COORDINATION AS ENERGY-IN-CONVERSATION

RYAN W. QUINN
Washington University in St. Louis

JANE E. DUTTON
University of Michigan Business School

Coordination is the process people use to create, adapt, and re-create organizations. We propose a theory of coordination as energy-in-conversation to help organizational scholars comprehend the emotional and motivational dynamics of coordination. Our model describes how people generate and diminish their energy in their attempts to coordinate, how this energy affects attempts to coordinate, and how coordinating affects the effort devoted to the activities in the process. This account of the coordination process presents a new approach for understanding performance in interdependent situations.

Organizations are recurring achievements of human coordination (Barnard, 1968), which makes coordination one of the central problems of organizational research (Follett, 1949; Heath & Staudenmayer, 2000; March & Simon, 1958; Thompson, 1967). Coordination is the process through which people arrange actions in ways that they believe\(^1\) will enable them to accomplish their goals (Cannon-Bowers, Tannenbaum, Salas, & Volpe, 1995; Weick, 1979)—goals being "ideas of future, desired, end states" that may or may not be conscious (Locke & Latham, 1990: 2) and that may or may not be shared (Weick, 1979). Coordination is often a conversational experience (Boden, 1994), where conversations are verbal and/or written interchanges that occur between two or more people (Capella & Street, 1985; Ford & Ford, 1995). Because coordination involves arranging activities in ways that enable goal accomplishment, it is also an emotional experience (see Frijda, 1988), which can oscillate between energizing and deenergizing.

We propose that the energy that people generate and deplete as they coordinate affects both how conversations unfold and the effort that people devote to coordinated activities.

Energy—or energetic arousal (Thayer, 1989)—is the feeling that one is eager to act and capable of acting. It is a construct that organizational scholars use but seldom define. Energy is an affective experience similar to Watson, Clark, and Tellegen’s (1988) “positive affect.” Affect is an umbrella term that includes emotions, moods, and dispositions. Energy is a type of positive affective arousal, which people can experience as emotion—short responses to specific events—or mood—longer-lasting affective states that need not be responses to specific events. A person’s level of energetic arousal can change in response to each conversational event (emotion), but a person can also experience a relatively consistent level of energy

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\(^1\) Our definition of coordination may seem odd to some readers because of our use of the phrase “that they believe will,” which may make it seem like the definition is about the expectation of coordination rather than the realization of coordination. This is not the case. Coordination is a process of arranging activities. When people complete this process, the activities are arranged—not expected to be arranged. However, even though the arrangement of activities is complete, this completion does not mean that the people who arranged the activities will necessarily achieve their goals or perform well. For example, Heath and Staudenmayer (2000) provide a number of examples of cases in which people arrange their activities but do so poorly and, thus, perform poorly. Therefore, people try to arrange activities in ways that will enable them to accomplish their goals, but they do not always accomplish them—even though they complete the arranging of their activities.
throughout a conversation (mood). Energy is also distinct from negative affect (Watson et al., 1998) or tension (Thayer, 1989), which is a type of affective arousal that involves a negative feeling of wariness or anxiety.

We focus on energy because it is a pivotal experience in the coordination process (Collins, 1981). The energy that people feel in the ebb and flow of coordination provides cues that affect how conversations unfold (Burgoon, 1994). In addition, energy “is the common denominator deciding the attractiveness of various alternatives, as well as a predictor of whether an individual will actually attain any of them” (Collins, 1981: 1005). In other words, energy has motivational effects: it affects the direction a person chooses to act in, because positive feelings indicate the attractiveness of alternatives, and the effort a person invests, because people tend to invest as much effort into activities as they feel they have energy to invest (Marks, 1977).

We describe how the energy that people generate and deplete in their efforts to coordinate affects both how conversations unfold and the effort that people devote to coordinated activities—a model of coordination as energy-in-conversation. There is some precedent for this model. For example, researchers recognize that affect plays a role in conversation (e.g., Capella & Street, 1985), communication scholars argue that communication is coordination (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999), and social psychologists explore the role that affect plays in the coordination process (Keltner & Kring, 1998). Despite these developments, organization scholars have not explored these research areas. While they recognize the importance of affect in organizations (e.g., Fineman, 1993a, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; Mumby & Putnam, 1992), we know of no researchers who have examined the interplay of affect and conversation in the coordination process.

Organizational scholars note this omission. Hatch argues that affective experiences are “the biggest empty space in our prior conceptualizations of organizing” (1999: 88), and Fineman argues that “strictly cognitive categories are insufficient” for understanding organizing processes (1993b: 30). We enrich our theories of coordination by describing affective arousal in conversation to illuminate how it affects motivation. Coordination and motivation are processes that were once studied together (e.g., Barnard, 1968; March & Simon, 1958) but have since been estranged (Heath & Staudenmayer, 2000). By re-integrating these processes, we illuminate how the simultaneous arrangement of activities and modulation of affective arousal work together to enhance or detract from the direction taken in arranging activities, the effort people put into activities, and the accomplishment of participants’ goals.

There are practical reasons for studying coordination as a process that involves affective arousal. Increased information volume and technological complexity, expanded employee autonomy, and more mergers, acquisitions, and layoffs put increased demands on people in organizations to coordinate activities. These demands can deplete people’s energy. Given that energy is an indicator of how positive a person’s current subjective experience and well-being are (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Thayer, 1989), as well as how much effort someone might expend (Marks, 1977), a theory of coordination as energy-in-conversation reveals insights on how to make coordination a positive experience, as well as an opportunity to improve performance.

The foundation of our model of coordination as energy-in-conversation is François Cooren’s (2000) book, The Organizing Property of Communication. Here, Cooren, following precedents in communications research (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999), presents a theory of communication as coordination by integrating research on speech acts and on narratives. We rely on Cooren’s theory for three reasons. First, his idea that narratives are embedded in other narratives provides a useful structure for examining both the context and the text of conversations (see Fairclough, 1992), revealing how and why coordination is accomplished. Second, Cooren accounts for two characteristics of communication that are necessary to explain coordination: the sequential nature of coordination and the transsituational nature of texts (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999). Third, Cooren’s theory achieves a delicate balance between subjectivism and objectivism; he acknowledges that individuals interpret2 communication.

2 Although some cognitive interpretation of conversational texts involves conscious (i.e., controlled) cognitive processing, we follow Bargh and Chartrand (1999) in arguing that much of the cognitive processing involved with interpretation is unconscious (i.e., automatic) and that, in conversation, interpretation often occurs as a person speaks.
nicative texts independently but also argues that, once created, texts exist and can be referred to again in subsequent situations, constraining some actions and enabling others. This idea explains how people re-create organizations each day and how organizations act as independent entities (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999).

By using Cooren’s (2000) theory as a new lens through which to view coordination in organization studies, and then introducing energy—including energy “texts”—into his theory, we describe how affective experiences such as energy can affect immediate conversations, as well as the arrangement and execution of organizational activities. This also explains how energy can be both a part of the conversation itself (one type of text) and an individual, subjective experience.

We develop our model first by reviewing the literature on coordination and by describing Cooren’s (2000) theory. We use a conversation between two people in a software company to illustrate the elements of his theory as we introduce each concept. Next, we introduce energy into our model and use the same software development conversation as a way to illustrate the value of an energy-in-conversation lens. We conclude by summarizing our model, discussing the affective nature of coordination, and integrating our model with performance-based research.

COORDINATION AND CONVERSATION

Coordination takes place in conversations (e.g., Boden, 1994). The way conversations unfold and the effort that people invest in coordinated activities depend, in part, on the energy people generate or deplete as they converse. However, to understand the role that energy plays, we must first understand how conversations coordinate.

