



Universität
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Organizations as Networks of Communication: A Luhmann- Inspired Methodology

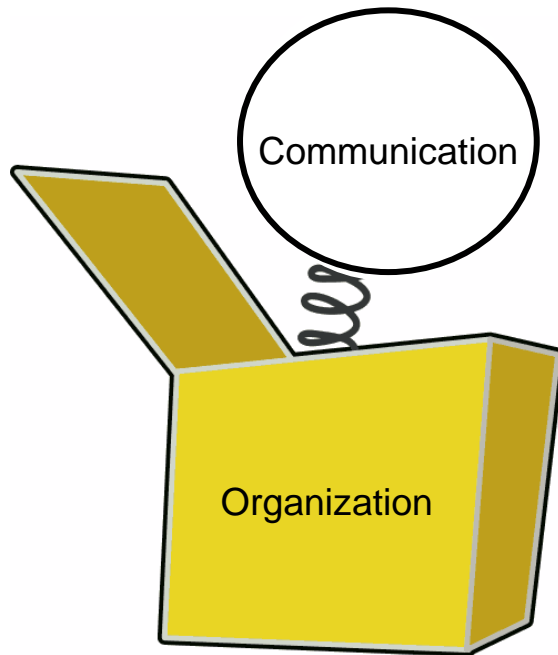
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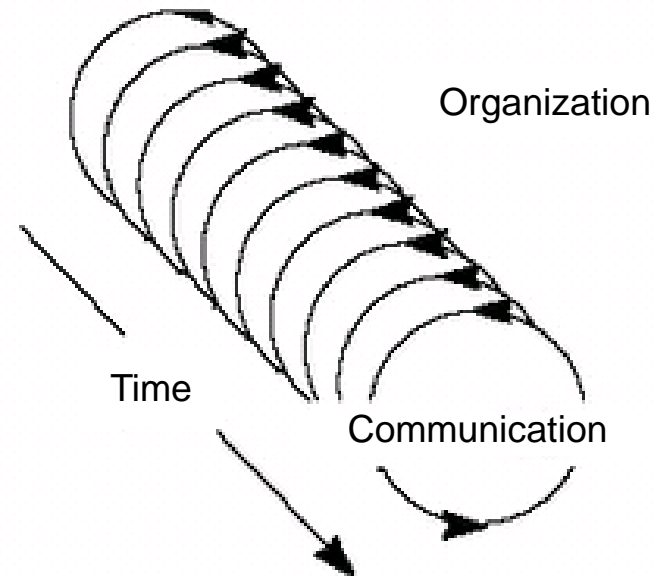
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Luhmann's theory of autopoietic social systems changes our view on organizations

Communication in/by organizations



Organization as communication



Luhmann's systems theory part of emergent view „communication constitutes organization“ (CCO)

Main schools of explicit CCO thinking (Cooren et al. 2011)

Montréal School

(e.g., Taylor, van
Every, Cooren,
Robichaud,
Giroux, etc.)

McPhee & colleagues

(e.g., McPhee,
Zaug, Iverson,
etc.)

„Luh Man Group“

(e.g., Luhmann,
Seidl, Schoene-
born, etc.)

**LUH
MAN
GROUP** 



Main assumptions of CCO view

- Constitutive character of communication for organizations
- Emergent character of organization out of communication
- Processual character of organization as communication



CCO studies empirically focused on local level, systems theory as chance for more holistic view

Central question within CCO thinking: How does interaction ,scale up‘ to organization (Cooren & Fairhurst 2008)?

CCO-based studies examine the emergence of organization on a local level, e.g., via conversation analyses

However, lack of holistic approaches that allow for examining organizations as holistic social entities

