

RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Interview with Dr. Jean A. Saludadez of the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU)

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Dr. Jean A. Saludadez is a Professor of the Faculty of Management and Development Studies, who also serves as Affiliate Faculty Member of the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies (FICS) and of the Faculty of Education (FEEd). She is currently the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration of the UP Open University, a post she has held since 2013. She completed her degrees in Bachelor of Science and Master of Science in Development Communication at the University of the Philippines Los Baños and has obtained her Doctor of Philosophy in Organizational Communication from the Universiti Putra Malaysia. She has been expanding her scholarship along the Agency Framework and has been enriching the teaching of her classes with the research she has conducted and the papers/publications she has produced along the way.

Due to the COVID-19 restrictions, we had a Zoom meeting for the PCS Review interview to talk about her latest book chapter on Communication as Constitutive of Organization.

RICA: Congratulations! We heard that you have recently submitted a book chapter for publication on Communication as Constitutive of Organization (CCO). Can you give us a sneak peek into this?

JEAN: In the Organization Communication field, there are three schools of thoughts: (1) the Functional School of Organization Communication, (2) Interpretive Critical School of Organization Communication, and (3) Communication as Constitutive of Organization. So differences nitong tatlo is how these schools of thought view the relationship between organization and communication. That is, how does each school look at organization and at communication, and how are they related.

First, the Functional School looks at communication as information flow, as transmission of information. It looks at organization as a fixed entity like a container where information flows through. An example of this would be if you look at an organizational chart. It's something fixed. It's flat. It has a singular reality. You know that there is this President or this Chancellor and that structure is flat and fixed. That's how the Functional School looks at organization. Its relationship with communication is its functions. Kaya functional siya kasi it functions in terms of attaining a goal that was set by this organization. So the flow of communication is from top to bottom; or the focus of research is on transmission of information. Were the memos received? Did the President provide enough information for people to know? That's the kind of research within that Functional School, and that is one way of looking at it. It's a productive way of looking at communication. It's very important like when you assumed that someone received the memo, but that someone did not receive a memo.

So, from that Functional School—where was the Noise? What were the barriers to the transmission from the one who created the memo to the one to whom the memo is addressed? And the types of research questions there are in terms of the effectiveness of communication in the medium or channels that were used; the uncertainty; the information; the amount of information. Di ba information is the inverse of uncertainty.

Doon naman sa Interpretive Critical School, ang communication is an interpretive process. It's a process of creating meaning. Therefore, ang organization doon is produced in that process of interpretation and creation, when you create that meaning. What is UPOU to me? That is produced in the interpretative process. The organization is not fixed like in the Functional School. For the Interpretive Critical School, the organization is fluid. It is socially constructed. It is produced by the interpretation of people. So how do you interpret the University of

the Philippines (UP)? How I interpret UP would be different. The organization that is UP is multiple, not fixed. It will be based on your experience of it, as you experience that organization. That's the Interpretive Critical School.

It is very interesting because you are able to understand “what is the university to a faculty?,” “what is a university to students?” They differ. ‘Yun ang mga research questions that are asked. Or “what is the organization to the community?,” “what is the organization to the organizational members?,” “what is the organization?”

It's a question of “what is”—what is that meaning. And it assumes that meaning is always contested. There's no one meaning. There is a meaning that is dominant.

So in the agency framework, punta tayo sa Communication as Constitutive of Organization (CCO). So sa CCO naman, organization is a configuration of human and non-human agents.. Not just the teacher, not just the students, not just the lessons, not just the platform. It's just the configuration of human and non-human agents.

So, that's where I am, my scholarly positioning. I belong to the Montreal School of the CCO school. I look at digital media as an agent making a difference. Digital media is not a tool but an agent making a difference. Ang communication in the CCO constitutes the organization. So kung ang communication constitutes an organization, ang organization ay naco-configure in the communication as we talk now. I'm a human agent of the UPOU, you're a human agent of the Philippine Communication Society (PSC). ‘Yun ang nangyayari in that interaction: when you look at it, there are two organizations interacting at this point because I represent the UPOU, I represent my scholarly community, and that is what communication is. Communication is very material because in communication, we speak with words, with language, with symbols. And what I'm using now, my language, the symbols that I'm using, they all constitute organization.

Halimbawa ngayon nakikita mo ako, anong painting ang nakikita mo sa likod? Painting ni Ma'am Gigi [Alfonso] yan. This is for Open University of Kaohsiung and UP Open University Joint Project in 2011 to raise funds for faculty exchange. Para 'yung UPOU magkaroon ng fund for faculty exchange, gumawa siya ng 50 na paintings. Ang 25 napunta sa Kaohsiung, 25 napunta rito and then the proceeds became a fund for faculty exchange.

