Dissent is ubiquitous in organizations, manifesting itself through active and passive, destructive and constructive, informal and formal, and public and private actions. Despite the pervasiveness of dissent and society’s fascination with stories of whistleblowers, Kassing contends in his new book that dissent is often silenced, contested, and discouraged within organizations (Chapter 1). For Kassing, the value and need to understand dissent lies in the amount of control organizations exercise over individuals’ lives and identities; “as language communities, organizations function to position and constitute our existence as social actors in these places” (p. 23). In *Dissent in Organizations*, Kassing condenses existing dissent scholarship, from the communication and management fields, into a format that is beneficial to scholars, practitioners, and students alike. Through an exploration of the defining principles, practices, pop culture examples, and the lived experiences of organizational dissenters, Kassing is able to provide a comprehensive review of how dissent exists in organizations, is communicated, and serves as a source of personal and organizational struggle.

Kassing begins in Chapter 1, establishing the presence and importance of dissent in society through the recent whistleblowing stories of individuals such as Coleen Rowley, Cynthia Cooper, Sherron Watkins, and Sibel Edmonds. In each example, Kassing chronicles the events from the individuals’ initial discovery of faulty work practices, through the reporting of the issues to relevant parties, and to the eventual retaliation/response of the organization. Kassing ends the case studies with the story of the traitorous eight who, due to disagreements with the operations, vision, and management practices of Nobel Prize winner William Shockley, left Shockley labs and later developed the very successful Fairchild Semiconductor. Yet, Kassing argues that the use of “traitorous” demonstrates the paradoxical nature of dissent (p. 16). He proposes that organizational dissenters are “vilified by some and lionized by others” (p. 16) and hence merit further attention.

Regardless of society’s response to dissenters, Kassing alleges that dissent is “the antidote for conformity,” (p. 17) granting individuals the ability to speak for themselves, which leads into Kassing’s efforts to define organizational dissent. In Chapter 2, Kassing reviews and debunks several myths surrounding dissent. One myth is that “dissent involves conflict” (p. 28). He argues that dissent may involve conflict but that it is not a requirement for dissent because conflict requires interdependence between parties, whereas dissent does not. In addition, even though people may express dissent...
upward, individuals also may express dissent laterally to coworkers.

In defining dissent, Kassing carefully positions dissent among other management and communication practices; he argues that dissent overlaps with conflict and upward influence, is subsumed by employee resistance and employee voice, and subsumes whistleblowing. By articulating how these concepts overlap and encompass each other, Kassing provides a working definition of organizational dissent that allows scholars to discuss related concepts and “broaden or narrow the scope of what constitutes a given [dissent] behavior” (p. 29).

With dissent defined, Chapter 3 explores how dissent exists and operates underneath several paradigmatic perspectives in communication research. Kassing carefully reviews communication and dissent through the classical management, human relations, human resources, systems, cultural interpretive, critical, discursive, and identity perspectives. In each instance, he discusses the role of dissent that is promoted within each approach and provides a rationale for the existence or silencing of dissent. Even though Kassing provides examples of dissent from the lens of each approach, he offers minimal critiques of the different perspectives. Instead, Kassing concludes with the idea that “the act of dissent varies with regard to how people perceive it, what purpose it serves, and what changes or results it brings” (p. 74).

After discussing the various perspectives, Kassing demonstrates how perception influences the way individuals experience dissent and how scholars study dissent. Using the parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant, Kassing proposes a list of theories that may be applied to understand dissent that stems from decision making (situational factors), dissatisfaction (motivational factors), and sense making (explanatory factors) (pp. 75–85). When decisions are made, situational cultural factors, such as participative workplaces, may encourage dissent, whereas the presence of unobtrusive control may limit the expression of dissent. When decisions are made unjustly, some employees may be motivated to speak out against unfair practices (p. 82). Lastly, employees engaging in impression management use sense making to determine if they wish to dissent or remain silent (p. 82).

