman (1955) and represents life as a series of events; as one moves through life, each frame can be analyzed as a specific occurrence. The ideal self, therefore, is one's attempt to show only their best attributes, an obvious goal in the resume development process (Goffman, 1955). A key to the ideal-self presentation is its connection to Impression Management, which is one's self-conscious attempt to manage the appearance of their own face to others and is commonly referenced in studies involving resumes and other documents prepared in the job search process (Knouse, 1994).

The Communication Theory of Identity (CTI), connected to Michael Hecht (1993), posits that one's identity comes from three cultural contexts that are linked through communication: individual, aka micro; communal, aka meso; and societal, aka macro. One's identity moves between two dimensions: the subjective, which is one's personal sense of self, and the ascribed, which involves the opinion of others. Each dimension, subjective and ascribed, is also divided throughout four layers: personal, one's sense of self in a situation; enactment, others' insights on one's sense of self and are based on what one does, has, or acts; relational, one's relation to other individuals; and communal, one's relation to a large group or culture. Resume research could explore how each of these layers are depicted within resumes. For example, communication scholars can explore how resume headings correlate with each layer of Communication Identity Theory, such as whether the objective heading is part of the personal layer because it describes the personal motivation for the writer, but the references heading is part of the relational layer because it describes the writer's interpersonal connections. How applicants self-represent their various career enactments on the resume could also be a context for resume research, as the self-representation of previous experiences forms the opinion of resume screeners and influences an interview request. Additionally, post-positivist and empirical research methods could be employed to determine or correlate which pieces of the layers are more effective than others in receiving interview requests.

Identity Negotiation Theory explores how one's identity transfers based on context (Ting-Toomey, 2015). One's personal identity is the closest relationship, and the identity then moves out to social, groups, or cultural relationships that can often be stereotypes. For example, one may be Roman Catholic and list membership on a local parish council on a resume to show community involvement and/or leadership. However, a reader may fixate on the religious component of the position, which can explain a great many things about the person's belief system and lead the reader to attribute generalities about the person being screened. However, an individual may not subscribe to every facet of the belief; for example, a Catholic could follow the Vatican's beliefs about not murdering or stealing, but the same Catholic may also take birth control pills or wear condoms to prevent pregnancies during sexual intercourse. Additionally, none of these traits would likely be relevant to the job description or the Catholic person's abilities in the workforce, with the possible exception being if the candidate were applying for a job at a Catholic-based agency. Therefore, future resume research can use Identify Negotiation Theory to explore whether the resume writer must be aware of any unintended consequences or attributes that their selected self-representation may inspire.

Intercultural competence is a term used to describe one's ability to interact with cultures that are different from one's own culture (Dinges, 1983). Intercultural competence is made of three parts: knowledge of the new culture, mindfulness of being aware of the new culture, and negotiating skill in the ability to move through the multiple identities and contexts being challenged. Future resume research can explore how the person writing a resume could look at each individual part of intercultural competence and make modifications for each submitted resume to better match for each individual position they seek. As demonstrated in the previous example, future hypotheses could explore if Roman Catholics gain an advantage vying for a job with a Catholic agency by self-disclosing religious affiliation through the resume. A resume writer's ability to determine when it is advantageous to list Catholic affiliations on the resume, such as parish council service or Knights of Columbus membership, can be studied as an effective application of intercultural competence within the job search process.

Looking at resume questions through the community-based social action media studies of the sociocultural tradition is another possibility. According to social action media studies, there are six premises (Schoening & Anderson, 1995). Each premise could be explored as a selection committee reviews resumes. First, meaning is produced by individuals' interpretation of information; therefore, how resume content is interpreted by each committee member can be explored. Second, the meaning of messages is produced by the audience; search committee members are playing an active role in the process. The third premise notes that, as individuals change media usage, meaning shifts. From a

resume standpoint, one could look at the method of delivery or even the resume itself, be it a piece of paper, document on a computer screen, ePortfolio website, or even a LinkedIn profile. Fourth, the media's meaning is built by a combination of an individual and a communal process. The search committee members will each have their own opinion of a resume, but they will also create a shared meaning of the candidate's credentials upon discussion. Fifth, group members will collectively determine the content's meanings and reach a shared understanding of the content. From a resume standpoint, studying how groups interact and come up with the shared meaning of each candidate's value would be a possible research question. The sixth criterion concerns itself with how researchers must join the community in order to study the communication phenomenon. This criterion implies that, in order to effectively study how resumes are interpreted by a search committee, researchers should serve on a selection committee as a participant-observer to gain the most insight about the resume screening and candidate selection process.