Coordination and Communication: A Review

A common way of studying coordination is by studying performance in interdependent situations. Researchers either assume coordination occurs because people complete interdependent tasks (e.g., Saavedra, Earley, & Van Dyne, 1993; Wageman, 1995), or they measure coordination with one or a few variables (e.g., O’Reilly & Roberts, 1977; Van de Ven, Delbecq, & Koenig, 1976). Coordination is often measured as a dimension of communication. For example, scholars use the amount of communication (Van de Ven et al., 1976), its frequency (Argote, 1982), its accuracy (O’Reilly & Roberts, 1977), or its timeliness (Waller, 1999).

Typically, research in this vein does little to capture the dynamism and affect of coordination—with some exceptions. For example, Weick and Roberts (1993) use Asch’s (1952) ideas about groups to describe coordination on a aircraft carrier flight deck and argue that the quality of coordination depends on how heedfully deck personnel subordinate their contributions to their personal representations of the collective system. Also, Gittell (2003) provides a dynamic description of “relational coordination” in documenting the reciprocal influence of communication and relationships among airline ground crews. We describe the dynamism and affect in coordination by integrating communication research and research on energy.

Some scholars who study organizational communication argue that communication is coordination (e.g., Boden, 1994; Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999). Barnard (1968) saw communication and coordination as equivalent, but organizational scholars did little with this observation until the 1980s (Tompkins, Tompkins, & Cheney, 1989). Mintzberg observed in 1973 that most of the work that managers do is talk, and in 1983 began the analysis of “talk as work” in organization studies. But it was only in the late 1980s that scholars began to examine the question of how communication organizes activities, structures, and even societies.

Communication scholars address how communication coordinates. This research is the foundation for our theory of coordination as energy-in-conversation. Within communication research, Cooren’s (2000) perspective represents a type of discourse analysis. “Discourse” is written or spoken language, larger than a sentence or clause, used to describe language that a person or people use to accomplish a purpose (Ellis, 1992). As a subdomain of communication research, discourse analysis is historically rooted in sociolinguistics (e.g., Barley, 1986; Brown & Ford, 1961) and consists of the subdomains of sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics, semiotics, literary and rhetorical language analysis, critical language studies, and postmodern language analysis (see Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001, for a review...

The Organizing Property of Communication

Cooren (2000) asserts that coordination is a process of using speech acts to impose narrative structures onto situations in order to make sense of those situations. Cooren’s theory draws on and integrates the strengths of speech act theory and semionarrative theory to explain how communication coordinates. To understand this approach, we must understand Cooren’s use of speech acts and narratives, how speech acts transfer discursive “objects,” how the exchange of objects constitutes narratives, and how narrative forms help people make sense of their situations.

We abridge Cooren’s complex theory and illustrate its power using a conversation from a software company (Table 1). This conversation example occurs between a manager and an interface designer in the software company. While based on an actual event, we use it only for illustration. The conversation begins when Tony, the interface designer, realizes that, to make the interface user friendly, the software code must be changed. However, he is not sure what changes should be made and does not have the authority to require them. Therefore, he asks the project manager, Theresa, for help. Table 1 contains speech acts uttered by Tony and Theresa.

Speech acts. A speech act is an action in language that creates a social reality that does not exist before the speech act is uttered (Austin, 1975; Searle, 1969). Cooren (2000) agrees that speech acts create social realities but disagrees with the idea that people can correctly interpret the intent of the speaker from the rules of language (e.g., a car) or a discursive (i.e., symbolic) entity (e.g., a role). People use seven types of speech acts to give four types of discursive objects (Cooren, 2000), as follows.

An assertive is a speech act in which people interpret that propositional content has been transferred, even if nobody is informed (e.g., if a person places a sign that says “1300” on a door, the room that the door leads to is now room 1300, even if nobody has seen the sign). Informatives are assertives that not only give propositional content but also change realities for the person to whom the informative is addressed. Expressives are speech acts that people use to give objects of sanction, which add or subtract value from someone or something (e.g., thanks or disapproval). Declaratives are speech acts that people can use to give institutional objects. Institutional objects, such as a title or a position, alter identities. The ability to use declaratives to give institutional objects requires the appropriate context (con-texts—often other institutional objects), such as a position of authority, in order for other people to accept that such an object has been given. Expressives and declaratives do not need to be attributed to anyone or anything in particular.

The final three speech acts—directives, ac-
creditives, and commissives—can only occur when the speaker or writer attributes them to someone or something else. This limit exists because speech acts involve giving the modal objects of a “having to do” (e.g., requests), a “being able to do” (e.g., authorizations), and a guarantee (e.g., promises), respectively, which
have no meaning without an attributive dimension. When a directive is given, for example, if there is no subject to whom that directive is attributed, then no one (or no thing) will perform (or refuse to perform) that directive. Also, Cooren's theory assumes that the objects transferred imply subsequent actions, either because one is directed to, one has committed to, or one is able to. By claiming that speech acts transfer discursive objects, Cooren (2000) provides a mechanism for explaining how people maintain or re-coordinate arrangements of activities. The physical and discursive objects that people have, encounter, and transfer in their conversations are "texts" that people can refer to again and again, and people interpret these texts in

### TABLE 1

**Conversation in a Software Company**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
<th>Narrative Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Theresa, when you get a minute could you come here?</td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Sure. Just a sec.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>What's the problem?</td>
<td>Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>The problem is that some of the files need to go on the web server, and some on the video server. On the web, these files [draws on the white board], on the video, these files.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>It used to be on one server.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Yeah, but how do you make it simple for the users? This has to go on this server [points], this on that server [points again].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>But even here [pointing] you may have these types of files.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Well, we may at some point, for tech support purposes, have to allow them to have this list [pointing]—or separate GIF and HTML folders. [Pause, both of them staring at the white board.] Here is the problem I see—the folders have to have different names, but you need a folder for each presentation to not override other types of files.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>We need to have it ask the users to give the presentation a name—we need to have Jim add some code that gives it a name. Devin [turning to face Devin]—does it make it easier for you if it has the same or separate folders?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>Separate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>There's your answer. [Points at Devin.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Okay. Then here are the folders. [Points at picture on the white board.]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Is index.html your javascript?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>I've got it! Make two starts! This will create two folders.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>So that loads start and that loads index?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>You may want to not make it index, because that's the default presentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Having it up here screws you up either way.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>The problem is if you're doing many presentations . . . [pauses]. I'm not sure I understand the main issue anymore.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>There's a lot of naming issues and overriding issues that need to be addressed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Let's name the issues. Folders need titles for the name of presentation to reduce erroneous overrides.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Plus ease of use for uploading stuff. So, rather than having fifteen folders . . . [draws on the white board].</td>
<td>Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>The options for multiple presentations are . . . [adds to the drawing].</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Okay. So that would have a link to the presentation and the images!</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Great. Then Devin could point users here [pointing], and Jim could add the code that names the presentation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Cool.</td>
<td>Sanction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ways that enable and constrain the activities that people can do (Goffman, 1974). For example, in the case of Tony and Theresa, objects such as the software code, the positions the two people “hold,” the propositional content (rows 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17–19, and 25), and the institutional objects drawn on the whiteboard (rows 22 and 23) can increase the likelihood of some behaviors (e.g., Theresa offering solutions), can decrease the likelihood of other behaviors (e.g., Tony singing), and can give people reasons to behave in similar ways each time they refer to or interact with these objects (or texts). And new texts, like the speech act that Theresa utters in row 25, can rearrange activities by transferring discursive objects that require new arrangements of activities.