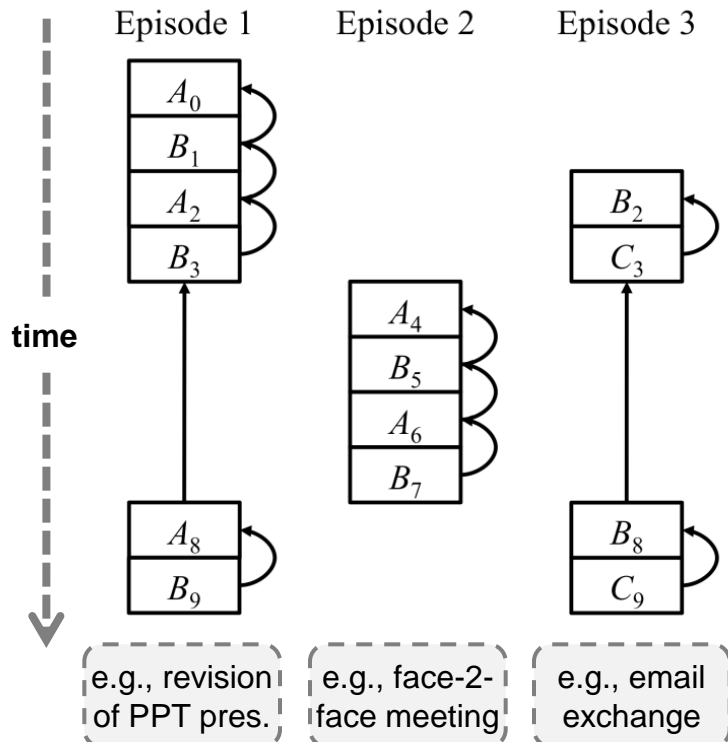


Luhmann’s social systems theory provides chance to study interactions, organizations, and society as distinct systems and their interrelations

Blaschke, Schoeneborn & Seidl (2010) suggest to turn to network analysis in order to make empirical use of this theoretical potential

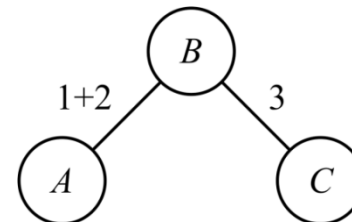
Methodological proposal: A communication-centered network approach to organizations