Critical

With a close connection to sociocultural traditions, the critical tradition investigates how the byproducts of communication lead to power, oppression, and privilege within societies (Craig, 1999). While sociocultural looks at the group interactions from a neutral viewpoint, the critical tradition looks at the group interactions and attempts to classify the power structures that exist within the group. There are three keys to critical scholars: first, identify whose interests are served by power structures; second, uncover social conditions that are oppressive to any certain subsections within a given group; and third, activate theory as a mechanism to minimize or reverse the oppression.

With resume research, the lens of critical scholars would be applied to discover how the structure of the job search process and resume screening process may impact underprivileged classes. Federal laws prohibit discriminatory practices, and HR uses the terms *disparate treatment* and *disparate impact* that resume researchers can explore (SHRM, 2017). Disparate treatment is an intentional act of discrimination; for example, a hiring manager refuses to hire women for front-line positions, so the manager automatically disqualifies any candidates who appear to be female on the resume. Disparate impact is an unintentional act that discriminates and is generally an unintended consequence of an organizational rule or policy. Critical scholars would be able to identify disparate impact caused by rules or policies during the employee selection process. One example of disparate impact in organizational entry could be an employer requiring all applicants to take a test during the resume submission process that disproportionately eliminates a minority group from consideration, especially if the test does not relate to core job functions (Roberts, 2010).

Fern Johnson's (2000) language-centered perspective on culture offers six assumptions that can be applied to resume research. First, all communication occurs within cultural frameworks. This means that international applicants seeking positions in the United States would need to conform to the rules of U.S. resume writing. Second, all individuals possess tacit cultural knowledge that they use to communicate. This means that international students will have knowledge of resumes from their national origin that serves as a guide for how to write resumes in other cultures. Third, in multicultural societies, there is a dominant linguistic ideology that displaces or marginalizes other cultural groups. The marginalization of cultural groups during the candidate screening process is recognized in the United States, and the U.S. government attempts to ensure a fair process through the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), an entity to which an individual may appeal if he or she feels discriminated against in an employment-related decision as a result of his or her age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and religion (EEOC, n.d.). Fourth, members of marginalized groups possess knowledge about both their own culture and the dominant culture. This occurs with internationals seeking jobs in the United States; however, the depth and breadth of the knowledge of U.S. resume culture varies greatly. Fifth, cultural knowledge is both preserved and passed down and constantly changing. While the fifth principle does not tie in specifically to resumes, the process of obtaining work in other cultures is constantly changing; perhaps Internet sites such as LinkedIn will make the resume obsolete in one culture, but not another. Sixth, when cultures coexist, each culture influences and affects the other. This can be seen in the introduction of educational system information from one culture into the resume of another; for example, United States' Grade Point Averages (GPAs) are usually measured on a 4.0 scale, while French grades are measured out of 100.

As Craig (1999) notes, many theories of communication tend to privilege consensus over conflict and change, which makes the study of resumes under a critical lens particularly salient as resumes may represent a possible tool of oppression. Resumes are an example of institutions normalizing the organizational entry process. Job candidates must submit resumes, which are then screened for qualifications and other attributes by a resume screener in order to determine which candidate may join the organization. At the heart of critical studies, there are those with power, also called hegemony, and those without. In the case of organizational entry, resume screeners represent the hegemonic power because the screeners control the fate of the applicants.

The Frankfurt School, credited with the origin of critical theory, believes that society must be understood as a mix of three major interests: work, interaction, and power (Padula, 2009). Work is described as the efforts to create the material resources. Interaction is the cooperation necessary for survival. Power is the dominating force which

controls the decision-making process. During the job search, the organization as enacted through the selection committee has the hegemonic power, while the resume writer seeks the work. The interaction between the resume writers, who ultimately wish to work for an organization and produce material goods, and the organizations they wish to work for, is necessary to consider and explore at the micro- and macro-levels. While the individual resume writer/organization interaction occurs at the micro-level, it is through the systems of organizations throughout the world that all production occurs and society is maintained. Understanding the micro-level impacts of resume screeners' decisions has a ripple effect, as the macro-level system of production is based on millions of micro-level decisions made every year. Examining the resume screening process through the theories of the Frankfurt school could impact what is known about macro-level business systems, such as supply chain logistics, as the consequences of the micro-level hiring decisions based on resumes may impact the global supply chain. The culmination of multiple micro-level decisions by resume screeners on which candidates to interview may also help to explain a general lack of representation among protected classes within the macro-level U.S. workforce and inform research within the Diversity and Inclusion division of Human Resource Management.