The process of transferring discursive objects can be difficult. Speech acts are not always performed and interpreted clearly. Once speech acts are produced, the producer, the receiver, and other participants interpret their meanings individually (Axley, 1984). Interpreters are often able to come close to inferring the “true” intention of the sender (if a true intention exists) because of the other texts available, but different interpretations are always possible. We can never know that a receiver has interpreted a speech act in the same way as the producer (Cooren, 2000).

Row 12 of Table 1 is an example of ambiguity. Theresa appears, in row 11, to be claiming to have found a solution. Rather than saying, “We need a more complex solution,” however, Tony presents the implication of Theresa’s “solution” in row 12 by saying, “Then here are the folders.” It is technically impossible to achieve the team’s goals and have the folders Tony is pointing to be “the” folders unless other, more complex changes are also made in the software. While Tony does not say this, Theresa can infer, from the fact that he waits for her to respond, from the goal of the team, and from the nature of the software (additional texts), that Tony expects her to understand that they need a more complex solution. Theresa receives a reminder of the nature of the software in rows 13 and 14, using it to understand the implications of Tony’s statement.

In practice, speech acts often involve conversational gaps, overlaps, interruptions, preventatives, and repairs. We acknowledge that these elements of conversation analysis affect communication and coordination (McLaughlin, 1984), but they are beyond the scope of this paper. Also, while we do not address the rules of turn taking and the adjacency pairs of conversation analysis, Cooren (2000) captures the importance of sequencing by introducing Greimas’s (1988) semionarrative analysis into his theory.

**Narrative.** People use speech acts to transfer discursive objects in ways that transform reality. Coordination is a process of arranging activities—including speech acts and physical acts—between people (and their instruments) and across time into a sequence that they believe will enable them to accomplish their goals. Narratives provide this sequence.

Narratives—stories—are thematic, sequenced texts (Barry & Elmes, 1997), structured by a tension between subject and object, in which the subject desires the object (i.e., the goal; Greimas, 1988). This tension—where the subject tries to achieve the goal—can be found in every meaningful discourse. In fact, this tension enables people to use narrative to make action meaningful and explains why people behave in particular ways.

Narratives consist of four phases: manipulation, competence, performance, and sanction (Greimas, 1988). People use this structure to make sense of situations (hence, Boje’s claim that “storytelling is the preferred sensemaking currency of human relationships” [1991: 106]) by imposing these phases onto the “ongoing stream” (Weick, 1995) of daily experience. People can use narratives to bracket their experience, because conversation enacts narrative structure onto situations (Cooren, 2000) and because the universal structure of narratives (Greimas, 1988) makes these conversations easy to understand. Thus, people converse by using speech acts and physical acts to enact narrative structures. Without structure to sequence the actions and texts to endow physicality on the sequence, there can be no coordination (Cooren, 2000).

The conversation in Table 1 illustrates how people use speech acts to enact a narrative and give it physicality. We note the narrative phases

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3 We use the term *subject* to refer to the “main character” in any given narrative. This main character often is, but need not be, one person. For example, it could also be an inanimate object or group of people.
of the conversation in the far right column. The narrative begins with the manipulation phase, in which Tony asks Theresa to come over—a directive (row 1)—and Theresa agrees to come—a commissive (row 2). The manipulation phase of a narrative often begins with the directive-commissive pair (Cooren, 2000), providing the subject with a reason to seek the object. Here, the object is a solution to Tony’s problem. This “manipulation” creates an imbalance, and this imbalance must be restored to complete the story.

Once Theresa commits to come, the competence phase begins. In this phase the subject encounters “tests” and receives “gifts” that affect the subject’s ability to obtain the desired object. The subject appears to be Theresa. However, even though the manipulation phase involves a directive from Tony (row 1) and a commissive from Theresa (row 2), the narratives in which this conversation is embedded (their common goal as members of a team) and the subsequent texts (e.g., the use of “we” rather than “I”) suggest that Tony and Theresa act as a unit, making the unit of Tony and Theresa the subject of the story—a collective subject.

The competence phase involves a series of mutual adjustments (Thompson, 1967), as Tony, Theresa, and Devin use primarily informatives (rows 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 14, 17, and 18) and directives (i.e., questions: rows 3, 5, 7, 9, and 13) to exchange information. Tony gives “gifts” of propositional content to Theresa through informatives, which also “tests” Theresa’s ability to help find a solution. Theresa “tests” the legitimacy of Tony’s concerns with the design of the software, giving him the use of her authority in return for passing that test.

For a short period of time—see Theresa’s apparent confusion in row 19—it seems that Tony and Theresa may not come up with a solution. However, when Theresa directs the two of them to “name the issues” and then begins to declare the first issue, she gives them the final gift they need to obtain the desired solution. This is when the performance phase begins.

Performance is the phase in which the subject obtains (or fails to obtain) the desired object. Tony and Theresa obtain their desired object—a solution—through a series of declaratives (rows 22–25). They declare the components and features the program must have, altering the identity or function of the program. This transformation is the solution, and because they have obtained this object (the solution) successfully, Tony concludes the narrative with an expression: “Cool.” Expressions can be interpreted to transfer objects of sanction, restoring the “debt” that Tony created when he asked Theresa to come in the manipulation phase. Theresa and Tony can interpret Tony’s utterance as giving sanction to their solution, rewarding them with praise.

The conversation illustrates how narratives are structures of exchange, in which people create and eliminate imbalances and transform themselves—and other, relevant objects—by uttering speech acts that can be interpreted to transfer discursive objects. It also illustrates that specific speech acts tend to occur in specific narrative phases (e.g., the directive-commissive pair in the manipulation phase, or the expressive in the sanction phase; Cooren, 2000). Speech acts are not exclusive to phases; they are just more likely to occur in these phases. However, because they are likely to occur in specific phases, they coordinate activities by arranging them into an appropriate sequence (similar to the turn taking and adjacency pairs of conversation analysis; see Boden, 1994). Thus, people use the narrative’s sequencing structure to arrange their acts (both speech acts and physical acts). People can judge how appropriate a specific act is at a specific point in time based on where these acts occur in a narrative, relative to other acts.

Narratives also contain subnarratives (Cooren, 2000). For example, each of the directive-informative pairs in the competence phase could be considered to be a subnarrative: Theresa “manipulates” Tony by asking him a question, and Tony “performs” by giving her the propositional content Theresa directs him to give. In these subnarratives Tony does not need to go through a competence phase, since he is already competent, and Theresa’s sanction comes when she uses her authority to declare the changes (row 25). Further, the conversation is also a subnarrative to another narrative: the story of the software development, which is also embedded in other narratives, like the organization’s story. Discourse analysts need to examine the narratives that a discourse is embedded in—context—as well as the discourse itself—text (Fairclough, 1992).
Conversations affect and are affected by the narratives in which they are embedded. For example, the problem that initiated the conversation was a “test” in the competence phase of the story of the software development. Thus, Tony began speaking with Theresa because he was working on the software development team and she was the project leader. The fact that he and Theresa “passed” the test (i.e., obtained a solution) in a way that transformed the software also began a process of renarrating the software development story. Prior to their conversation, activities were arranged in a way that was conducive to the previous software design. Once Theresa and Tony agreed that they needed to change the design, Theresa also needed to rearrange—that is, renarrate—the software development story, altering Devin and Jim’s assignments as well (row 25).

Finally, people can tell stories from the point of view of any person or object in a narrative, meaning that there are at least as many potential subjects and narratives as there are members of an organization. However, because people tend to focus on only one subject at a time as they “tell” stories, the other “characters” in the story (members in the organization) generally have to submit themselves to subordinate roles (Cooren, 2000). This puts the subject in a powerful position and produces hierarchy as well as coordination. There is flexibility for people to interpret their roles in the story (or the story itself) differently, but it is important to note that scholars can detect power by analyzing who the subject is in the stories being told.