Unfolding & interlocking
communicative events

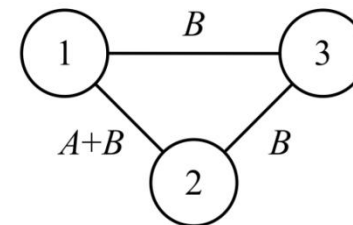


Networks of individuals versus
networks of communication

Individuals as vertices

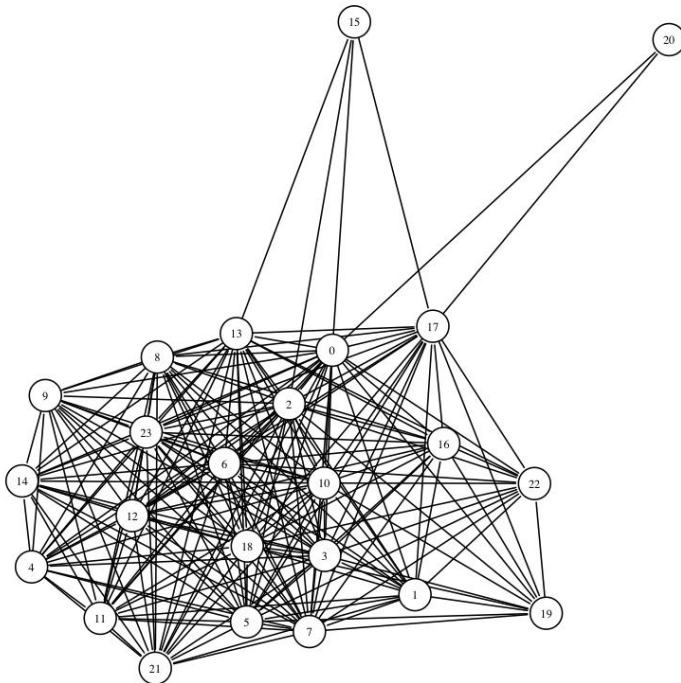


Communication episodes as vertices

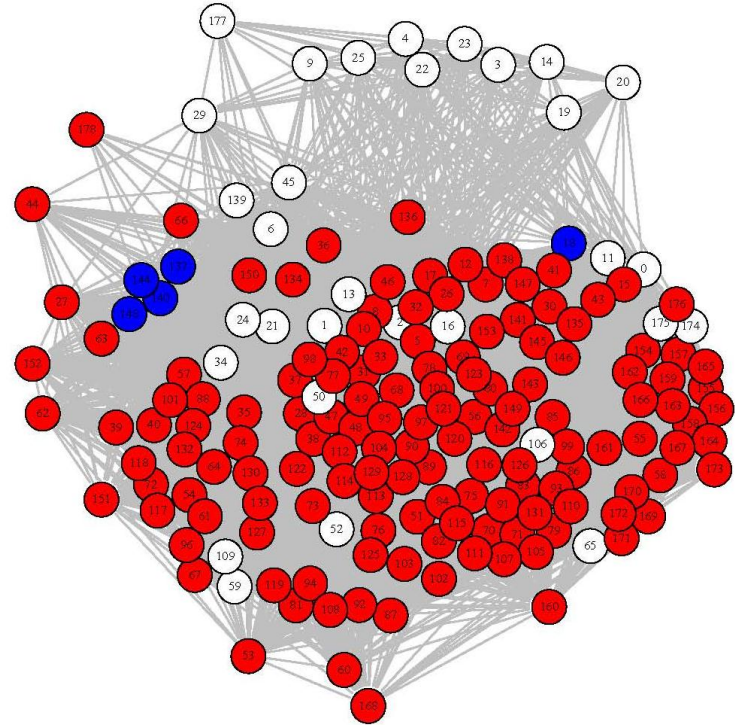


Methodological proposal turns conventional network view on organizations inside out

