

Is Symmetrical Communication Ethical and Effective?

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore two questions: 1) Is symmetrical communication in public relations practice inherently ethical? 2) Is symmetrical communication effective in terms of public relations effectiveness and organizational effectiveness? Three surveys are undertaken to test seven research hypotheses for the purpose of a cross-validation of research findings. The results suggest that symmetrical communication is inherently ethical. Moreover, symmetrical communication indeed contributes to several performance measures, which include favorable organizational reputation, positive media exposure, positive market performance, overall organizational effectiveness, conflict resolution, and crisis management.

Key Words: symmetrical communication, public relations, ethical communication, effects, public relations effectiveness, organizational effectiveness

Purpose

Public relations professionals, functioning in the roles of organizational boundary spanners and communication managers (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Ehling, 1992), often help an organization manage its responses when communicating with its constituencies in order to cope with rapid environmental changes (White & Dozier, 1992). Given such a contribution to organizations, public relations, however, has been coined as an unethical practice from two aspects. First, research has revealed the prevailing existence of a "personal influence" pattern in public relations practice in an international setting (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang & Lyra, 1995), and this pattern has been perceived as being performed in an asymmetrical and unethical manner (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1996).

The second aspect concerning the unethical implication of public relations is regarded to the practice of persuasion (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1992). Miller (1989) argues that persuasion and public relations are “Two ‘Ps’ in a Pod” — that communication and persuasion are associated inextricably. Miller contended that communication or public relations are the way in which people attempt to exert control over their symbolic environment. Likewise, Lowe (1987) paralleled Miller (1989) and defined public relations as a practice of control.

Several scholars, adopting a rhetorical perspective, have argued against the idea that persuasion might be inherently unethical (Heath, 1992a). For example, Nelson (1994) raised the question: When is persuasion unethical? Bivins (1987) even distinguished between the ethics of counselor who are considered as symmetrical practitioners and those advocates considered as asymmetrical practitioners. He suggested that an *advocate* has an inherent problem in that it leads public relations practitioners to act only in the client organization's self interest. However, Bivins (1987) held that an ethical standard can be met if a public relations practitioner reveals the motives (reasons) that underlie his/her asymmetrical publicity. Likewise, Heath (1992b, pp. 46-57) wrote that persuasion could be ethical if it meets three rhetorical principles: standards of truth and knowledge, good reasons, and perspectivist criticism. The debate on "when is persuasion unethical" (Nelson, 1994) reserves the possibility for the co-existence of persuasion and ethical

communication.

In response to the claim of unethical implications, the literature of public relations seems to suggest endorsing the need for two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and their constituencies (Anderson, 1992; J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992; Huang, 1994; Pavlik, 1989). J. Grunig (1989) and J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) promoted that the two-way symmetrical communication model provides the normative ideal and effective public relations for most situations.

Despite the intensive discussion in support of symmetrical communication, the concept of symmetrical communication arouses more fervent debate than most other aspects in the generic theory of public relations. The first facet of the debate in the literature is centered on the nature of symmetrical communication, especially on the question of whether or not symmetrical communication is inherently ethical, or if asymmetrical communication is inherently unethical. Basically, several scholars contend that the personal-influence model can be practiced ethically or unethically; what actually makes a difference is the “worldview” that is pre-occupied in the public relations practitioners (J. Grunig, 2001, p.26). Namely, the extent of “symmetry” (see J. Grunig, 1992) employed decides whether the practice of public relations is ethical or unethical. If this position is accepted, then the next logic and important question would be: Is symmetrical communication inherently ethical?

The second facet relates to the effect of symmetrical communication. Three main problem areas exist in the issue concerning the effect of symmetrical communication. First, although the published works appear to support the use of symmetrical communication between organizations and activists (Anderson, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992; Huang, 1994; Pavlik, 1989), these supports primarily come from evidence showing that the three most typical models of public relations used — press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical — look to be ineffective in dealing with activism (Huang, 2001a). Little evidence has demonstrated the direct, positive effects of symmetrical communications.

The second problem area concerns the issues of "one-best style" and the underlying

"value-free" concept of "excellent" public relations, i.e., symmetrical communication (Leichty & Springston, 1993). Leichty and Springston (1993) questioned the effectiveness of an organization consistently using the same public relations model across stakeholders over time. They contended that public relations models should be measured at "the relational level," rather than be aggregated "across publics and relational stages and globally characterized as an organization's overall public relations practice" (p. 334). Leichty and Springston (1993) further argued that, in fact, most organizations practice a combination of various models of public relations and that the contingency approach to the models makes them more practical.

The third contention relates to the controversy on whether symmetrical communication is of a normative nature or of both normative and descriptive natures. Sun (1994) and Van der Meiden (1993) argued that the two-way symmetrical model only prescribes what an organization should do, without actually representing the reality. They maintained that with a cost-and-benefit assessment, public relations practitioners always serve corporate interests. Likewise, Sun (1994) pointed out the slim possibilities for an organization to actually practice a symmetrical model. Murphy (1991), equating the two-way symmetrical communication model to a pure cooperation model in game theory, held that symmetrical communication is difficult to find in the real world. Along the same lines, Van der Meiden (1993) criticized a symmetrical worldview as unrealistic, inasmuch as it disconnects "its communicative activities from its immediate or removed interests" (quoted in J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996, p. 15).

Grounded on the above discussion, the purpose of the paper is twofold. The first purpose is to explore the nature of symmetrical communication, or specifically, the relationship between symmetrical communication and ethical communication. The second is to investigate the effects of symmetrical communication in terms of public relations effectiveness and organizational effectiveness. Namely, this paper will first investigate whether or not symmetrical communication is inherently ethical and then the extent to which symmetrical communication contributes to various aspects of organizational effectiveness is explored.

Conceptualization

This section will first conceptualize the notions of symmetrical communication and ethical communication. The relationship of these two concepts will then be explored, followed by the investigation of the effects of symmetrical communication. The research proposition and research hypotheses are developed along the course of the conceptualization.

Symmetrical Communication

J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined public relations as "the management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 6). Two worldviews (J. Grunig, 1987), represented by the models of public relations, characterize the communication purpose: asymmetrical and symmetrical. The first such view is an egocentric perspective and the other view is an altruistic (or others-oriented) perspective out of which develops the two-way symmetrical model of public relations.