From the CCO perspective, Dr. Gigi Alfonso and I are the human agents, but there are non-human agents that participate in the understanding of what UPOU is.

This digression is to say that the organization is not just about the organizational chart. It is about your interpretation of what an organization is. And the organization is constituted in communication with the human and non-human agents. So I look at digital media not just as a tool. Kasi sa Functional, tinitignan lang siya as a channel. Dun naman sa Interpretive Critical, tinitignan ang digital media as how the user interprets it, like in the Social Shaping of Technology (SST). You know you have this SST, you have this theoretical perspective. How society, the users of technology like digital media, make sense of it. But for the Communication as Constitutive, the Montreal School, digital media is an agent participating in organizational reality. It makes a difference, like in what we are doing now—are we able to accomplish the task that Ma'am Gigi has asked the two of us to accomplish? The digital participates in it. It's a non-human agent that is making a difference; meaning, without Zoom we cannot come up with an article based on a question and answer.

That's how I look at digital media. It's an agent participating in an organizational reality, and it's not just in education. Of course, we are in UPOU and therefore the focus is on education, but it need not just be there. Even emotion is a non-human agent in creating that reality. Because we are focusing on digital media, you know the view now of digital media is from a passive tool to an agent making a difference.

RICA: Yes. You've mentioned that digital media, not just technology, is also active. After I read your writings, I realized that the content sparks interest in the person for meeting new knowledge or creating new knowledge or further study. So it's not passive. Pero meron din ba doong element na it becomes active based on the action of the person consuming that digital media? Kasi kahit na you view that media asset as active, if the person consuming it doesn't act on it, parang it will remain static.

JEAN: That is for the Social Shaping of Technology [to describe]. Even if digital media is not doing anything to the consumer, it is to be taken as an agent. My specialization is not in mass media but in org comm. But if I may transform 'yung sinabi mo into an organization context, magiging agent siya if it makes a difference. That question, I cannot answer it with a yes or a no. My answer there is, did it make a difference? If it makes a difference, then it becomes an agent.

RICA: So the mere fact that it added new knowledge is already an action in itself. Okay, yes. And then you also mentioned in your research the anti-agent role of digital media. Doon ako medyo nalito. Ano 'yun? How can it act back and refuse to be mobilized?

JEAN: Yes, it happens. Pag naputol tayo ngayon sa Zoom, then it becomes an anti-agent. So hindi na natin ma-accomplish and task na pinagawa sa atin.

RICA: Kasi na-cut 'yung communication. Ganon?

JEAN: Yes, because sa halip na nag-make siya ng difference in terms of accomplishing the task na pinapagawa, nag-act back siya. It acts against the accomplishment of the task. Nagiging anti-agent siya.

RICA: Wow, okay. So kasama pa rin ba sa organizational communication 'yung choosing what kind of technology is used for Learning Management Systems?

JEAN: From the CCO point of view, that decision in itself is participating in the creation of that reality. For instance, nag-decide tayo na Zoom, hindi Google Meet, hindi Hangout. In that regard, Zoom is participating in this reality. So that decision and the technology together accomplished the task for this *PCS Review* interview. So nandoon 'yung decision, kaya nga it's a configuration. Hindi siya naka-focus lang on one element. Configuration 'yung human and non-human agents. It is so fluid like in the Interpretive Critical School, but at the same time there's a fixed dimension to it. Si Dr. James Taylor, he's my mentor from the Montreal School. Although I did not graduate from the University of Montreal, in my dissertation I used the CCO, and that's how I got to know him personally. Kasi I did my PhD in Universiti Putra Malaysia where I had encountered his book, *Rethinking the Theory of Organization Communication* and that's the beginning of our scholarly relationship. That time, email already made a difference because I was able to reach him in Montreal while I was in Malaysia. That is a picture of a reality that is not just fixed, that is not just fluid. Sabi ni Dr. Taylor, it is crystal and smoke. An organization is metaphorically a crystal—there's something fixed kasi di mo naman mababago na. For instance, si Ma'am Gigi ang nag-command sa atin na former Chancellor. That's fixed, right?] However, there's something fluid there too. So it's both crystal and smoke. It's how Dr. Taylor explained what an organization is. What is fixed is the law. For instance, the appointments are fixed for a certain period. But it is smoke is when you perform it, when you perform your role. You plan it this way, it turns out this way. So it becomes a negotiated reality. It is performative.