Network of individuals

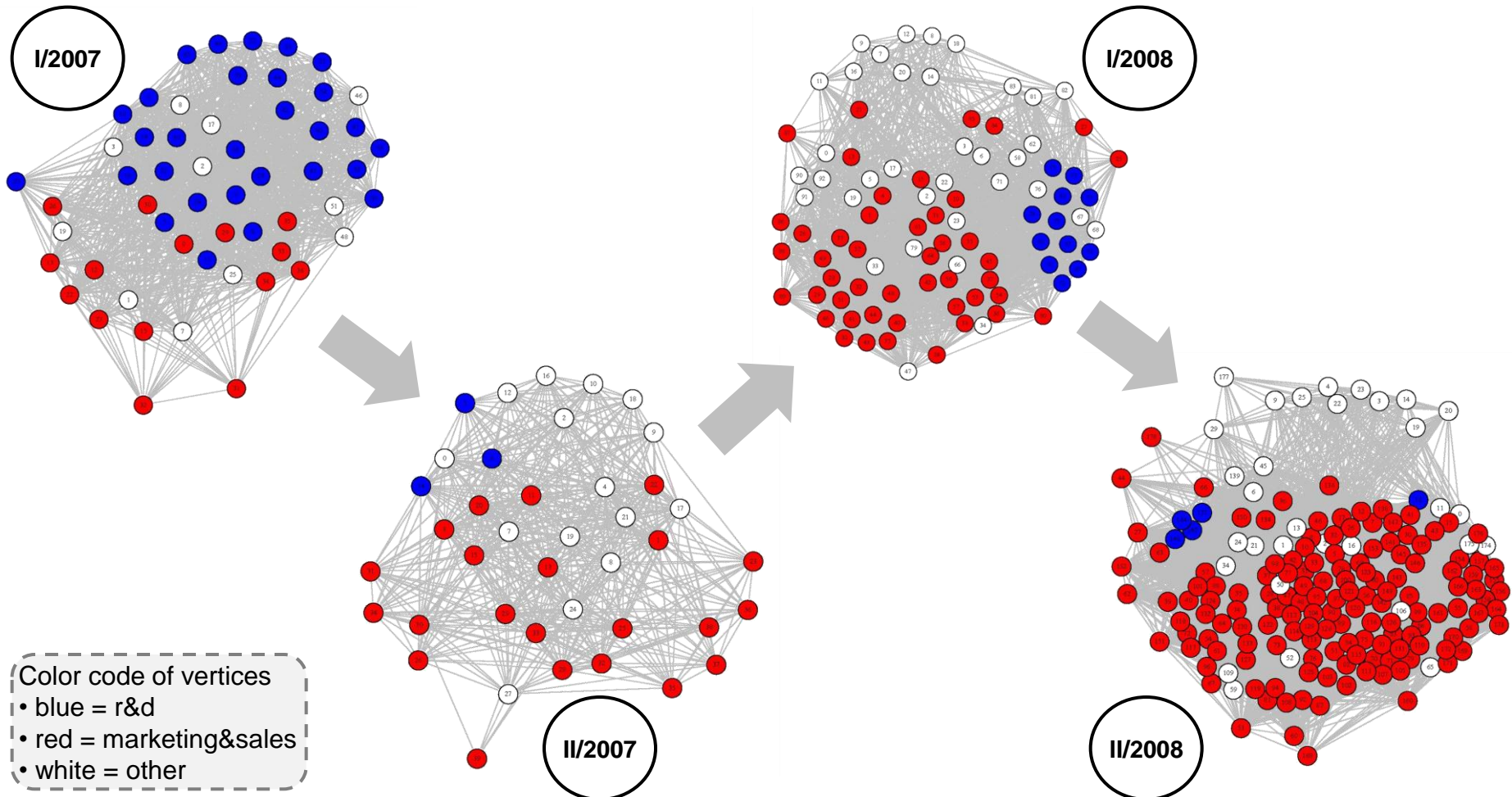


Network of communication

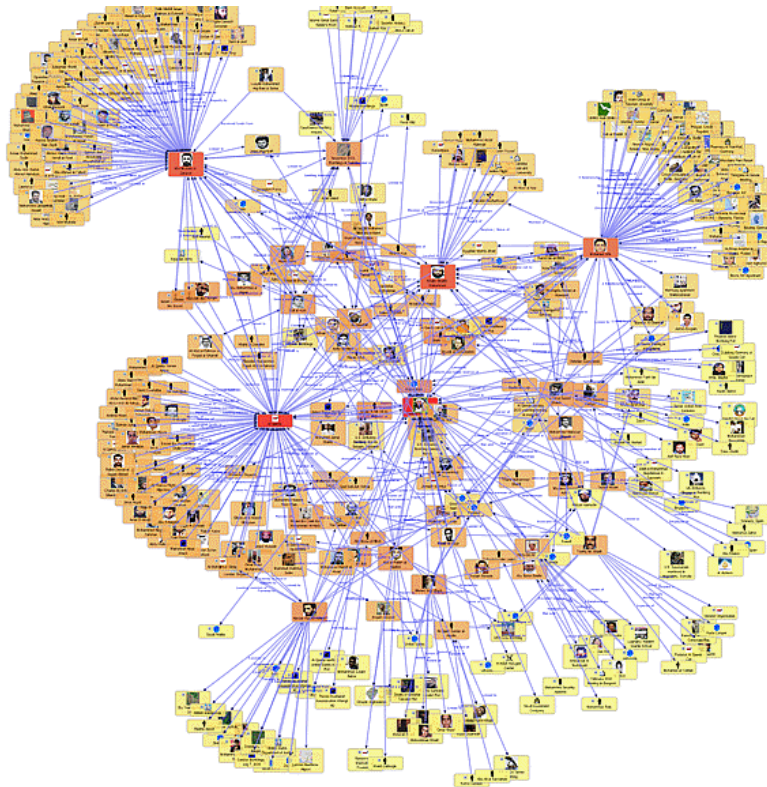




Network analysis reveals dynamic development of organizations as systems of communication



Potential application of methodology: Terrorist organizations as networks of communication





Conclusion: Empirical status of Luhmann's social systems theory remains debated

- Emergent CCO perspective as opportunity for Luhmann's systems theory:
 - Related tradition with strong(er) emphasis on empirical research
 - Chance to become more well known in the international realm
- Vice-versa, Luhmann's theory can provide CCO perspective with more holistic approach to organizations and new methodological inspiration
- However, empirical status of Luhmann's social systems theory remains debated: Consistent with underlying social-constructivist epistemology?



BACKUP



CCO puts forth social-constructivist view: Organizations are „talked into existence“

“When I imagine an organization I have in mind nothing more than an interlocking network of communication processes” (Taylor, 2003: 12)

“The communication activity *is* the organization”
(Weick, 1995: 75; own emphasis added)

“Organizations emerge and are able to reproduce themselves only when decisions are communicated” (Luhmann, 2000: 63; own translation)



Luhmann's theory of social systems contributes to key questions of CCO perspective

1. What makes communication *organizational*?
 - Communication of decisions, forming a self-referential network over time
2. How do organizations become stabilized over time?
 - Organizations as producers of „decision necessities“
 - Perpetuated need to deparadoxify the inherent contingency of decisions
3. What differentiates organizations from other social phenomena?
 - Self-referential decision communication maintains system boundary