Organizations with a symmetrical worldview see communication as interactive behavior in which two or more systems construct cognitions and attitudes together so that they behave in ways that are either "synergistic or symbiotic" (J. Grunig, 1989, p. 13). The following presuppositions underlie the symmetrical worldview: communication leads to understanding, holism, interdependence, an open system, a moving equilibrium, equality, autonomy, innovation, responsibility, conflict resolution, decentralization of management, and interest group liberalism (Grunig & White, 1992). On the other hand, organizations with asymmetrical worldviews see communication as a tool that they use to change the cognitions, attitudes, or behaviors of another person, organization, or similar system. Concepts germane to the asymmetrical worldview include internal orientation, closed system, efficiency, elitism, conservatism, tradition, and central authority (Grunig & White, 1992).

In summary, symmetrical communication is conceptually based upon J. Grunig and his colleague's (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) original idea of communication purpose. Whether the communication purposes are balanced, i.e., whether the communicators are willing to initiate changes from their side, is the key to symmetrical communication. Namely, that an intent to initiate

change on the part of an organization is the focal point in symmetrical communication. If an organization is willing to make changes from its side or actually has done so already, then the theoretical presuppositions underlying the symmetrical worldview have been achieved.

Ethical Communication

Ethical communication is defined as involving the following three concepts: teleology, disclosure, and social responsibility. With respect to the first concept, teleology, debate on ethical theories always falls into two extremes: utilitarianism or teleology on the one extreme and Kant's categorical imperative or deontology on the other extreme. Grcic (1989) explained the differences between teleology and deontology:

Teleological theories hold that the ultimate criterion of moral goodness is either the sum total of good over evil consequences that the action brings about or whether it promotes individual functioning and development. A teleologist holds that an action is moral if it is a means to the appropriate moral good. A deontological approach, however, holds that the morality of an action is not primarily determined by its consequences but by certain intrinsic features of the intention or mental aspect of the contemplated action. A deontologist emphasizes doing one's duty and the nature of our motives and intentions, not the consequences that may result from our actions. (p. 4)

In a similar manner, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1996) equated teleological theories as consequentialist theories and deontological theories as non-consequentialist theories. In other words, public relations practitioners should first consider the impact of their communication behaviors on their colleagues, clients, organizations, and the larger society. The public relations practitioners also should then follow deontological rules to be honest, truthful, and sincere when communicating (Reinsch, 1990).

The second notion germane to public relations ethics is disclosure. According to Bok (1989), having secrets and having access to information is having more power. Disclosure thus could facilitate power symmetry. As indicated above, Bivins (1987) pointed out that advocacy has been the public relations practitioner's primary job. Advocacy, however, has inherent problems in that it

drives public relations practitioners to act purely in the client organization's interest. Thus, Bivins (1987) suggested that revealing the motives (reasons) of asymmetrical communication can secure ethical standards. In essence, the concept of disclosure is related to the basic right that Sullivan advocates human beings should have, i.e., possessing information and participating in decision-making (quoted in J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996, p. 22).

The "ritualistic" tone of the obligation of preserving secrets though is repeatedly set forth in professional codes of ethics (Bok, 1989). The question of when the obligation to maintain confidentiality between professionals and clients may be overridden, according to Jaksa and Pritchard (1994), is the subject of much controversy. Bok (1989) offered a strong premise of justification and rationale for professional secrecy. She stated that the premises are not usually separated and evaluated in the context of individual cases or practice. On the contrary, Jaksa and Pritchard (1994) argued that, even though professional codes and legal determinations themselves may consequentially sustain moral weight, they do not justify "blind acceptance" (p. 203).

The third critical concept in public relations ethics is social responsibility. Scholars maintain that public relations practitioners should perform their social roles and functions in a socially responsible manner (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1989) indicated that, in accordance with systems theory, public relations span the boundaries between organizations and the outside world. They emphasized that public relations practitioners should take into account the impact (or consequences) of their public relations activities on their publics. In this sense, public relations professionals would be the right actors to discharge corporate social responsibility for an organization.

As Amba-Rao (1993) indicated, social responsibility has been defined variously in different contexts by different scholars. Amba-Rao maintained that the concept generally involves decisions, actions, and outcomes regarding issues, stakeholders, and the society. In addition, Donaldson's (1989) concepts of "minimal duty" and "maximal duty" are appropriate for consideration. Public relations professionals should meet the bottom-line standards of "minimal duties" for an organization's stakeholders, e.g., the community, employees, and consumers, and then further

endeavor to fulfill the "maximal duty" as an act of corporate good citizenship (Donaldson, 1989).

Donaldson (1989) specified the "minimal duty" for multinational corporate social responsibility as "enhancing the welfare of consumers and employees, respecting the rights and justice of the people in the society, and minimizing harm or other negative effects such as misuses of power or depletion of natural resources" (quoted in Amba-Rao, 1993, p. 5). The "maximal duty," on the other hand, would be an act of good corporate citizenship, such as supporting Third World development programs or economic aid.

In a similar vein, Naor (1982) suggested that social responsibility satisfies social needs and promotes public welfare. Sethi (1975) also maintained that, in the highest phase of responsibility — social responsiveness — a corporation takes anticipatory actions with a commitment towards social goals (Sethi, 1975, cited in Amba-Rao, 1993). In Carroll's (1991) pyramid of corporate social responsibility, the highest level is "philanthropic responsibilities," which suggests being a good corporate citizen, making contributions to the community, and improving one's quality of life.

Donaldson's (1989) notions of "minimal duty" and "maximal duty" correspond to the idea of "teleology" as suggested in J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1996), which emphasized that an organization should consider the impact of its communication behaviors on its constituencies and the larger society. On the other hand, the idea of "public interests" seems to be a focal concept in Naor's (1982), Sethi's (1975), and Carroll's (1991) conceptualizations of social responsibility. Moreover, "disclosure" is another aspect of communication ethics (Bok, 1989). I adopt these focal concepts in order to develop the measures of ethical communication in this study.

The Relationship Between Symmetrical Communication and Ethical Communication

With regard to the relationship between symmetrical communication and ethical communication, two opposing positions exist in the literature of public relations. The first view postulates that ethical communication and symmetrical communication often co-exist (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996). For example, J. Grunig and his colleagues contended that the two-way symmetrical model reformulates public relations as a more ethical practice. Specifically, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1996) held that "public relations will be inherently ethical if it follows the principles

of the two-way symmetrical model" (p. 40). J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1996) further wrote that it is possible to practice public relations both asymmetrically and ethically, but this combination is very difficult. J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) even contended that the two-way symmetrical model avoids the dilemma of ethical relativism inasmuch as it specifies ethics as a process of public relations rather than as an outcome. Likewise, Pearson (1989) noted, "it is a moral imperative to improve the quality of these communication relationships, that is, to make them increasingly dialogical [symmetrical]" (quoted in J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996, p. 40). The empirical research in the existing literature of public relations actually demonstrates that the symmetrical presuppositions of an organization can contribute to achieving several ethical characteristics of public relations, such as the concerns of ethics and social responsibility, and the empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition (Karlberg, 1996; Lauzen & Dozier, 1994). Likewise, Culbertson (1995) suggested that three principles stand out to help define and explain truly effective public relations around the world: two-way symmetrical practice, well-trained and educated practitioners, and the empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition.