Theory of Communicative Action, developed by Jürgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School, establishes principles for the use of language that can be researched within the resume genre (Stroud, 2009). In order for speech (written or oral) to be considered valid, three criteria must be achieved by the communicator: it must be truthful, sincere, and appropriate. Truth claims are argued with theoretical discourse, which requires evidence. An example for a resume writer would be to supply official transcripts if they claim a high GPA. Appropriateness claims should be argued with practical discourse, which emphasizes norms. For a resume writer, appropriateness could be demonstrated through the depiction of co-op or internship experiences that are directly related to the position they seek to fill. Sincerity is generally measured in direct action rather than discourse; therefore, it would be during the interview process that the resume writer can make the sincerity argument to validate resume content.

From a poststructuralist point of view in the critical tradition, resumes can be studied as a means of hegemonic oppression of certain groups. The goal of poststructuralists is to deconstruct language to demonstrate how language can be understood, used, and constructed in a limitless number of ways, and that, essentially, normalization of language creates oppression similar to the discussion on Fern Johnson's language-centered perspective on culture in the critical tradition (Dissanayake, 2009). From a poststructuralist standpoint, the hegemony, which in the United States is considered those of white ethnicity, have the ability to dictate what is proper grammar, syntax, and structure for resumes, and can use these rules to oppress those outside of the group (Tevis et al., 2022). For example, the hegemony can write the job descriptions and

decide which qualifications will be preferred, thus tailoring those job descriptions to in-group members and block others from applying. Additionally, the hegemony has control of syntax and spelling, so the hegemony can discriminate against minority groups who use different sentence structures. For the poststructuralist scholar, there are multiple research questions that could examine the role of resumes as a tool for hegemonic oppression.

Rhetorical

The final division of communication theory identified by Craig (1999), the rhetorical tradition, is also the oldest, as most scholars trace its roots back to Ancient Greece and Aristotle. The rhetorical process has three key elements: the rhetor, or speaker; the message; and the audience. In the case of resumes, the rhetor is the job seeker; the message is the qualifications, skills, and abilities as depicted in the resume; and the audience is the selection committee or hiring managers reading the resumes and screening candidates for organizational entry.

From the rhetorical tradition, Organizational Control Theory can inform research questions about resumes. Developed by Phillip Tompkins and George Cheney (1985), Organizational Control Theory posits that organizations use five mechanisms for control: simple, technical, bureaucratic, cultural, and concertive. Additionally, organizations assert four modes of discipline: unobtrusive, collaborative, social relations, and values. Finally, organizations create identity through communication interaction (Gossett, 2009).

Future resume research can explore whether a resume writer informed on the five mechanisms of organizational control could appeal to a selection committee by providing concrete examples of how they can comply within each level. Understanding simple control, direct open power and bureaucratic control, and following orders, can be operationalized for study on resumes through listing successful membership in other organizations, especially ones that may be well known, for an extended period of time. Several research questions can be explored at each level of control: Can an applicant who successfully served in the military, or even one who worked at McDonalds, successfully demonstrate interacting within a Weber-style bureaucracy with a formal chain-of-command system? Can a resume writer demonstrate understanding of technical control by including information about understanding of technology? Can the writer describe a willingness to undertake a 24/7 on-call work status through bullet statements describing previous positions held? Finally, can a resume writer demonstrate the ability to follow cultural values and common practice, as well as the ability to submit concertive control, through examples of interpersonal skills and teamwork, describing accomplishments achieved through working within a team environment? Studies can assess whether writing resumes that demonstrate a candidate's ability to comply with the mechanisms of organization control increase the candidate's ability to receive interview requests.