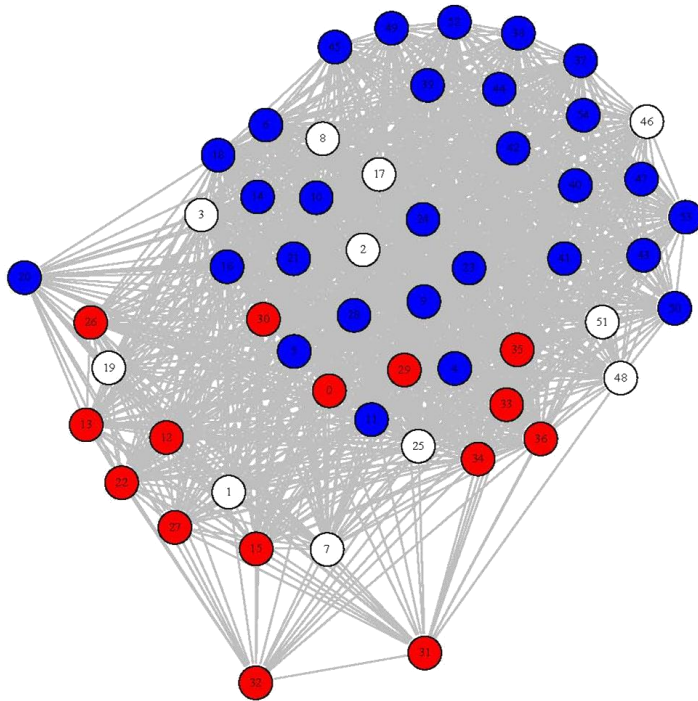
We propose to complement network views on organization & communication by CCO variant

	Networks of Individuals	Networks of Human and Non-Human Actors	Networks of Topics	Networks of Communication
Representation of Vertices	Individuals	Individuals and artifacts	Linguistic concepts in communication	Communication episodes
Representation of Edges	Communication; either implicitly or explicitly	Communication	Reported cognition of individuals	Participation of individuals in communication
Constitutive Character	Low (instrumental)	Moderate (constitutive-implicit)	Moderate (constitutive-implicit)	High (constitutive-explicit)
Emergent Character	Low	High	Moderate	High
Processual Character	Low	Low	Moderate to high	High
Representative Studies	Ahuja 2000; Ahuja & Carley 1999	Contractor & Monge 2002; Monge & Contractor 2003	Montgomery & Oliver 2007; Oliver & Montgomery 2005, 2008	

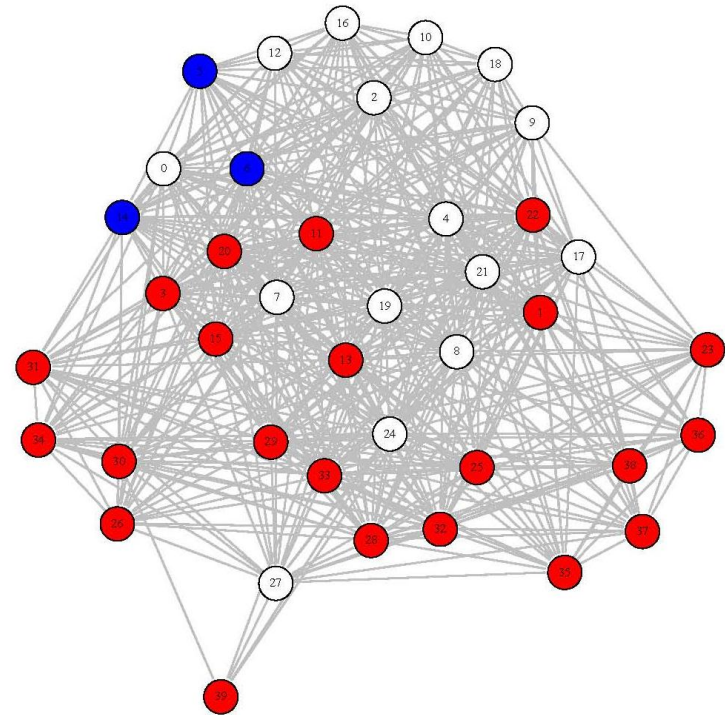


We can also study the emergence of the organization as network of communication over time (I)