The second and opposing view, however, considers symmetrical communication and ethical communication as two different conceptual dimensions (J. Grunig, 2001). Contradicting his previous argument, J. Grunig (2001) maintained that although a symmetrical model should be inherently ethical, other models could be ethical, too, depending on the rules used to ensure ethical practice. In this line of reasoning, J. Grunig (2001) separated ethical communication and symmetrical communication as two different dimensions. Based upon J. Grunig's (2001) later argument, the first research hypothesis is posed:

Research Hypothesis 1: Ethical communication and symmetrical communication are fundamentally distinguishable, but inter-correlated factors represent public relations practice.

This section discusses the question concerning the ways in which symmetrical communication contributes to public relations effectiveness and organizational effectiveness (J. Grunig, L. Grunig & Dozier, 1995). In the field of public relations, various perspectives have been adopted to

investigate public relations effectiveness (Hon, 1997; Kim, 2001; Huang, 2001a, 2001b). The literature suggests that measuring public relations performance is complex due to its multidimensional nature (see Hon, 1997; Huang, 2002). In order to provide a comprehensively analytical framework of public relations performance, this paper first consults Huang's (2002) three direct-level measures of public relations effectiveness and Heath's (2001) two paradigms of public relations values representing organizational effectiveness.

Huang (2002) used the following three measures to represent direct-level public relations effectiveness, i.e., 1) organizational reputation (J. Grunig, 1993; Kim, 2001), 2) communication effects (Bissland, 1990; Lindenmann, 1988, 1993, 1995), and 3) organization-public relationships (J. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Huang, 2001b). It should be noted, however, that this paper will not investigate the aspect of organization-public relationships, because this direction of research has been a central topic for the past two decades and has led to a preponderance of empirical findings (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000; J. Grunig, 2000; J. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon, 1997, 1998; Huang, 2001a; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning & Wilson, 1999; Wilson, 2000; Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995; L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Vercic, 1997).¹ Given the fruitful research results on the aspect of organization-public relationship, this paper will focus on exploring the other two performance measures of public relations effectiveness, i.e., organization reputation and media exposure.

Two Measures of Public Relations Effectiveness.

Organization reputation. To date, interest in the effects of public relations has led to investigate public relations effectiveness from the perspective of reputation management. Some published works have revealed that the ultimate aim of public relations is to communicate the reputation of the organization (e.g., Hon, 1997; Kim, 2001). J. Grunig (1993) considered reputation as representing the behavioral relationships of an organization with its publics. This paper adopts Grunig's (1993) and Huang's (2002) conceptualization and defines corporate reputation as the

¹ Basically, empirical research studies have demonstrated that public relations in general and symmetrical communication in particular (Huang, 2001a) increase organizational effectiveness by building stable, quality, long-term relationships with strategic constituencies.

aggregate perception of an organization (Marken, 1990) and poses research hypothesis 2:

Research Hypothesis 2: Symmetrical communication is a function of favorable organizational reputation.

Media exposure. Researchers have long investigated the communication effects of public relations from two respects: 1) measures of communication output or media exposure, e.g., quantity of output, number of media contacts, and quality and quantity of media placements (see Dozier & Ehling, 1992; Bissland, 1990; Lindenmann, 1988; 1993; 1995), and 2) measures of communication effects, generally assumed to be awareness, interest, cognition, attitudes, or behavior (see Hon, 1997; J. Grunig, 1993). The basic assumption of examining the effect of public relations from the perspective of communication effects is that communicated messages should cause changes in knowledge, attitudes, and behavior among the targeted publics. In academia, measures of communication effect are more commonly used, but by contrast in the field of practical public relations, the most frequently-used evaluation measures are communication outputs and media exposure (Bissland, 1990). In this current study the latter measure is investigated and this focus leads to Research Hypothesis 3.

Research Hypothesis 3: Symmetrical communication is a function of positive media exposure.

Revenue-generation Effects of Public Relations Value.

In addition to the above two effect measures of public relations effectiveness (Huang, 2002),² Heath (2001) investigated values of public relations from the perspective of organizational effectiveness. Heath (2001) used two paradigms to define the value of public relations to organizations: revenue generation and cost reduction. He emphasized that public relations practitioners are interested in a revenue-generating paradigm, while scholars are interested in a cost-reducing paradigm in view that the values that are often invisible should be accounted for. In this current study the measures of market input and overall organizational effectiveness are used to

² Several published works have demonstrated that excellent public relations directly or indirectly add value to organizational effectiveness. For example, Hon (1997) demonstrated that effective public relations helps organizations survive, make money, save money, save lives, and helps other organizational functions make money.

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represent the revenue-generating paradigm, while conflict resolution and crisis management are adopted as the measure for cost-reducing paradigm.

Market input. With respect to the revenue-generating paradigm, the area encompassing marketing effects has been especially emphasized. Specifically, Kim (2001) made evident that public relations exert influence on organizations by increasing financial performance and company revenue. Moreover, Kim (1997) also provided empirical evidence about positive relations between a company's public relations and organizational returns across different industries and companies. Based upon the above discussion, Hypothesis 4 is thus posited.

Research Hypothesis 4: Symmetrical communication is a function of positive market performance.

Overall organizational effectiveness. A wide variety of general theories and models of organizational effectiveness have been adopted in the field of public relations, and a similarly wide ranging set of criteria measured. Several published works have indeed demonstrated that public relations positively influence organizational effectiveness from various aspects (Huang, 2001a, 2001b; Kim, 2001). Huang (2002) concluded that the measures of overall organizational effectiveness have been developed around two generic questions pertaining to either long-term versus short-term performance measures. In this current research hypothesis, the measure of overall organizational effectiveness regardless of any specific aspect is investigated. The basic assumption is that as long as the goals of organizations are achieved, either in their long-term or short-term natures, then the overall organizational effectiveness is realized. Moreover, this measure is considered as in the paradigm of revenue generation in this current study, because the realization of organizational goals should attain a financial bottom line to the least extent, given a wide spectrum of organization types.

Research Hypothesis 5: Symmetrical communication is a function of positive overall organizational effectiveness.

Cost-reduction Effects of Public Relations Value.