RICA: Aside from Dr. James Taylor, who would you consider to be your influences in your scholarship positioning?

JEAN: I'm also very much influenced by François Cooren, also from the University of Montreal, who labeled the non-human agency in the accomplishment of organization. So it's not just human agents but

also 'yung non-human agents that are very important. And that's where my scholarship on digital media is now, looking at a non-human agent. In terms of accomplishing certain things like "how is distance education possible," for instance, digital media makes it possible. Digital media made a difference, is making a difference, especially now during COVID-19. Now that we have a semblance of normality, what happened in the past, we continue to do now. Of course, not in the same way because we are now mediated by Zoom. But you see, that's how it made a difference.

RICA: Do you think it will still continue even after the pandemic? I don't think it will go back to the original na face-to-face way of doing things. Parang from this experience, I think we will pick up the good skills and the good things about learning with technology, and using technology forward. We cannot just go back. We have to go forward.

JEAN: Yes, that is something that is naging material. Something becomes an agent, and it makes a difference when it is material. Zoom now is material in the future, something that matters. It will matter in education. Not Zoom but digital media will matter in education and all. Even in governance, in health. Ako nga nagkaroon ng possible side effect ng Pfizer [vaccine] so I had an allergy. Although initially, sabi ng derma ko, "No, no it's not an effect." But you know, I didn't want to go to the hospital when there's this online consultation. So piniktyuran ko 'to and then in our Messenger call I showed it to the derma. After the first dose nag-appear na [ang allergy] pero we thought na it's not that. Tapos nawala siya. Nung nag-second dose ako nag-reappear siya, so I know nagka-allergic reaction ako. So very material ngayon ang Messenger (or other online platforms or apps) because of the need for it in online consultation. So it's making a difference. Without communication as the lens, it's difficult to surface that.

As communication scholars, we can contribute something to the intellectual discourse. We are able to show a reality that cannot be seen by other studies, because disciplines look at reality differently. We look at reality differently. Communication scholars look at reality differently, and all of those disciplines have a unique contribution to understanding, to knowledge, to knowledge creation. So ako ine-enjoy ko 'yun kasi I have something to say. Like digital media, tinitignan lang siya maybe as technology or information system. Pero I don't look at it like that. I look at it as an agent making a difference.

So communication, nandoon 'yung confidence. Mga estudyante ko, nagugulat sila kasi we need to have this confidence. We are in the communication discipline, communication field. There is an aspect

of reality that we are able to surface and show. We can provide an explanation that is different from other explanations.

RICA: Why do you think this level of confidence is necessary? You mentioned the concept of authority, wherein it's not just the position but also a communicative action from the Montreal School of Organizational Communication.

JEAN: Actually, the Montreal School focuses on authority and what it is. 'Yun na nga, why did I bring up Dr. Taylor? Why did I bring up Cooren? So that credibility would be enhanced. It isn't just anything that happens in my mind. There is this scholarly community that I belong to, and in it we, together, produce studies. So it's not just me na solipsistic ba itong si Jean, kung anu-ano lang naisip. It's not just an imagination in my mind. This is a scholarly community that we're producing, a knowledge that we would contribute. It's not making it superior over others. No, it's another way of looking at things. When you look at things from the Agency Framework, communication becomes authoritative because I bring with me the scholarly community. And I bring it with me so that you can say that there's this scholarly activity that I am part of. Hindi 'yung parang ako lang nag-imagine, no. Nothing is original. We learn from others, I learned from my dissertation. I have this theoretical pursuit. Okay ang story na 'to.

RICA: Can you tell us how your theoretical pursuit started?

JEAN: When you get older daw, you become historical. You tell a lot of stories. And when I graduated with a Master's [degree], my mind was set on doing my Doctoral because I have this theoretical pursuit. As a Christian, I believe that the universe was created through the power of God's word. Then nakita ko na the communication I knew was passive. Transmission of information. Pero sabi sa Bible, the world is created through the power of God's word. There are two ways of looking at communication: communication as passive, which is not untrue. It's true also, it's a valid way of looking at it. Pero at the back of my head meron akong gustong i-pursue: I wanted to understand in what way communication is an active principle.

And that's how I did a study on the emergence of temporary organization in stories, or in narratives. So, Narrative Structure, makikita doon 'yung organization. Ang inaral ko kasi ay 'yung research collaboration network and in what way a research collaboration emerges. So I had a three-country study—I travelled to Thailand, I was in Malaysia, and here in the Philippines. I focused on one research community, the forest research community, and I listened to their

stories. This is the communication of it, when you articulate what happened in a particular collaborative work. So the organization that is the forest research network, nag-emerge 'yun in the narratives of the researchers. There were two narratives, the partner story, and the not-partner story. So 'yung partner story, the collaboration flourishes. The not-partner story, ito 'yung collaboration that does not flourish. Hindi na sila nagco-collaborate. So when you have this theoretical pursuit, you want to provide an explanation. So each explanation is valid in its own way. Iba-iba.