Chapter 4 marks a shift in the nature of the text. Kassing begins the chapter by reiterating the importance of dissent in combating conformity dangers and as “necessary to protect against both institutional and social forces” (p. 90). After discussing some of the material, political, and social constraints of dissent (p. 88), Kassing reviews five common barriers to expressing dissent: leadership, binary thinking, hierarchical structures, employee hesitance, and loyalty to the organization. Kassing then turns to discussing the situational factors that determine dissent, including the risk of retaliation, seriousness of the issue, and the likelihood the issue would be addressed. Then, using qualitative excerpts from employees’ dissent stories, Kassing reviews the various topics and triggers of dissent. Kassing ends the chapter with a brief discussion of dissent and ethics. Unfortunately, the ethical discussion is limited to discussing ethics of and surrounding the individual dissenter.
and does not take into account the ethics of the listener/manager and organization.

After providing employees’ dissent stories, Kassing shifts the focus of the text to reviewing organizational dissent models and typologies. Using Graham’s (1986) and his own model (Kassing, 1997), Kassing proposes a comprehensive typology of organizational dissent. Kassing argues that dissent starts with a “triggering agent” (p. 118) that exceeds the employee’s tolerance level, resulting in an expression of dissent. The employee must then choose a channel to express his/her dissent. These channels may be formal or informal, internal or external, and articulated upward or displaced laterally to fellow coworkers. For example, principled dissent, when employees recognize wrongdoing in the organization (pp. 117–118), can be expressed internally to managers through an open-door policy or use of human resources, or dissent may be expressed externally to the media or a regulatory organization. Lastly, he briefly reviews some of the organizational influences, organizational structures, and personal and relational influences that may inhibit the expression of dissent. Here the author acknowledges that most of the research “on organizational dissent has been conducted in traditional for-profit organizations” (p. 134); however, his efforts to provide examples of alternative organizing are limited to some democratic–participative organizations and churches. Finally, he acknowledges that computer-mediated communication has altered the ways employees view dissent including the development of “cyberdissidents” (p. 140) who, through the Internet, create public spaces and platforms for dissent.

Kassing concludes the text with an exploration of dissent strategies (Chapter 6) and methods managers and organizations can use to foster dissent (Chapter 7). Employees use various strategies to express dissent, including direct factual appeal, providing a solution presentation, circumventing the direct supervisor, threatening resignation, and repeating their dissent. Each strategy involves positive and negative consequences that Kassing helpfully discusses. Issues arise for managers when the dissent is not addressed and/or accumulates. Kassing concludes the text by presenting his suggestion of an optimal organizational dissent situation, one involving a moderate volume of dissent. When the optimal level is achieved, it suggests, “that an organization tolerates dissent at reasonable levels” (p. 181) and dissent is handled quickly and effectively.

Overall, Kassing accomplishes his goal of providing a comprehensive review of organizational dissent literature, although he misses key opportunities to critique and explore several issues further. Specifically, in Chapter 1 Kassing admits that the nature of dissent is paradoxical; however, this argument is not explored fully. Not unpacking the paradoxical nature of dissent is a missed opportunity to explore some of the contradictions inherent in dissent and the acceptance of dissent. Another missed opportunity lies in the limited discussion of alternative organizations. He admits, “dissent will occur whenever organizational structures exist that call for consensus and coordinated activity” (p. 134), but does not account for
differences in legitimacy and the governing bodies of nonprofit organizations. Is dissent handled differently in alternative organizing contexts? These are issues that get lost in the book’s focus on corporate examples.

In line with the other books in Polity Press’ new line *Key Themes in Organizational Communication*, Kassing creates a text that is well suited for courses in organizational communication, managerial communication, conflict, and ethics. The way Kassing structured the text moves the reader seamlessly through understanding dissent in relation to other concepts, to revealing paradigmatic and theoretical assumptions of dissent, to providing models and practical applications of engaging and managing dissent. Not only does he provide a comprehensive overview of organizational dissent through a discussion of key principles and practices, he does so in a manner that is engaging and informative. Kassing’s text is the perfect combination of theory and real life application. The reader is left with a clear understanding of the value and role of organizational dissent in modern organizations.

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**References**