Conflict resolution. With respect to cost reduction paradigm, the effect of symmetrical

communication on conflict resolution has been investigated, as by J. Grunig et al. (1995) and L. Grunig, J. Grunig, and Vercic (1997), who first maintained that excellent public relations contribute to organizational effectiveness by managing conflict and by reducing the costs of conflict that result from regulation, pressure, and litigation. The results of published works seem to suggest endorsing the need for a two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and activists (Anderson, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992; Pavlik, 1989; Huang, 1994; 1997; 2001a). For example, Huang (1997) demonstrated that symmetrical communication could lead to cooperation from the organization's constituency in a conflict situation. Huang (2001a) further demonstrated that public relations could indeed reduce the conflicts between an organization and its stakeholders through favorable organization-public relationships that result from symmetrical communication. The above discussion leads to research Hypothesis 6.

Research Hypothesis 6: Symmetrical communication is a function of conflict resolution.

Crisis management. Research has revealed that public relations contribute to organization effectiveness via crisis management and crisis communications (Marra, 1998). Benoit (1997) maintained that part of the success due to crisis management effort is dependent on what an organization says and does during and after a crisis. Thus, the role of public relations on crisis management has been intensively examined (Coombs & Holladay, 2001; Benoit, 1997; Fearn-Banks, 1996; Williams & Moffitt, 1997)). Fruitful evidence has supported that appropriate response strategies help organizations pass through the challenges of media pressure and public criticism during crisis situations (Hearit, 1996; Benoit & Brinson, 1999). For example, in the case of Princess Diana's sudden and tragic death, people around the world were shocked and saddened by the event, and suspicions became aroused that the British Royal Family did not fully share in this grief. The apprehensions over the their lack of public sorrow and concern for their subjects created an enormous public relations problems, provoking the Queen of England to give an unprecedented speech to rebut those innuendos. Benoit and Brinson (1999) investigated the highly public illustration of royal public relations and evaluated the Queen Elizabeth's efforts as being generally well conceived and effective in terms of crisis management. Given such instances,

research Hypothesis 7 is posed:

Research Hypothesis 7: Symmetrical communication is a function of crisis management.

Method

Samples

Three surveys were undertaken to test the seven research hypotheses. The surveys conducted for three independent samples were designed for the purpose of cross-validating the research findings. Information was collected from real organizations' public relations practitioners and their constituencies as opposed to student samples. The three survey data sets include: 1) the first data set consists of 301 effective questionnaires surveyed to legislators and their assistants in the Second Plenary Session of the Third Legislative Yuan in Taiwan from April to June in 1997;³ 2) the second data set surveyed 1087 residents in Taiwan island-wide on the issue of the construction plant of the fourth nuclear power plant; and 3) the third survey concerning public relations practice was conducted to 326 public relations practitioners from Taiwan's Top 500 companies and from PR agencies in Taiwan.

In an effort to enhance the generalizability of the research findings, the three studies cover a variety of issues reflecting public relations practice, i.e., an executive-legislative relation under government public relations (1st study), a nuclear issue for a public utility company's public relations practice (2nd study), and the generic aspects of public relations, such as organizational reputation, media exposure, market input, etc., for corporate public relations practice (3rd study). It should be noted that the above-mentioned research design ensures that both perspectives of goal attainment (Mark, Salyer, & Geddes, 1997) and strategic constituencies (J. Grunig, 1992; Stone & Cutcher-Gershenfeld, 2002) are included in this current paper. The first and second data sets, which will be discussed later, are conducted in order to represent the perspective of strategic constituency,

³ The data was collected for and reported in Huang's (1997) unpublished dissertation. Partial statistical results of the PRSA scale, such as reliability efficiencies and the model CFI, have been presented at the 1998 AEJMC conference (Huang, 1998).

while the third data set is related to the organization's goal attainment.

Study 1. The first study, of which the data were collected from the perspective of strategic constituency, was conducted on legislators and their assistants in the Second Plenary Session of the Third Legislative Yuan in 1997 in Taiwan. The main purpose is to test the role of symmetrical communication in executive-legislative relations. A census involving a population of 758 legislative members and their assistants was contacted for the survey, and 301 valid questionnaires were returned by the legislative members and their assistants. The survey yielded a 0.45 response rate for all respondents and a 0.54 for legislative assistants. Forty-nine percent of the respondents were males, and 51 percent were females. The educational level ranged from some high school to having completed a doctoral degree. Moreover, the proportion of party members represented in this sample closely paralleled the actual proportion of seats held by these parties in the Second Plenary Session of the Legislative Yuan.

Study 2. Study 2 is an island-wide telephone survey. The topic surveyed the surrounding controversy over the planned construction of Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant and the proposed company, i.e., the Taiwan Power Company (TPC). An island-wide survey provides enough information to capture the full range of TPC's constituencies' opinions so as to represent the perspective of strategic constituency. Essentially, an investigation into TPC's activities in the area of public relations as well as the effects of symmetrical communication can provide valuable insight into public relations effectiveness. For the island-wide telephone survey, the sample came from a computer-generated randomized list. The computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) design was adopted in the current study, and the method of stratification according to cities, townships, and villages was incorporated into the sampling design. A random sample of 1,495 Taiwan residents, aged 20 and above, was contacted by telephone in June of 1999. A total of 408 respondents turned down the interview, yielding an effective sample of 1,087 respondents. The response rate was 72.7% with a sampling deviation of $\pm 3.0\%$ at a confidence level of 95%. Forty-eight percent were males, and the educational levels ranged from some having completed high school to those having completed a master's degree. This sample appears to accurately reflect

the make-up of Taiwan's population, as it is a representative of the island's population in terms of gender, age, and residential area.

Study 3. The final attempt at hypotheses testing was conducted on a sample of public relations practitioners ($n = 326$) drawn from Taiwan's Top 500 companies and from public relations agencies. In contrast to the previous two studies, Study 3 represents the organizational perspective. In this survey sample, 66 percent held bachelor degrees and another 25 percent had achieved a graduate degree. The average age of the respondents was 36.61 years ($S.D. = 10.28$) and 61 percent were females. With respect to the respondents' organizational profiles, 70 percent served as in-house public relations representatives, while 30 percent were in public relations agencies. The average tenure of respondents in the Top-500 companies fell in the 0-6 years range (68.8%) and in the 0-4 years range (73.2%) for that in PR agencies.

Survey Instrumentation

In Study 1 respondents made up of legislative members and their assistants were instructed to think about public relations activities held by the public relations practitioners in the governmental department that they contact the most frequently. The respondents were then asked to circle the number that best described their perception of the public relations practice of the said department. Similarly, the respondents in Study 2 were asked to assess the public relations practice involving the nuclear issue employed by the Taiwan Power Company (TPC). Thus, for the first and second studies of data collection, the survey instruments primarily represent an evaluation of an organization's perspective of public relations practice. In Study 3 public relations practitioners from agencies and Top-500 companies were asked to self-assess their public relations practice and their contribution to the organization.