The Functional School, kino-consider ko is very important. The Interpretive Critical School is very important. The CCO is very important. All these we teach our students in the Doctoral Program, Doctor of Communication. The agency I'm trying to explain is why and how Distance Education is possible. Kasi 'di ba you mentioned about authority, and then 'di ba you mentioned about Correspondence Schools, na kung hindi pa sa COVID-19 hindi pa magkakaroon niyan. COVID-19 is a non-human agent that participates in the creation of digital media and distance education. Then people suddenly recognize it. But there should be an explanation of how and why education is possible at a distance. So through the Agency Framework, pinapakita ko in the interaction, in the Learning Management System, how education is possible. So 'yung archived recordings ng discussion, the discussion in the discussion fora in our Learning Management System is through that interaction. Pinapakita ko doon ano 'yung human and non-human agents and how they are configured to accomplish distance education. So, distance education is possible with these human and non-human agents.

RICA: Yes, everybody is experiencing digital media and distance education now, right? Before, when we started flexible learning, parang marami nagre-resist kasi sabi it's not as good as face-to-face learning. But now they are one year and a half into it, the students are learning, right? Well, first we have to teach the teachers how to teach through digital media and distance education properly. Kasi magkaiba talaga ang skills from the face-to-face instruction, eh.

JEAN: Yes, and you mentioned authority. So dun sa mga studies natin paano nakikita 'yung authority. The philosophy of distance education is that it is Constructivist, ano? Nakikita 'yun in the execution in the classroom na Constructivist ka. Sabi mo teachers need training. You know in a mediated education, dapat Constructivist 'yung view that education is a non-human agent. Kasi kung ang philosophy mo ay para ring rote learning, feed ka lang nang feed ng information na mare-receive ng estudyante. It's already flat. Nandoon na 'yung flatness of the screen. You see the teacher, the teacher's presence is there. So the

authority is not just the teacher; the philosophy of education is also an authority. And it's not just any LMS. It should be the UPOU LMS. Not Facebook, not any other apps. So the other faculty [members] may have a different view, but my view is that interaction should happen in my classroom, in the modal classroom. That is authority. Napapalabas din na authority is what makes education possible.

RICA: And they recognize your authority. They accept your authority.

JEAN: I mean for instance, if the student posts their assignment in Facebook pero wala naman akong Facebook. But I have Messenger. I was forced to have it kasi when we visited my cousins sa U.S. puro Messenger sila and hindi kami makapag-communicate so kailangan ko ng Messenger. So I created [an account] and I found out na it makes a difference kasi we can accomplish many things. Mawala man ako, mahahanap nila ako. Kasi with Messenger, I can send them a message that I got lost at matatanggap nila. It's something na hindi bifurcated or separated from your individual or personal life. Nandoon 'yung professional and the personal, hindi siya parang the sacred and the secular. Hindi naman siya ganoon.

RICA: You mentioned that in Constructivism, knowledge creation is through sharing. And then in your article you talked about Cognitism, where knowledge acquisition is through transfer. How can you convince more professors to share their class lectures and PowerPoint openly in digital spaces?

JEAN: Yes, that's an advocacy of UPOU, to have open education resources, but that is voluntary. Coming from the Rhetorical Tradition of Communication Theory, I believe na we do it by what we do. The art of discourse. I mean we convince not by our words but by our practice. UPOU is an example of a university that shares. They can just look at us, so we don't have to say it. I don't have to convince them. Of course, may mga complaints. Some students would have complaints. But I believe that we are able to participate in the building of the lives of our students.

RICA: Okay. Babalikan ko lang 'yung concept of authority. Can you translate the concept of authority in digital learning and teaching in the reimagining of communication and education, like when authoring an account as creator or originator of thought or idea?