ENERGY-IN-CONVERSATION

Cooren’s (2000) theory describes, and our story illustrates, how people arrange actions to enable them to accomplish their goals. What is missing from this description is how affect influences and is influenced by the coordination process. We develop theory in this area by describing energy and introducing it into Cooren’s theory.

Energy

“Energy” is an affective experience, described variously as energetic arousal (Thayer, 1989), emotional energy (Collins, 1993), subjective energy (Marks, 1977), positive affect (Watson et al., 1988), vitality (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), and zest (Miller & Stiver, 1997). Energy is a reinforcing experience; people try to enhance, prolong, or repeat the circumstances they perceive as increasing their energy, and they try to diminish or avoid the circumstances that they perceive as decreasing their energy (Collins, 1993). Because energy is a positive affect, people who feel high levels of energy tend to view events positively and to expect that positive events will occur (Arkes, Herren, & Isen, 1988). Energy can increase a person’s expectancy (Vroom, 1964), but expectancy is a type of cognition and energy a type of affect. Energy, in conjunction with expectancy, affects the effort that people invest in activities, but energy also indicates how positive an experience people are having and their personal well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

Changes in the energy a person feels involve an automatic appraisal of one’s situation, physiological changes, and expressive gestures (Thoits, 1989). When someone experiences an increase or decrease in energetic arousal, that change creates two “texts” that people can “read” as a conversation unfolds. By referring to energy as “texts,” we mean that (1) a person can read his or her own energy as a bodily signal that summarizes how desirable he or she perceives a situation to be (Thayer, 1989) and that (2) people can read another person’s expressions to interpret how much energy that person feels. Thus, energy-in-conversation is (1) a person’s energy level, which that person interprets automatically as a reflection of how desirable a situation is, (2) a person’s interpretation of a conversational partner’s energy from his or her expressive gestures, and (3) a feeling of being eager to act and capable of acting, which affects how much effort a person will invest into the conversation and into subsequent, related activities (Marks, 1977).

People interpret felt energy and expressive gestures as texts and experience changes in their energy based on their interpretation of texts. When people write or utter speech acts, other conversational participants interpret those speech acts and experience a change in energy. We propose, drawing on self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), that energy increases when people interpret speech acts to increase their autonomy, competence, or relatedness, and it decreases if they interpret a speech act to decrease their autonomy, compe-
Changes in autonomy, competence, and relatedness change a person’s energy because they imply the meeting of basic human needs. Presumably, it is adaptive for someone to have reinforcing experiences like increased energy when basic needs are met and “punishing” experiences like decreased energy when basic needs are not met. Whatever the mechanism, evidence suggests that there is a relationship between these three constructs and energy (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Coordination As Energy-in-Conversation

Our model of coordination as energy-in-conversation incorporates energy into Cooren’s (2000) theory. It articulates how people’s interpretations of speech acts and narratives affect their energy, how interpretations of energy affect speech acts, and how these reciprocal effects can be modeled as “coordination as energy-in-conversation.”

Figure 1 is a simplified illustration of these relationships. It does not depict the narrative structure, nor does it depict which conversational participants utter which speech acts or the conversational features of the relationships, such as gaps, overlaps, and repairs. Instead, it illustrates three assertions.

First, it illustrates how coordination is both an affective and dynamic experience. Second, it distinguishes our model from interdependence research (using solid versus dotted arrows), illustrating our contribution to this literature. Third, it illustrates our three-point thesis: (1) people interpret speech acts and narrative roles in ways that affect their energy; (2) energy is a text that people interpret, affecting subsequent speech acts; and (3) energy also affects the amount of effort people devote to coordinated activities. We now explain the points of our thesis and illustrate these points with our software development conversation.

4 White (1963), deCharms (1968), and Baumeister and Leary (1995) provide arguments for why autonomy, competence, and relatedness are basic needs.
How interpretations of speech acts affect energy. Table 2 identifies ways in which conversational participants could interpret each type of speech act such that it would increase or decrease the participants’ energy. Each cell illustrates how energy could change, depending on how a person perceives that the reality presented by the speech act would affect his or her autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). For example, when a person utters an informative (row 1), the speaker proposes a description that he or she may or may not believe is true; likewise, those hearing the speech act may or may not believe it is true (Cooren, 2000). If the person who utters the speech act believes that the propositional content is true, then the change in the speaker’s energy will depend on the speaker’s new interpretation of his or her autonomy, competence, and relatedness. We propose that the speaker’s energy will increase to the extent that he or she interprets the speech act as described in the second cell in the “Informatives...” row (i.e., the speaker offers the information freely, perceives that the hearers believe the propositional content, or perceives that the hearers are grateful for the information). In contrast, we propose that the speaker will experience decreased energy if he or she feels forced to share the information, perceives that the hearers do not believe the propositional content, or perceives that the hearers are not grateful for the information.

Table 2 works the same way in describing how interpretations of speech acts affect the energy of the person a speech act is attributed to (see column 3). Again, using informatives as an example, we propose that when a person has an informative attributed to them, that person is likely to feel an increase in energy if he or she perceives new opportunities (increased autonomy), believes he or she is more able to accomplish the goal(s) relevant to this conversation (increased competence), or perceives that the speaker gave this information with the intent of being helpful (increased relatedness). And, in contrast, we propose that this person will experience a decrease in energy if he or she perceives fewer opportunities, believes he or she is less able to accomplish the relevant goal, or perceives that the speaker gave the information with the intent of hindering.

Table 2 contains autonomy, competence, and relatedness interpretations for each type of speech act. We should also note, however, that when a conversational participant is neither the producer nor the receiver of a particular speech act, that person is still able to interpret the speech act and to feel a change in energy. We propose that such a person will appraise how speech acts affect his or her autonomy, competence, and relatedness in ways that are similar to receivers of a speech act.

For example, in the software development story, the bulk of the conversation occurred between Tony and Theresa, each attributing their speech acts to the other. However, Devin, the tech support specialist, also heard the conversation. We propose that if a third party like Devin listens to a conversation, that person will interpret the speech acts that apply to him or her in a similar way to the person receiving the speech acts (Table 2, column 3).

Table 3 presents the software development conversation again, but it includes Tony’s and Theresa’s nonverbal expressions and their reports of energy felt during the conversation. We use Table 2 to propose explanations for why Tony and Theresa report feeling the reported levels of energy. This illustrates our integration of Cooren’s (2000) theory with self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000)—not conclusions drawn from data.