For measures, the judgmental measure — i.e., asking informants for their assessments of public relations practice — is used. It is worth attention that judgmental measures have been widely viewed as valid in many fields (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993; Deshpande, Farley, & Webster, 1993), because significant evidence exists to indicate a close association between objective and perceptual measures of business performance (e.g., Dess and Robinson, 1984; Jaworski and Kohli, 1993;

Pearce, Robbins, & Robinson, 1987; Venkatraman and Ramanujam, 1987).

Symmetrical Communication and Ethical Communication. A Likert-type scale ranging from (1) *never*, (2) *seldom*, (3) *sometimes*, to (4) *often* is used in the symmetrical and ethical communication measures. Measurement items are adopted from previously-published established scales (J. Grunig, 1984; Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995; Huang, 1999). In Study 1 the items included in symmetrical communication are: 1) They not only tried to change our attitude and behavior, but also tried to change the attitude and behavior of the management at said department; 2) They tried to change their department's behaviors and policies after considering our opinions; 3) They consulted those influenced by their policies during decision-making; 4) Their main goal was to get us to do what they want.

The questions related to ethical communication include:⁴ 1) They considered how their public relations influenced us; 2) They provided us with accurate information; 3) They considered the public interest more than their own individual interests; 4) They considered the public's interests more than their own department's interests; 5) They engaged in open lobbying; 6) They engaged in private lobbying; 7) They told us their motives and reasons for their actions.

Performance Variables. As previously mentioned, this paper tries to provide a comprehensive picture to reflect as many aspects of public relations performance as possible. Six performance variables are investigated. Due to time and space limits on the surveys in the three studies, one item instead of a multi-item scale is used for measuring each outcome construct. Given the deficiency, the similar format of question wording for all performance measures is adopted so that a comparison across measures can be made. The question for measuring organizational reputation in Study 2 is "Please rate the overall corporate image of the TPC on a 0-100 scale." In Study 3, the question is "Please rate the extent to which public relations contributes to the

⁴ The respondents in the pre-tests maintained that the concept of moral responsibility was ambiguous. Thus, I use "engaging in public lobbying" and "engaging in private lobbying" to clarify the concept. Likewise, pre-test respondents indicated that they did not understand the notion of social responsibility. After having it tested in three pre-tests, I now eliminate the item involving social responsibility and instead use two items involving public interest to measure this similar notion.

reputation of your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale?”⁵ The questions for measuring media exposure are “Please rate the TPC’s overall communication performance involving the nuclear issue on the mass media on a 0-100 scale” in Study 2, and “Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to media coverage and exposure for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale?” in Study 3.

To measure market input, the question asked in Study 2 is: “Given a chance, will you change to a different utility company?” Since the item is negatively worded, the corresponding responses are reversed for statistical calculation. The question posed in Study 3 to the public relations practitioners is “Please rate the extent to which public relations contributes to the market sales for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale.”

With the regard to overall organizational effectiveness, respondents in Study 2 were questioned “How agreeable do you consider continuing Taiwan’s fourth nuclear power plant.” The major reason for asking this question is because the nuclear controversy of the proposed plant has been postponed for over 30 years, and continuing with the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant is TPC’s organizational mission. In Study 3 the question for measuring overall organizational effectiveness is “Please rate the extent to which public relations contributes to the achievement of the goals for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale.”

The measures of conflict resolution and crisis management are difficult to be measured from the constituencies’ perspective as designed in Study 2. Thus, questions are posed specifically involving the nuclear issue. The item for measuring conflict resolution is “Generally speaking, I am satisfied with TPC’s problem-definition and decision-making on the nuclear issue,” based upon the assumption that given such a satisfaction, the possibility of protests would be reduced. On the other hand, as for measuring crisis management, in view that trust is the essential component in crisis communication involving a nuclear issue (Fitchen, Hearth, & Ressen-

Raden, 1987; Krinsky & Plough, 1988; National Research Council, 1989), the question posed

⁵ The questions addressing the clients are specifically directed to those respondents working in public relations agencies.

Is Symmetrical Communication Ethical and Effective?

is “Generally, how do you trust TPC’s ability of operating a nuclear power plant”? In Study 3 the question posed for the measure of conflict resolution and crisis management is “Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to conflict resolution for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale,” and “Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to crisis management for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale,” respectively.

In order to enhance face validity it is worth noting that, before the three formal surveys were conducted, a group of expert judges (including 9 from TPC and 22 from corporations) were interviewed to explore the pertinence and accuracy of the initial pool of items intended to measure ethical communication and symmetrical communication.

Results

Research Hypothesis 1: Ethical communication and symmetrical communication are fundamentally distinguishable, but inter-correlated factors representing public relations practice.

Results. Appendix 1 contains all measure scales. Table 1 provides an overview of construct means, standard deviations, and correlations. The items concerning symmetrical communication and ethical communication used for testing hypothesis 1 are first tested in Study 1 and then cross-validated in Studies 2 and 3. Factor analyses are adopted for testing this hypothesis, revealing that the four items measuring symmetrical communication are separated into two groups with B8, B9, and C7 grouped together, while B1 has singled itself out. Item C7 is then removed from the factor due to its low factor loading (Table 2). Moreover, item B1 is also discarded, because it seems to belong to a different factor from the other items.

[INSERT TABLE 1 and 2 ABOUT HERE]

With regard to ethical communication, statistical results also reveal that two factors are extracted from the seven items. Items A14 and A15 are fused together as one factor, and the other five are grouped as another. Items A14 and A15, two items addressing lobbying, are thus removed first inasmuch as they might be considered by the respondents to reflect the behaviors of lobbying

itself, rather than the moral aspect of public relations that I am interested in investigating. Items C1 and C8 are also discarded, because of their low factor loadings, which leave items B6, B7, and B10 in the factor (Table 3).

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

As suggested in conceptualization, ethical communication and symmetrical communication often co-exist. Therefore, in order to test the relationship between these two dimensions, a factor analysis is conducted to combine the remaining two items on symmetrical communication (B8 and B9) and the three items on ethical communication (B6, B7, B10) (see Table 4). The results show that, indeed, only one factor is extracted. After taking the theoretical propositions into account, these stated items are included in one factor and renamed as "symmetrical/ethical communication." This new factor, symmetrical/ethical communication, is further tested for its reliability and validity across Study 2 and Study 3. The following criteria are tested: uni-dimensionality, internal consistency of items, and construct reliability.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

Uni-dimensionality. For the purpose of testing the uni-dimensionality of symmetrical/ethical communication, further factor analyses are conducted in Studies 2 and 3. These analyses indicate that this new dimension across two independent samples also remain as one factor (Table 5). Moreover, the exploratory factor analyses demonstrate that the overall goodness of fit (Table 6) supports unidimensionality (Steenkamp and van Trijp 1991). The CFIs of this factor across three consecutive studies are .87, .99, and .98, respectively.