Resume writers may also allude to an understanding, and willingness, to submit to disciplinary control by organizations, a function that can be operationalized in future research. A bullet statement such as “stocked shelves during down times to ensure a professional work environment” could imply an understanding of unobtrusive control methods by demonstrating self-initiative. A resume writer may demonstrate collaborative discipline by including a bullet statement from a previous position such as “collaborated with management to develop team rules and procedures” and could even enhance it by adding an accomplishment such as “which increased overall efficiency by 20% over three months.” Demonstrating an understanding of social control may be accomplished through establishing the ability to work in a team environment. Finally, explicitly connecting to a previous organization’s values may establish connection to values controls for the prospective employer with statements such as, “assisted all clients in accordance with the <Company’s> ‘Golden Service Values.’”

Ultimately, according to Cheney and Tompkins (1987), organization members go through a process of identification, linking oneself with others. In keeping with this line of thought, future work can explore if resume writers would be wise to seek identification with their audience and if such identification can be accomplished when the resume screener becomes aware of his or her similarities with the writer. A rhetorical term to accomplish this connection is *enthymeme*, a device used to persuade through a combination of claims supported by facts that also connect to the values and opinions of the speaker (Conley, 1984, p. 169). By a resume writer utilizing rhetorical principles within the resume, it may be possible to reduce uncertainty within the resume screener by using specific terminology and listing accomplishments to create a clear sense of the writer’s skills and abilities. If the resume screener’s uncertainty about a candidate is reduced in a way that the resume screener has a favorable opinion of the resume writer, then, as speculated in Berger and Calabrese’s (1975) Uncertainty Reduction Theory from the sociopsychological tradition, resume writers may receive an interview invitation. If the theories can be operationalized in future research and results hold to what the theories predict, then the invitation to interview would be a direct result of the resume writer’s rhetorical skills, as the writer made an effective case for employment that persuaded the resume screener to believe the writer may be a fit for the position and worthy of an interview. Operationalizing the uncertainty construct could add a theory-based perspective into the resume genre.

Conclusion

While there is no lack of publications in the resume genre, there is a clearly identified lack of theory-based research and testing (DiMarco & Fasos, 2019; Risavy 2017). The communication discipline offers a solution to the call for theory-based resume research. To assist resume researchers

navigate the many diverse theories spanning many philosophical traditions, Craig (1999) offered a model that could bring some order to the chaos, organizing the field of communication into seven traditions: semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, critical, and rhetorical. Understanding how the field of communication is organized will also guide researchers to appropriate starting points for theory-based resume research questions.

For example, a scholar planning to conduct a case study of an applicant’s experience through the U.S. job search process that starts with submitting a resume to a job posting should begin the literature review with theories and methods from phenomenology, cybernetic, sociocultural, or critical traditions, selecting theories that focus on lived experiences and group interactions. Research conducted on an individual’s experience within a system would involve questions of lived experiences, networks, group interactions, and power structures. Conversely, if one wanted to measure the effect of the resume bullet statements on prompting action on the part of a resume screener in the form of extending an interview request, theories from the sociopsychological tradition would be appropriate because the question of resume screeners’ cognitions would examine the communication phenomenon at the individual level. Additionally, if one wanted to study the resume as a communication artifact, semiotic or rhetorical traditions would apply to the words on the page and inform why some resumes receive interview requests while others do not.

Craig’s (1999) metamodel provides a theoretical launch point for applied resume research that can inform and guide studies pertinent in other disciplines, as resumes are a crucial component of the organizational entry process and explored by scholars trained in management and organizational behavior. Resume researchers armed with an understanding of the philosophical roots of the communication discipline can offer new, theory-based perspectives into the body of knowledge for the resume genre. While some may view the resume as a simple document with a singular goal, to obtain an interview for the resume writer, a communication scholar can dissect many interactions within the resume genre, from the writing of the document itself to the screening process, and explore how the individual and societal contexts underlying the process may impact the decisions of resume screeners and the successes of the resume writers. Communication theories provide explanations to what is being observed in the resume literature; the time has come for theory-based resume research.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Diane Boehm, Kim Lacey, and Pradeep Sopory for their feedback on draft versions of this paper.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: The author received financial support to offset the APC fees from the West Virginia University Open Access Author Fund (OAAF).

Ethical Approval

No animals or humans participated in research associated with this paper.

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