I/2007

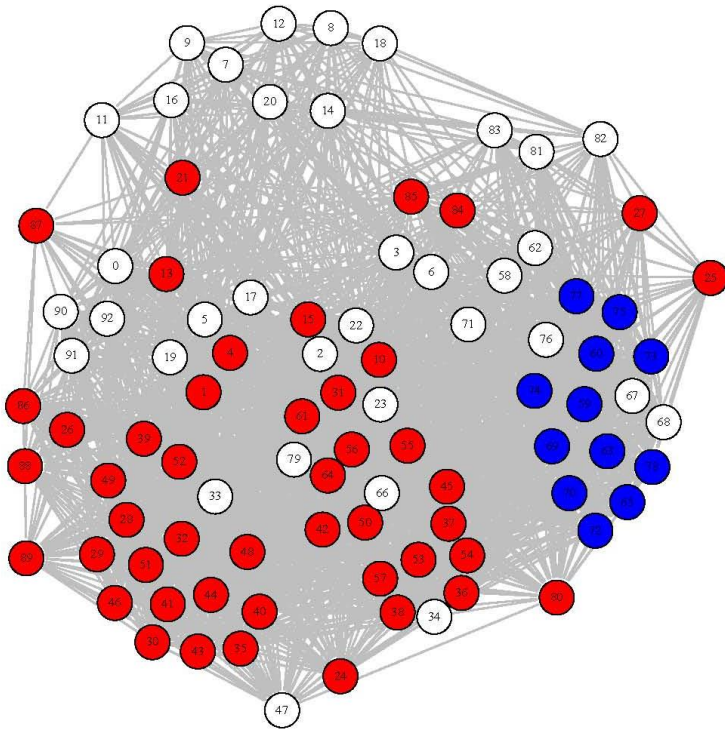


II/2007

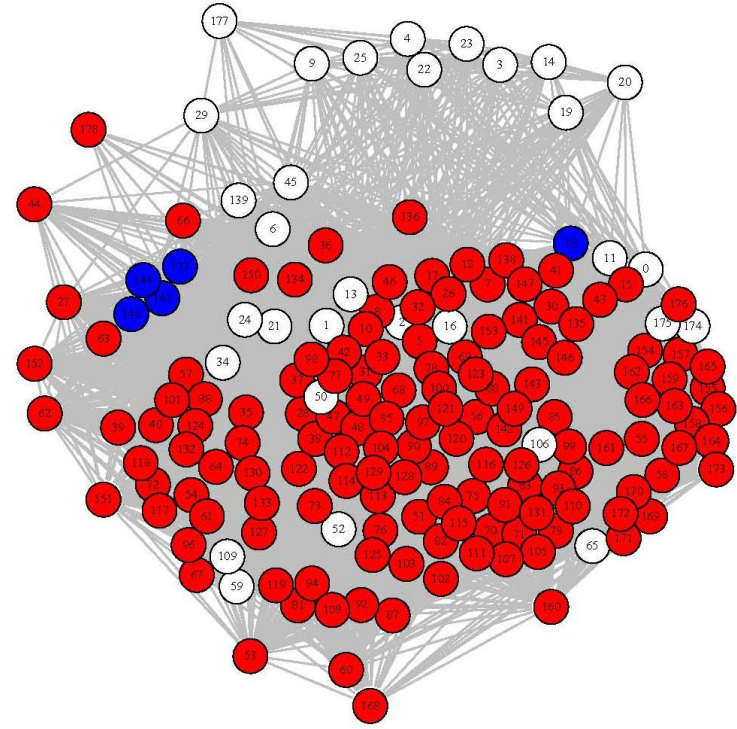


We can also study the emergence of the organization as network of communication over time (II)

I/2008



II/2008





CCO perspective has found resonance in journals from management and organization studies

Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R., & Cooren, F. (2009). Constitutional Amendments: “Materializing” Organizational Communication. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1-64.

Cooren, F., Kuhn, T. R., Cornelissen, J., & Clark, T. (in press). New Directions in Organizational Communication Research. *Organization Studies* (Special Issue).

Kuhn, T. R. (2008). A Communicative Theory of the Firm: Developing an Alternative Perspective on Intra-Organizational Power and Stakeholder Relationships. *Organization Studies*, 29(8–9), 1227-1254.

Robichaud, D., Giroux, H., & Taylor, J. R. (2004). The Metaconversation: The Recursive Property of Language as a Key to Organizing. *Academy of Management Review*, 29(4), 617-634.

Taylor, J. R., & Robichaud, D. (2004). Finding the Organization in the Communication: Discourse as Action and Sensemaking. *Organization*, 11(3), 395-413.

Organisationen als selbstverfertigende Systeme, die aus Entscheidungskommunikation bestehen