[INSERT TABLE 5 and 6 ABOUT HERE]

Internal scale consistency and construct reliability. The internal consistency of the items in the factor is measured by Cronbach's alpha and construct reliability. The Cronbach's alpha values are .75, .72, and .71 respectively in the first, second, and third studies. The construct reliabilities that result from using the amount of total standardized variance/covariances explained by a factor to be divided by the total amount of standardized variance/covariances are .75, .74, and .76, respectively. Basically, a generally-accepted benchmark for adequate internal-consistency

reliability is .80 (Nunnally, 1978). On the other hand, having a construct reliability be over .70 is generally recommended to indicate "good" reliability (Miller, 1995). Compared between these two reliability tests, the results of construct validity are relied upon more, because the statistical assumption underlining Cronbach's alpha is less applicable in this study. In the summary, except for a comparatively low Cronbach's alpha in the second sample that is of a nation-wide, cross-sectional nature, the scale measure of symmetrical/ethical communication has acceptable and satisfactory uni-dimensionality, internal consistency of items, and construct reliability across three studies.

Validity. As previously suggested, a group of expert judges of nine of TPC's public relations practitioners in Study 2 and another 22 corporate practitioners in Study 3 were interviewed to test the pool of items used to assure the face validity. The interview ensures that the measurement is comprehensible and each question could elicit a valid response. Moreover, convergent validity is supported by all factor loadings being significant ($p < .01$) and nearly all R^2 exceeding .50 (Hildebrandt, 1987) (Table 5).

Discussions. The empirical data across three studies suggest that two concepts, i.e., teleology and symmetrical worldview, play essential roles in the factor of symmetrical/ethical communication. In Study 1, on the one hand, the notion of willingness to make changes on the part of an organization (symmetrical worldview) underlies items B8 and B9. On the other hand, items B7 and B10 reflect teleological theory (or consequentialist theory) that suggests an organization should consider the impact of communication behavior on its measurement constituencies and on the larger society (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996). The notion of symmetrical/ethical communication is replicated in Studies 2 and 3. In summary, the attempt to differentiate symmetrical communication from ethical communication has been proven to be in vain. The empirical data shows that the two factors, although hypothesized to be separate, eventually are grouped as one. In essence, the fusion of these two factors supports J. Grunig and L. Grunig's (1996) argument that "public relations will be inherently ethical if it follows the principles of the two-way symmetrical model" (p. 40). Lastly, it is worth noting that the notion of disclosure (Bok, 1989), which is measured by the item "We explained to them our motives and reasons for our

actions,” is finally excluded in the measurement due to its unstable property, showing that its factor loading is borderline in Study 1, and that it is factored in a different one with the others items in Study 3.

Research Hypotheses 2 and 3, measuring public relations effectiveness: Symmetrical communication is a function of favorable organizational reputation (H2) and positive media exposure (H3).

Having taken into account the appropriate properties of reliability and validity of symmetrical/ethical communication, the new dimension is used for hypothesis tests. These two hypotheses are partially supported. As shown in Table 7, the data indicate divergent results across two studies. In Study 3 symmetrical/ethical communication is an influential predictor of favorable organizational reputation and positive media exposure ($\beta = .181$, $p = .002$, and $\beta = .201$, $p = .001$, respectively). However, such significant relationships do not appear in Study 2.

[INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE]

Research Hypotheses 4 and 5, measuring revenue-generating effects of public relations value: Symmetrical communication is a function of market input (H4) and overall organizational effectiveness (H5).

These two hypotheses are fully supported. The results indicate that symmetrical/ethical communication effectively predicts market input and overall organizational effectiveness across two independent samples. In Study 2 the results reveal that symmetrical/ethical communication is a prediction of respondents' intention of market input ($\beta = -.363$, $p < .001$) and favorable agreement on the construction of the fourth nuclear power plant ($\beta = .365$, $p < .001$). The results of Study 3 are used to cross-validate the findings from Study 2. The results demonstrate that the respondents' self-assessed symmetrical/ethical communication have substantial power in predicting market sales ($\beta = .120$, $p = .042$) and overall organizational effectiveness ($\beta = .120$, $p = .040$).

Research Hypotheses 6 and 7, measuring the cost-reducing effects of public relations value: Symmetrical communication is a function of conflict resolution (H6) and crisis management (H7).

These two hypotheses are also fully supported across two samples. In Study 2 symmetrical/ethical communication is a function effectively predicting the potentiality of conflict resolution, which is demonstrated by the fact that the public is satisfied with TPC's problem-definition and decision-making on the nuclear issue ($\beta = .479, p < .001$). Moreover, symmetrical/ethical communication also has predictive power for crisis management, because the public trusts TPC's ability at operating a nuclear power plant ($\beta = .481, p < .001$). In Study 3, symmetrical/ethical can effectively predict the respondents' self-assessment that the conflicts between organizations and their stakeholders can be resolved ($\beta = .131, p < .05$) and that the crises can be managed ($\beta = .136, p < .05$). The causal paths from symmetrical/ethical communication to conflict resolution and crisis management are both statistically significant at the .05 level. In summary, the results indicate that symmetrical/ethical communication has a mild to moderate influence on these two cost-reduction measures across two studies, which are theoretically important for the effectiveness of public relations (Heath, 2000).

Discussion. The effects of symmetrical/ethical communication on performance measures can be discussed from two aspects. First, there are convergent and divergent findings in the two studies. The divergent results reveal that symmetrical/ethical communication was a precursor of positive organizational reputation and media coverage in Study 3, but not in Study 2, which suggests that such hypothesized relationships should be considered suggestive. The factor contributing to the insignificant associations in Study 2 may be due to the actual contextual situations. The construction plan for the fourth nuclear power plant has been postponed for more than 30 years, and years of heated controversy and public antagonism may have resulted in the public's negative stereotype and media coverage of the proposed entity, the TPC. The convergent results are the ways in which respondents perceive an organization's use of symmetrical/ethical communication, both from organizations' and constituencies' perspectives, how it affects their assessment of market intentions or market sales, the overall organizational performance, and the potentiality of conflict resolution and crisis management.