An example of how interpretations of speech acts affect energy is displayed in row 1 of Table 3—Tony’s directive for Theresa to “come here.” Theresa said she felt a “moderate/high” level of energy in response to this directive. We can use the interpretations proposed in the third column of the “Directives...” row of Table 2 to explain why Theresa felt this way. First, Theresa could interpret that she was capable of accepting or rejecting Tony’s directive with no adverse consequences (increased autonomy). She could interpret this from Tony’s text, because he softened the directive “come here” by adding “when you get a minute” and by phrasing it as a question. Theresa also relied on the previously existing texts that “made” her Tony’s boss. She could appraise her competence from her ability to join Tony. And she could appraise Tony’s respect from Tony’s de-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
<th>Can increase the energy of the person who produces them if...</th>
<th>Can increase the energy of the person they are attributed to if...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Informatives...** *(speech acts in which one person gives propositional content to another)* | A. They are offered freely,  
C. the producer appraises that the intended receiver believes the propositional content, and/or  
R. the producer appraises that the intended receiver is grateful for the information | A. The receiver perceives new opportunities because of the information,  
C. the receiver appraises that he or she is more able to accomplish the goal relevant to this narrative because of the information, and/or  
R. the receiver appraises that the producer gave the information to help the receiver. |
| **Directives...** *(speech acts in which a person gives a "having to do" to another person)* | A. The producer issues the directive as a means to accomplish a goal he or she is intrinsically motivated to accomplish,  
C. the receiver complies or commits to comply, and/or  
R. the producer appraises that the receiver is willing to comply. | A. The receiver believes that he or she is free to accept or reject the directive without worrying about the consequences,  
C. the receiver appraises that he or she is able to fulfill the request, and/or  
R. the receiver appraises that the producer made the request in a respectful way. |
| **Accreditives...** *(speech acts in which a person gives a "being able to do" to another person)* | A. The producer offers the "being able to do" freely,  
C. the producer appraises that giving a "being able to do" to the receiver makes the producer more likely to accomplish his/her goal, and/or  
R. the producer appraises that the receiver is grateful for the "being able to do." | A. The receiver appraises that he or she has the discretion to pursue a desired goal,  
C. the receiver appraises that he or she will be more capable of accomplishing the goal relevant to this narrative, and/or  
R. the receiver appraises that the "being able to do" was given willingly. |
| **Commissives...** *(speech acts in which a person gives a guarantee to another person)* | A. The producer perceives that he or she is offering the commitment freely,  
C. the producer believes that he or she is able to accomplish what he or she is committing to, and/or  
R. the producer appraises that the receiver appreciates the commitment. | A. The receiver believes that the activity that the producer is committing to do will contribute to a goal that the receiver is intrinsically motivated to accomplish,  
C. the receiver believes that the completion of the activity makes him/her more likely to accomplish the goal, and/or  
R. the receiver appraises that the commissive was offered willingly. |
| **Declaratives...** *(speech acts in which a person transfers an institutional object)* | A. The producer offers the institutional object freely,  
C. the producer appraises that giving the institutional object to the receiver makes the producer more likely to accomplish his/her goal, and/or  
R. the producer appraises that the receiver appreciates the institutional object. | A. The receiver believes that he or she is more able to act autonomously because of his/her new identity,  
C. the receiver believes that his/her new identity makes him/her more able to accomplish the goals of the narratives he/she is currently embedded in, and/or  
R. the receiver wants to belong in the social groups that his/her new identity includes him/her in. |
| **Expressives...** *(speech acts in which a person transfers an object of sanction)* | A. The producer appraises that he or she is able to give the object of sanction freely,  
C. the producer believes that he or she is able to express him/herself competently, and/or  
R. the producer believes that he or she is expressing something that will strengthen his/her relationship with the intended receiver. | A. The receiver does not appraise that the producer’s expression puts him/her in an awkward social situation,  
C. the receiver appraises that the producer’s sanction makes him/her more able to accomplish the goals of the narratives he/she is currently embedded in, and/or  
R. the receiver appraises the object of sanction to strengthen his/her relationship with the producer and/or other relevant group members. |

* A = autonomy; C = competence; R = relatedness.
TABLE 3
Conversation in a Software Company with Emotional Indicators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Row</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Speech Acts</th>
<th>Reported Energy—Tony</th>
<th>Reported Energy—Theresa</th>
<th>Narrative Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Theresa, when you get a minute could you come here?</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate/ high</td>
<td>Manipulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Sure. Just a sec.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>What’s the problem? [Smiling, walking toward Tony.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>[Brow furrowed, lips tight.] The problem is that some of the files need to</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>go on the web server, and some on the video server. On the web, these</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>files [draws on the white board], on the video, these files.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>[Brow furrowed.] It used to be on one server.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Yeah, but how do you make it simple for the users? This has to go on this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>server [points], this on that server [points again].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>But even here [pointing] you may have these types of files.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Well, we may at some point, for tech support purposes, have to allow them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to have this list [pointing]—or separate GIF and HTML folders. [Pause, both</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>of them staring at the white board, with brows furrowed.] Here is the</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>problem I see—the folders have to have different names, but you need a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>folder for each presentation to not override other types of files.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>We need to have it ask the users to give the presentation a name [raises</td>
<td>Moderate/ high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>both hands in an open gesture]—we need to have Jim add some code that</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>gives it a name. Devin [turning to face Devin]—does it make it easier for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>you if it has the same or separate folders?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>Separate.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>There’s your answer. [Points at Devin.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Okay. Then here are the folders. [Points at picture on the white board.]</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>[Brow furrowed.] Is index.html your javascript?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>No. [Lips tight, shaking his head.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>I’ve got it! [Eyes widen, smiling.] Make two starts! [Holds up two fingers.]</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>This will create two folders. [Moves two fingers back and pushes them</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>forward again.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>[Raises eyebrows.] So that loads start and that loads index?</td>
<td>Moderate/ high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>You may want to not make it index, because that’s the default presentation.</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>[Shoulders drop.] Having it up here screws you up either way.</td>
<td>Moderate/ high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>The problem is if you’re doing many presentations … [pauses, furrows brow,]</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I’m not sure I understand the main issue anymore.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>There’s a lot of naming issues and overriding issues that need to be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>addressed. [Hands are forward in an open gesture.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Let’s name the issues. [Lips tighten.] Folders need titles for the name of</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>presentation to reduce erroneous overrides.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Plus ease of use for uploading stuff. [Eyes get wide, arms start moving</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>quickly and pointing, voice raises.] So, rather than having fifteen folders</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>… [draws on the white board].</td>
<td>High</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>[Eyes get wide, arms start moving quickly, voice rises.] The options for</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>multiple presentations are … [adds to the drawing].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Okay. So that would have a link to the presentation and the images!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>[Eyes get wide, arms move quickly again, volume rises again.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
<td>Great. [Smiling.] Then Devin could point users here [pointing], and Jim</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>could add the code that names the presentation. [Palms outward and up.]</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Cool.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sanction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
cision to soften the directive and from her past, positive experiences with Tony.5

Theresa may have felt “moderate/high” rather than “high” energy, however, because Tony had a puzzled expression. Theresa might interpret this text as suggesting that Tony was going to ask her for help. Because she did not know what Tony’s request would be, she could not know if she was competent to perform the implied task. However, Tony’s request for her to come was also a text that she could interpret to mean that Tony thought that she was competent enough to help.

How interpretations of the narrative structure affect energy. We also propose that conversational participants experience changes in the energy they feel based on how they interpret the narrative structure in which they are participating. Two narrative characteristics that can affect energy involve the perspective from which the narrative is “told” and the narrative’s goal.

Stories are usually told from only one point of view at a time—making only one subject. Subjects structure their narratives around their quest for a desired object (Greimas, 1988). When one person takes the subject role, other people (characters) in the story (organization) play supporting or subordinate roles (Cooren, 2000). People who perceive themselves to be adopting a subordinate role in a conversation tend to experience decreased energy (Collins, 1990). In contrast, people who perceive themselves to be adopting the role of the subject—a superordinate role—often experience increased energy (Collins, 1990). We propose that this is because people perceive that power increases (and dependence decreases) their autonomy and competence. Thus, we expect that people playing the role of the subject in organizational narratives have more energy than those playing supporting roles.

We also expect, however, that when people create collective subjects (as Tony and Theresa did in the software development conversation), the level of energy they feel will depend on how autonomous and capable they perceive the collective to be, as well as on how much the participants feel they belong (relatedness). In addition, we propose that when people act as collective subjects, their energy will show in their facial expressions, postures, tone of voice, and other nonverbal expressions, as well as in words, and these “energy texts” act as feedback. This creates a dynamic in which people can generate high—and even exhilarating—levels of energy.