JEAN: I'll share with you the study that I made when I was sent on a faculty exchange almost nine years ago. I collected data from three Open Universities: the one in Taiwan, in Malaysia, and UPOU. I collected archived recordings of teachers-students interaction. In one of these three universities, there was a student-teacher exchange. Nagtanong

ang estudyante, “Teacher, how can I get the answer to a question?” Sabi ni teacher, “Okay, you ask those questions at the tutorial page.” A tutorial page is digital media. So what is the teacher doing there? The tutorial page is the authority. That’s the authorized digital space. Not just in any digital space, not in Facebook, not in Messenger. You go to the tutorial page, I will be there. I’ll answer your questions there. That’s the authority. The authority of the teacher surfaces with the agency of the digital media that is the tutorial page. Dun na lang tayo sa tutorial page. ‘Yung email, tayong dalawa lang ang nagkikita dito. Be in that tutorial page, that’s our classroom. Go there.

RICA: So other students, if they have similar questions, can also learn from it, right?

JEAN: That’s Constructivism and Collaborative Learning, kasi you also learn from what others are asking. But beyond that is a clear question of authority di ba? Hine-herd ni teacher to a digital classroom. Because magka-klase ka lang ba sa ilalim ng puno kung nagustuhan mo lang mag-klase? Hindi. Pupunta ka sa classroom mo na residential classroom. Papasok ka sa Humanities I. Nandoon ka sa labas? Pumasok ka sa loob. Kasi si teacher at saka ‘yung mga kaklase mo nandoon sa loob. That’s authority, the authority of the material. Hindi ka basta makapagturo anywhere or sabihin mo lang, “Hindi, ayoko nga. Gusto ko si teacher pumunta dito sa akin sa labas.” Aba, mag-isa ka. Pumasok ka doon. Meaning, ‘yung authority ng teacher, nagagawa niya because they are in the classroom.

If I may share, so this a book published not less than a year, *Authority and Power in Social Interaction: Methods and Analysis*. This is published by Routledge. Pero ang mga authors dito, you know Klaus Krippendorff, right? So he is one of the chapter authors. I’m one of the chapter authors here. Klaus Krippendorff is not my co-author, and this is six chapters. This is a look at authority not by position, people, or person, but authority in communication. Authority is something that is emergent and negotiated. Ang sinabi dito ni Alena L. Vasilyeva, one of my co-chapter authors, she quoted from Chantal Benoit-Barné that authority is accomplished through presentification, that is, by making sources of authority present in interaction. Like what I’m doing now. Bringing with me the Montreal School, the CCO, this book, just to say that I know about authority. It is material agency to say that I have scholarship on the authority aspect. But from the communication lens, [we can say that] we made it present. Because when we don’t make it present, it’s not an authority anymore. But there may be absent authority. Yan nga ‘yung scholarship namin ngayon, the absent authority.

The PCS Review 2020

RICA: Wow! Very interesting naman. Absent authority.

JEAN: Absent siya, hindi mo siya sinabi but it's there.

RICA: Yes. Parang si God, no constant presence but with constant authority. I don't want to take more of your time. It's been an hour of pleasant, engaged conversation.

Dr. Jean, most of the people who will read this are communication educators. What would you tell our communication educators about agency and this perspective from CCO?

JEAN: I am a person who would not persuade, because I believe in equality and there's no monopoly of knowledge. Wherever they are, they cultivate their scholarship. If you are in the Organization Communication discipline, if you are in the Functional, cultivate it; in the Interpretive, cultivate it; if you are in the CCO, cultivate it. That's what CCO is. You have to cultivate where you are. Ito 'yung field mo, cultivate it. Ito 'yung scholarship mo, continue to share it. So that's what I would like to say. If they are interested, of course I would be very much pleased to share it. But not to persuade them to use it. [Instead,] I would like to encourage them to try it. We at the communication discipline, we have something to contribute always in knowledge creation. Let's have confidence in that.

RICA: Wow! Ang ganda. Thank you very much, Dr. Jean Saludadez. Winner! Very inspiring.

JEAN: Okay, bye. Ingat! God bless.

ABOUT THE INTERVIEWER

Maria Angelica “Rica” D. Abad is the Assistant Secretary for the Philippines Communication Society. She currently serves as the Assistant Vice President for Public Affairs and Director for the Office of Alumni Relations with the University of the Philippines System. She is also a faculty member of the UP Diliman Extension Program in Pampanga (UPDEPP) teaching General Education Courses such as *Speech 30- Public Speaking and Persuasion*, and *English 13 Writing as Thinking*. She is a Trustee of the UP College of Mass Communication Foundation, Inc., and was its immediate past Executive Director. She currently serves as the Board Secretary of the UP College of Mass Communication Alumni Association in UP Diliman, a post she has filled since 2014.

She has received her BA Communication degree major in Broadcast Communication minor in Advertising & Public Relations from U.P. Diliman in 1992, and her MS Television and Radio Management and Programming from Brooklyn College-City University of New York in 1995.