Second, comparing the effect sizes of the paths in two studies, most of the paths in Study 2 are

of moderate sizes, while those in Study 3 produce mild ones. Specifically, in Study 2 the paths ranged between 0.3 and 0.4, i.e., conflict resolution ($\beta = .479$, $p < .001$) and crisis management ($\beta = .481$, $p < .001$), followed by two revenue-generating measures, i.e., overall organizational effectiveness ($\beta = .365$, $p < .000$) and market input ($\beta = -.363$, $p < .000$). In Study 3, however, except for media exposure that the path is over 0.2 and organizational reputation reaches 0.2, all the other paths remain under 0.15.

The divergent results between the studies might result from two factors. The first factor is the nature of questions posed. The questions in Study 2 are directed to a specific issue, i.e., the nuclear power issue, in contrast to those in Study 3, which is general and non-focused. Public relations practices exert more evident effects in specific, focused issues than do general ones. The second factor also is concerned with the nature of measurement. Study 2 is investigated from the perspective of constituencies while Study 3 is from organizations. The difference between these two approaches deserves more future research.

Conclusion

Summary of the Findings

The relationship between symmetrical communication and ethical communication. In this study factor analyses are conducted in response to the question: Is symmetrical communication inherently ethical? Symmetrical communication is conceptualized by focusing on the intent to initiate changes on the part of an organization, in contrast to merely trying to change the cognitions, attitudes, or behaviors of the publics. On the other hand, the conceptualization of ethical communication includes three focal concepts: teleology, disclosure, and social responsibility. The attempt to differentiate symmetrical communication from ethical communication, however, proves to be in vain. Although hypothesized to be separate, the empirical data shows that the two factors eventually are grouped as one. In essence, the fusion of these two factors supports J. Grunig and L. Grunig's (1996) argument that "public relations will be inherently ethical if it follows the principles of the two-way symmetrical model" (p. 40). The focal notions underlying the items in the resultant

factor "symmetrical/ethical communication" include symmetrical worldview and teleology.

The effects of symmetrical/ethical communication on performance measures. The second purpose of this paper is to explore the effects of symmetrical communication, which are tested in Study 2 and Study 3. Table 7 indicates that across two independent samples, the significant relationships between symmetrical/ethical communication and all performance variables (except that media exposure and organizational reputation are of partial supports) are in the hypothesized, positive direction. These results provide strong empirical evidence for the cross-validation of the hypotheses posted in Conceptualization, which is especially noteworthy given that the samples examined differ considerably on demographic, economic and issue, dimensions, and differ on goal-attainment and strategic-constituency perspectives. After examining H4 to H7, which explicate the associations between symmetrical communication and two revenue-generating-related variables as well as two cost-reducing measures, consistent patterns of effects exist across two independent samples, i.e., symmetrical communication has the highest predictive power on conflict resolution and crisis management, followed by market input and overall organizational effectiveness.

Implication to Theories

The theoretical implications of the results can be discussed from three avenues. First, the results replicate the findings of Grunig and White (1992) and L. Grunig, J. Grunig and Vercic (1997) in that symmetrical/ethical communication, a critical component of excellent public relations, indeed contributes to several performance measures. Specifically, from both a perspective of organizations and their constituencies, an organization's use of symmetrical/ethical communication can predict most of the positive performance outcomes proposed in this study. Second, the empirical evidence of his study provides challenges to the criticism regarding the symmetrical worldview as being unrealistic, because of "its communicative activities from its immediate or removed interests" (Van der Meiden, 1993, as quoted in J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1996, p. 15). The empirical data in this study reveal that symmetrical communication actually serves organizations' interests. Third, this study also shows that the relationship between the generic principle of public relations, i.e., symmetrical communication, and their effects is indeed

universal and generic to different cultures. This study replicates the findings of the Excellence Study (L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Vercic, 1997) in that, in addition to the United States, Canada and United Kingdom, in Taiwan symmetrical communication also appears to contribute to various aspects of public relations effectiveness and organizational effectiveness. In essence, the findings support Culbertson's (1995) assertion that a symmetrical practice does stand out to help define and explain truly effective public relations.⁶

Fourth, following the suggestion of J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1996), this study moves beyond the four static public relations models and uses a continuous dimension to represent public relations strategies, i.e., symmetrical communication. A series of factor analyses and reliability tests furthermore demonstrate the viability of using symmetrical communication to describe an organization's public relations practice. Last, the empirical result involving H6 helps to demonstrate the relationship between symmetrical communication and conflict resolution. Essentially, this study contradicts previous works (L. Grunig, 1992; Huang, 1994; Huang, 2001a) in that this study indeed demonstrates that symmetrical/ethical communication could directly lead to conflict resolution.

Implications for Future Studies

This study has sought a systematic understanding through the inclusion of several performance measures and has tested their relationships with symmetrical/ethical communication. This attempt is guided by theoretical framework and comprehensive conceptualization, and has been tested on three independent samples. I believe it can serve as an adequate starting point for further research to investigate the variables involved and the relationships speculated. The following future research directions are suggested.

First, the critical next step should be qualitative research to explore in-depth contextual information as the basis for further data interpretation (Marshall & Rossman 1995; McCracken 1988). As suggested in Sypher (1990), qualitative research can "bring to life the nuances of work

⁶ Culbertson (1995) suggested that three principles stand out to help define and explain truly effective public relations around the world: two-way symmetric practice, well-trained and educated practitioners, and the empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition.

life and talk" (pp. 3-4). The findings should generate insight exploring the questions drawn from this study: What is the role of cultural factor on symmetrical communication and ethical communication? Does it play any role on the fusion of these two factors? Second, replication procedures are critical to further cross-validate the results obtained from this study. Concepts and relationships could be tested on different samples and cultures. Third, the findings concerning the effects of symmetrical/ethical communication on media coverage and organizational reputation should be viewed as being suggestive instead of conclusive, because only one study confirms the hypothesized relationships. A replication of other studies could help to ensure the generalizeability of the findings.

Fourth, as stated before, the concept of disclosure is not included in the measure, because of its unstable factor properties. Future research could explicate this notion conceptually and operationally. Moreover, the cultural implication into the notion of disclosure is also worth additional exploration, because of the differences between Oriental and Western cultures. Specifically, the challenge will result from the discrepancy in the fundamental purpose and nature of communication between the Oriental and Western views. On the one hand, the Chinese communication style tends to be high-context in contrast to Westerners' low-context style (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, Ting-Toomey, Nishida, Kim, & Heyman, 1996; Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998). On the other hand, as suggested in Scollon and Scollon (1994), in Western cultures the purpose of communication is information exchange. By contrast, people in Asian cultures communicate for the purpose of relationship building and maintenance; they emphasize relationships over communication. Based upon the above discussion, it is logical to question whether cultural difference is the factor that results in the exclusion of disclosure from symmetrical/ethical communication in this current paper. Thus, the role of culture on the relationship between disclosure and symmetrical/ethical communication is worth further exploration.