Tony and Theresa have this kind of experience, as suggested by their animated behavior and their reports of high levels of energy in rows 22 through 25. The experience begins when they find a solution—which can be energizing because it makes people feel competent—but that energy is also reinforced by the experience of cocreating the solution and of reinforcing each other’s affective state (see Kelly & Barsade, 2001).

We propose that people are likely to create collective subjects when they perceive that members of the collective are willing to make collective goals a higher priority than individual goals. Individuals are often tempted to seek individual goals because others often have to invest effort and resources in their goals, but these individuals do not have to invest effort and resources in others’ goals. In other words, they gain power from other people’s submission to their goals (Cooren, 2000). Such people are the subjects of organizational narratives, and those who help them achieve their roles become “supporting characters” (Greimas, 1988). When people perform actions that further collective goals—particularly at the expense of personal goals—others are likely to interpret their intentions as sincere. For example, Tony could interpret Theresa’s desire to put the collective goal first from her willingness to come at his request or from her apparent lack of anger when he corrects her (row 12). We also propose that the more sincere other members of the collective subject perceive a person to be, the more likely they are to reciprocate, beginning a positive feedback cycle that generates high levels of energy.

Goals are as useful for explaining people’s energy in less dramatic situations as they are for explaining dramatic, high-energy “interaction rituals” (Collins, 1993). Whether the subject of the narrative is individual or collective, the degree to which the subject feels energy depends, at least in part, on the degree to which

---

5 Because conversational narratives are often embedded in larger relational narratives, people tend to “smooth out” aberrations from typical behavior—for giving negatively appraised speech acts in generally positive relationships or diminishing the value attributed to positively appraised speech acts that occur in generally negative relationships (e.g., Murray & Holmes, 1996).
the subject appraises the goal to be autonomously chosen and appraises himself, herself, or themselves to be able to accomplish the goal. Theresa and Tony enjoyed working together, as an autonomous unit, on a goal they felt capable of accomplishing—even though they faced a problem they did not know the solution to. Hence, they maintained at least a moderate level of energy throughout the conversation. Thus, both the narrative’s goal and the perspective from which the narrative is “told” affect the energy people feel and the degree to which people create collective subjects that generate high-energy interactions.

**How the interpretation of energy “texts” affects speech acts.** We have proposed that interpretations of speech acts and narratives affect the energy people feel. We also propose that the energy people feel creates “texts” that supplement speech acts and that can affect the content of subsequent speech acts. These texts include an individual’s own physiological changes and subjective feeling (e.g., “Reported Energy” columns in Table 3) and other people’s expressions (e.g., facial expressions or gestures, as in the “Speech Acts” column of Table 3). By interpreting these texts, individuals can get a sense of how positively people in the conversation—including themselves—interpret the circumstances (Arkes et al., 1988) and how much energy people are likely to invest in the proposed arrangement of activities (Marks, 1977).

The way a conversational participant interprets energy texts is likely to affect the content of subsequent speech acts produced by that participant. If a person deems it worth the effort to create a more energizing arrangement of activities (for self or for others), that person will produce a speech act that he or she believes will increase the autonomy, competence, and/or relatedness of the person or people whose energy the producer is trying to increase. Thus, narratives and speech acts affect the energy that conversational participants feel, which affects the speech acts they produce. The cumulative effect of this interplay among speech acts, narrative, interpretation, and energy is an arrangement of activities that participants feel more or less energized about performing and in which they invest more or less effort (Marks, 1977).

**Coordination as energy-in-conversation.** We now use our software development conversation as an illustration of coordination as energy-in-conversation. Our purpose in reviewing this conversation is to illustrate how incorporating energy and energy texts into Cooren’s (2000) theory of coordination enriches our descriptions of coordination, explaining why conversations unfold in particular ways, and integrating motivational and coordination processes. We focus on parts of the conversation that illustrate these points.

When Tony asked Theresa to come help him out, the energy that Theresa felt was affected by her interpretation of both what he said and his nonverbal expressions. We propose that these interpretations, the energy felt, and the stage of the narratives that she was playing a part in all affected her response. Theresa’s response was an enthusiastic but conditional commissive. Her commissive was enthusiastic, we suggest, because she was largely able to interpret Tony’s speech act and expressions as increasing or reinforcing her autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, her commissive was also conditional. Theresa was participating in another narrative when Tony asked her to come. We propose that she added “Just a sec” to her commissive in order to finish the other narrative, or at least to come to a natural break.

Theresa’s request for Tony to wait for a moment for her to follow his directive highlights an important point about motivation. Motivation is a “meta” construct that includes other constructs, such as initiation, direction, effort, and perseverance (Landy & Becker, 1987). The amount of effort people expend is proportional to the energy they feel (Marks, 1977). Direction is determined by the way people interpret speech acts uttered in the conversation. Whether or not people initiate action in the first place (such as the act of committing in response to a directive), however, also depends on their perceived roles in other narratives.

For example, Theresa could initiate her conversation with Tony, since it would not impede the goals of the other narratives she was partic-

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6 Energetic arousal is a biopsychological mechanism for translating interests into action (Marks, 1977; cf. Brehm & Self, 1989), and people are interested in activities to the extent that they perceive those activities will fulfill their basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).
ipating in and because she could appraise the activity as something that she was free to do, able to accomplish, and was asked to do in a respectful way. However, if she considered herself to be autonomous, competent, and related but her role in another narrative suggested that she should not commit, then we propose that she would probably express a reluctant rejection—feeling energy for doing it but constrained to say no. If she did not feel autonomous, competent, and/or related but believed that she was bound to commit because of the importance of Tony’s new narrative, then we propose that she would be likely to commit reluctantly and hesitantly. And we propose that if she felt no energy and had no reason in the larger narrative for committing, then she would likely refuse. Thus, a person’s interpretation of a speech act and the accompanying changes in energy that person feels both affect the content of that person’s next speech act.

Theresa joined Tony and began to exchange a series of questions (directives) and answers (informatives), each interpreting and appraising each speech act, his or her own energy, the other’s expressions, and his or her other narratives. These elements each affected subsequent speech acts. Thus, the pattern described in the previous paragraph continued with each speech act. Eventually, Theresa began to suggest potential solutions and reported experiencing brief increases in energy with each solution she submitted—perhaps because she was hopeful that this would be the ultimate solution. Tony, having more knowledge about the problem, only reported experiencing an increase in his energy when he did not express problems with Theresa’s suggestions. This is probably why Theresa’s energy fluctuated more than Tony’s during the competence phase.

The performance phase of Tony and Theresa’s conversation is an example of a high-energy interaction (Collins, 1993). After Tony identified the uploading issue in row 22 of Table 3 and began to declare a solution, he reported feeling more energy. We propose that Tony felt his energy jump because he perceived new opportunities (autonomy) that he was able (competent) to accomplish. Theresa, seeing Tony’s physical animation and hearing his declarations, also reported feeling an increase in energy, presumably because of a sense of increased competence. She added her own ideas (row 23). Tony could interpret Theresa’s speech acts and physical animation as positive feedback, which, we propose, could be interpreted as a confirmation of their collective competence in solving this problem, as well as a sign of respect and appreciation.

The perception that people in a group feel the same way about the same topic generates solidarity and energy (Collins, 1993). Also, because energy is a positive feeling (Watson et al., 1988), it makes people more likely to appraise subsequent events positively (Arkes et al., 1988)—energy often begets more energy. Tony and Theresa built on each other’s ideas and excitement, and also declared (in row 25), based on their redesign of the software, new assignments for other developers.

Organizational participants, like Tony and Theresa, use speech acts to construct an organizational reality (Austin, 1975; Cooren, 2000; Searle, 1969), and we propose that the energy that people feel for each reality affects how much effort they invest in enacting that reality. For example, when Tony finished his conversation with Theresa, he returned to work and reported feeling confident both in his ability and in knowing that his work would contribute to their overall goal (rather than become only a moderately useful add-on). Theresa let Devin and Jim know about the changes they would need to make. She began those conversations enthusiastically—even if the energy she (and they) felt oscillated somewhat during those subsequent conversations.

The energy that people feel about a particular reality—along with the effort that they put into enacting it—is not necessarily limited to the immediate speech act or narrative. Speech acts uttered in one narrative can lead people to re-narrate (i.e., reorganize) other organizational activities as well (e.g., see row 25). We propose that the level of energy people feel for a reality created in one narrative will significantly affect the energy people feel (and the effort they invest) in a subsequent, related narrative (see Rothbard, 2001), at least until the actions of the subsequent narrative alter reality in a way that increases or decreases participants’ energy. The energy generated (or diminished) in one narrative may not be permanent, but we propose that people will
begin the subsequent narrative feeling a similar level of energy.

Our software development example illustrates key points about our model of coordination as energy-in-conversation. It illustrates the reciprocal relationships among interpretation, speech acts, and energy. It also illustrates our propositions about the effect of narrative structures on speech acts and energy; the interplay of conversations with initiation, direction, and effort; the dynamics of affective contagion; and the interconnectedness of organizational narratives.

**DISCUSSION**

We offer three contributions to the study of coordination, conversation, and affect in our model and example of coordination as energy-in-conversation. Our model integrates theoretical perspectives such that research on the equivalency of communication and coordination (e.g., Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999) is enlivened with energy, research on the coordinating property of affect (e.g., Keltner & Kring, 1998) is enriched with interpretation and texts, and the structures imposed by communicative acts are revealed in research on conversations (e.g., Capella & Street, 1985). These contributions, in turn, affect how organization scholars conceptualize basic constructs, such as coordination, motivation, and goal accomplishment.

**Energy in Speech Acts and Narrative**

Our model of coordination as energy-in-conversation highlights Cooren’s (2000) theory of the organizing property of communication as important work for organizational scholars to consider, and it enlivens his theory by integrating energy. Energy enlivens Cooren’s theory because it leads researchers to consider the individual and collective experience of coordinating (i.e., how energizing the experience is) and how this experience affects the coordination process. Energy indicates the quality of a person’s experience (Collins, 1981) and well-being (Ryan & Frederick, 1997), the effort a person is likely to invest in an activity (Marks, 1977), and how attractive a person considers alternatives to be (Collins, 1981). Researchers who pay attention to the energy that people feel as they communicate with others can improve their ability to understand how individuals choose among alternatives, how much energy individuals invest in coordinated activities, and how positive the experience of coordinating is for the people involved.

Energy also involves the experience of bodily movements from quiescence to activation, including expressions, posture, body movement, and prosody, as well as internal somatic changes (Thayer, 1989). This means that people are more than just thinkers; they are human beings whose hearts race, palms sweat, and mouths grin and whose conversations enrich or deplete “relations between bodies” (Game, 1997). Relations between bodies are feedback processes, suggesting that the energy felt in conversation can escalate or de-escalate dramatically, igniting highly charged interactions that create eager coordination or draining conversations that spiral into depleted people and dysfunctional arrangements. We would do well to pay more attention to organizations as bodily experiences and to the nonlinear effects of these experiences on patterns of coordination.

Affective experiences like energy are also collective experiences. It is only possible to communicate with speech acts because other “texts”—like energy—are also available (Cooren, 2000). Energy enhances the communication process because it produces subjective physiological texts and expressive texts that people can interpret in conjunction with speech acts. Thus, researchers who pay attention to the energy people feel in their conversations can also use these texts to understand how people make sense of their situations and coordinate their activities.

Energy is also a collective experience because affect tends to converge among people who interact with each other (Kelly & Barsade, 2001). For example, if we were to plot the energy that Tony and Theresa reported feeling across time and side by side, Tony’s side of the “landscape” would be mostly flat, with one bump and then an abrupt, steep rise at the end. Theresa’s side would be much bumpier than Tony’s but would have the same abrupt, steep rise at the end. Researchers who examine these plots could see where Tony and Theresa began to converge affectively and could compare this observation with the speech acts (and perhaps even the interpretations) that occurred at this point.
By associating speech acts and interpretation with affective convergence, we may be able to predict what arrangements of activities are likely to have a significant continuing impact on group behavior. For example, if activities get arranged but energy does not converge, then some of the people may not be energized about the way activities were arranged and may not put as much effort into accomplishing the goals that they coordinated to achieve. Thus, we propose that the energy that people feel as they coordinate indicates the degree to which those people will accomplish their intended goals.

Scholars who examine coordination as energy-in-conversation can gain new insights into the choices, effort, well-being, physiological experience, feedback processes, expressive cues, and affective convergence of people who coordinate. However, energy is just one of two major dimensions of affect. The other is tension (Thayer, 1989). Future theoretical development that considers the role of tension in conversation would help us to explain the role of negative affective experiences, such as anger, in the coordination process. Some people suggest that anger is an energizing experience and that it is wrong to treat energy only as positive. While we acknowledge that anger could increase energetic arousal, we believe it is more likely to be associated with tense arousal and to be less energizing than it is arousing (i.e., it involves activation of bodily subsystems). Whether energizing or arousing, however, anger and other negative affective experiences can play important roles in the coordination process, and in future research scholars should address these possibilities.

Complementing Affect with Interpretations and Text

Our model also contributes to the work of social psychologists who have identified the coordinating properties of affective experiences. For example, scholars such as Keltner and Kring argue that emotions coordinate by “signal[ing] socially relevant information,” “evok[ing] emotional responses in others,” and “serv[ing] as incentives” (1998: 322). We agree with these observations. However, by incorporating affect (in particular, energy) into a (largely linguistic) communication-based theory of coordination, we learn how affect signals, evokes, and serves as an incentive. By treating energy as text, we can see how people interpret (or misinterpret) energy texts and speech acts, how these interpretations affect subsequent energy texts and speech acts, how energy and speech acts contribute to the order and meaning of narratives, and how people can interpret these texts again and again.

Interpretation plays a key role in our model of coordination as energy-in-conversation and affects how well people can use energy and speech acts to coordinate. This is an important difference between Cooren’s (2000) theory and earlier theory on speech acts. In earlier theory on speech acts, Searle (1969) and Austin (1975) argued that people understand speech acts because they understand the rules of language. We, however, argue, in agreement with Cooren, that when people generate energy or speech acts, they generate texts that others interpret, and those interpretations may or may not be the same as the interpretations of the person who generated the energy and speech acts. This interpretive perspective offers two theoretical developments to research on the coordinating properties of affect and suggests new avenues for research.

The first contribution that comes from treating coordination through speech acts and energy as an interpretive process is a model of coordination that is both subjective and objective. As Cooren (2000) points out, a physical or discursive object (such as those transferred in speech acts) is an “agent or agency of some subject’s action (the subjective component) [which a subject puts] into material form or text (the objective component)” (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999: 11). This balance between subjectivity and objectivity is important, because speech acts and energy are both subjective and both objective, making it possible to integrate them into our model. Thus, when people experience energetic arousal, they not only experience a feeling of energy but also experience subsystems of their body moving from quiescence to activation, which is expressed in their facial expressions, posture, body movement, prosody, and even in the effort they exert in activities (Thayer, 1989). These expressions and felt changes in the physical body are “material forms” or texts (objective component), which act as the agent of that person’s action (subjective component).
Thus, by incorporating energy into Cooren’s theory, we are able to treat energy both as a part of conversations themselves and as a personal, physical experience. Objective texts can influence situations beyond those they are generated in because they can be reinvoked and reinterpreted at later dates (Cooren, 2000), and they can enable groups or organizations to act as independent entities because organizations are the texts that comprise them (Fairhurst & Putnam, 1999). This objective property of “energy as text,” we propose, enables momentary or short-lived affective experiences to continue having impact long after the experience has ended.

The second contribution from treating coordination through speech acts and energy as an interpretive process is that we can see the paths that people use to generate energy for their organizational activities: interpretations of narratives and speech acts that increase or decrease people’s autonomy, competence, and relatedness. By identifying these paths, we ground this process in knowable conditions for energy generation. Also, by identifying these paths, we reveal at least one means to begin studying the relationships among energy, narratives, and texts: researchers can use energy and speech act texts, in conjunction with reports of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, to test the relationships we propose.

Coordination in Energized Conversations

We also contribute to the work of conversation analysts. Conversation analysts recognize that affective expression plays a role in how conversations unfold (Capella & Street, 1985) and that the sequencing of turn taking in conversations affects the structure of social arrangements (Boden, 1994). Our model adds to this work because of our consideration of the objective nature of texts and because of our narrative approach to the understanding of conversational structures. We discussed the benefit of a subjective-objective approach to understanding coordination, conversation, and energy above. Therefore, we focus primarily on narrative here.

Narratives provide a sequencing structure for conversations and for the activities that conversations arrange (Cooren, 2000). The narrative sequence is based on a goal, in which the subject seeks to acquire an object, as follows. A manipulation occurs that makes the subject desire the object. The subject engages in tests and receives gifts that give the subject the competence to acquire the object. The subject performs the act of acquiring the object. And the subject receives sanction for acquiring the object (Greimas, 1988).

Researchers who examine conversations with this narrative structure can uncover power dynamics. For example, when a person uses a directive to manipulate others, that person is using a speech act to impose a goal (narrative structure) on others—that is, telling them what role they have to play in what narrative or sub-narrative (Cooren, 2000). A person who receives a directive can challenge the directive (a contest of power), accept the subordinate role and submit to the directive (obey those with power), submit to the directive but interpret it as “doing a favor” for the person who utters the directive (give up power temporarily), or submit to the directive as a way of putting collective goals ahead of individual goals and making a collective subject (share power). All of these actions can have a significant effect on the energy people feel, because people are likely to interpret their power in ways that have a significant impact on how autonomous, competent, and related they feel.

Sequential structures and power dynamics are only two of the many advantages we obtain by viewing conversations and coordination through a narrative lens. People use narratives and narrative structures to solve problems, suspend irreconcilable alternatives, socialize, generate commitment, learn, make sense, symbolize, control, and create meaning (see Boyce, 1996, for a review of this literature). We could enrich our model further by incorporating any of these other narrative characteristics. For example, an examination of the narrative structure of conversations could help us to learn why some conversations make more sense than others (Weick & Browning, 1986), how some “characters” could be “emancipated” from the captive nature of the organizational narratives in which they participate (Gabriel, 1999), or how people engage others in narratives by enhancing the novelty or credibility of their narratives (Barry & Elmes, 1997). Space considerations prevent us from integrating our model into the broad field of narrative theory, but these are important areas for further developing our model.
Location in “Traditional” Organization Studies

Our model contributes to research on the equivalency of communication and coordination, on the coordinating properties of affect, and on conversation analysis in organizations. While organizational scholars use these bodies of literature to explain organizational behavior, this literature tends to fall more squarely in the disciplines of communications, psychology, and sociology. Therefore, we now consider how our model fits into “traditional” discussions of coordination in organization science. We use Figure 1 to frame this discussion. The figure illustrates what happens when people are interdependent. The solid arrows illustrate the focus of our theory, and the dotted arrows illustrate the focus of research on performance in interdependent situations.

Research on performance in interdependent situations—if it “measures” coordination at all—measures coordination as communication. Thus, the relationships we depict with solid arrows tend to be lumped into variables like the “accuracy” or “amount” of communication. As a result, researchers manipulate types of interdependence. Other scholars who study group performance take a motivational approach. For example, group goal researchers (e.g., O'Leary-Kelly, Mortocchio, & Frink, 1994; Weldon, Jehn, & Pradhan, 1991) study how goals affect variables like direction and effort, and they control for variables like skill and feedback. Researchers using both approaches often overlook what coordination is and how it is accomplished—the focus of our theory. Not only do we contribute a description of what coordination is and how it gets accomplished; we also reconsider how the processes of coordination and motivation are intertwined in everyday organizational experience and provide a means to explore what makes coordination meaningful.

Coordination is a motivational process. We begin the process of reintegrating our understanding of these processes (Heath & Staudenmayer, 2000) by describing how people generate energy and direction in the conversations in which they coordinate. As illustrated in Figure 1, the energy people generate or deplete in conversation affects the effort they devote to activities, and people find direction for their efforts in their interpretations of conversational texts. (For example, when a person utters a directive, the receiver’s interpretation of that directive gives him or her direction regarding what activity to perform and how.) These activities are not limited to physical activities but also include subsequent speech acts. Thus, efforts to coordinate motivate subsequent coordination activities (e.g., speech acts), as well as the activities (e.g., subsequent conversations, physical activities) that follow. People coordinate by using speech acts to impose narrative structures onto situations, people know in what direction to devote effort based on how they interpret these narratives and speech acts, and people devote more or less effort to coordinated activities based on how much energy they feel for the activities.

Practical Contributions

In a world of accelerating change and increasing complexity, people must coordinate more and more often, and their ability to accomplish the goals that they coordinate to achieve is more crucial. People should be more likely to accomplish these goals to the extent that they interpret and respond to the texts that others generate in appropriate ways. By focusing on energy texts as well as on verbal and written texts, people may be more likely to find important nuances in coordination efforts that improve the direction of their efforts. And if people manage the coordination process in ways that increase their own and others’ energy, this process should also increase the effort that people invest in subsequent activities and should increase the well-being of the people who participate (Ryan & Frederick, 1997).

People can coordinate in ways that energize conversational participants by asking questions like “Is there a way to coordinate that will minimize or eliminate the need for people to submit to others’ narratives?” (e.g., “Can we create a collective subject, or involve them in the process of renarration?”), or “How will this arrangement of activities affect people’s autonomy, competence, and relatedness?”

Conclusion

Our theory of coordination as energy-in-conversation reveals how energy is a text affecting coordination according to people’s interpre-
tations, that coordination is an affective process with dynamic contours that are consequential for creating and maintaining organizational arrangements, and that narratives and speech acts affect both the effort and direction of subsequent actions. These contributions can be used to renarrate the way in which organizational scholars study coordination. We hope that those of us who tell the story of the future of research on coordination do so with energy, zest, vitality, and enthusiasm. We intend to.

REFERENCES


**Ryan W. Quinn** is an assistant professor of organizational behavior at Washington University in St. Louis. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. He studies the subjective experience of organizational practices, including topics such as coordination, change, energy, flow, courage, and empowerment.

**Jane E. Dutton** is the William Russell Kelly Professor of Business Administration at the University of Michigan. She received her Ph.D. from Northwestern University. Her research interests include high-quality connections, thriving at work, compassion, resilience, energy, and organizations—all part of a focus on positive organizational scholarship.