Lastly, it is worth noting that comparisons among the effects sizes of regression tests reveal that surprisingly, the effect sizes from constituencies' perspective (Study 2) are higher than the ones

from organizations' perspective (Study 3). Does this mean that the nature of symmetrical/ethical communication is more valued by the constituencies than by the organizations themselves? or, is symmetrical/ethical communication under-evaluated from a goal-attainment perspective? These observations may also deserve special attention in future research.

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Appendix 1: Items Measuring Symmetrical/Ethical Communication and Performance Measures in the Three Studies

Symmetrical/Ethical Communication

Study 1

B7: Considering the impact on us.

B8: Trying to change management.

B9: Consulting those influenced during decision-making.

B10: Considering public interest.

Study 2

T9: For the decisions about the interests of the public, TPC and the public have equal influences during communications?

T21: When communicating about nuclear power, TPC took into account the public's opinions.

T22: During the decision-making process, TPC consulted the public's opinions.

T23: The public has enough channels to express opinions about the impacts of the nuclear power on them.

Study 3

A13: We consulted those influenced by our policies and opinions during decision making.

A14: During communication, we took into account the possible negative impact on the public.

A15: We considered both their and our opinions and positions during communication.

A16: We considered how our public relations influenced them.

Performance Measures in Study 2 and Study 3

Study 2

Organizational reputation

Please rate the overall corporate image of TPC on a 0-100 scale.

Media exposure

Please rate TPC's overall communication performance involving the nuclear issue on the mass media on a 0-100 scale.

Market input

Given a chance, will you change to a different utility company?

Overall organizational effectiveness

How agreeable do you consider continuing Taiwan's fourth nuclear power plant.

Conflict resolution

Generally speaking, I am satisfied with TPC's problem-definition and decision-making on the nuclear issue

Crisis management

Generally, how do you trust TPC's ability at operating a nuclear power plant?

Study 3

Organizational reputation

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to the reputation of your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale?

Media exposure

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to the media coverage and exposure for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale?

Market input

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to the market sales for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale.

Overall organizational effectiveness

Is Symmetrical Communication Ethical and Effective?

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to the achievement of the goals for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale

Conflict resolution

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to conflict resolution for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale

Crisis management

Please rate the extent to which public relations contribute to crisis management for your organization (or clients) on a 0-100 scale

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviations of the Items of Symmetrical/Ethical Communication in the Three Data Sets

| Data Set | Items | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|------------|--|------|--------------------|
| Data Set 1 | B7: Considering the impact on us. | 2.75 | .81 |
| | B8: Trying to change management. | 2.34 | .80 |
| | B9: Consulting those influenced during decision-making. | 2.38 | .86 |
| | B10: Considering public interest. | 2.62 | .90 |
| Data Set 2 | T9: For the decisions about the interests of the public, TPC and the public have equal influences during communications? | 2.72 | .91 |
| | T21: When communicating about nuclear power, TPC took into account the public's opinions. | 2.42 | .91 |
| | T22: During the decision-making process, TPC consulted the public's opinions. | 1.95 | .86 |
| | T23: The public has enough channels to express opinions about the impacts of the nuclear power on them. | 1.94 | .96 |
| Data Set 3 | A13: We consulted those influenced by our policies and opinions during decision making. | 3.36 | .77 |
| | A14: During communication, we took into account the possible negative impact on the public. | 3.69 | .57 |
| | A15: We considered both their and our opinions and positions during communication. | 3.81 | .44 |
| | A16: We considered how our public relations influenced them. | 3.76 | .48 |

Table 2: Factor Loadings for Symmetrical Communication from Data Set 1

| Variables | <u>Loadings</u> | |
|---|-----------------|----------|
| | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
| B8: Trying to change management | .84 | .13 |
| B9: Consulting those influenced during decision-making | .78 | .05 |
| C7: Getting us to do what they want (R) ^a | .62 | -.55 |
| B1: Trying to change management and us ^a | .20 | .89 |
| Eigenvalue | .173 | .112 |
| Percentage variance accounted for | 43.40 | 28.10 |

Note. ^a The item eventually was removed from the factor.

(R) indicates the item was reverse-scored.

Table 3: Factor Loadings for Ethical Communication from Data Set 1

| Variables | <u>Loadings</u> | |
|--|-----------------|----------|
| | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
| B7: Considering the impact on us | .78 | .04 |
| B10: Considering public interest more than individual interest | .76 | -.11 |
| B6: Disclosing their motives and reasons | .75 | -.02 |
| C1: Providing accurate information ^a | .60 | -.38 |
| C8: Considering public interest more than department interest ^a | .55 | -.18 |
| A15: Private lobbying ^a | .23 | .86 |
| A14: Open lobbying ^a | .24 | .84 |
| Eigenvalue | 2.53 | 1.63 |
| Percentage variance accounted for | 36.20 | 23.30 |

Note. ^a The item eventually was removed from the factor.

**Table 4: Factor Loadings for Symmetric/Ethical Communication
from Data Set 1**

| Variables | <u>Loadings</u> |
|--|-----------------|
| | Factor 1 |
| B7: Considering the impact on us | .78 |
| B10: Considering public interest | .75 |
| B8: Trying to change management | .74 |
| B9: Consulting those influenced during decision-making | .70 |
| B6: Disclosing their motive and reasons ^a | .69 |
| Eigenvalue | 2.68 |
| Percentage variance accounted for | 53.68 |

Note. ^a The item eventually was removed from the factor.

TABLE 5: Factor Loadings and Reliability Test in the First, Second and Third Data Sets

| Dimension | Items | | | Factor Loadings | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
| | 1st Data Set | 2nd Data Set | 3rd Data Set | 1st Data Set | 2nd Data Set | 3rd Data Set |
| Symmetrical/Ethical Communication | B9: Consulting those influenced during decision-making | T22: During the decision-making process, TPC consulted the public's opinions. | A13: We consulted those influenced by our policies and opinions during decision making. | 0.75 | 0.83 | 0.55 |
| | B10: Considering public interest | T9: For the decisions about the interests of the public, TPC and the public have equal influences during communications? | A14: During communication, we took into account the possible negative impact on the public. | 0.77 | 0.53 | 0.76 |
| | B8: Trying to change management | T21: When communicating about nuclear power, TPC took into account the public's opinions. | A15: We considered both their and our opinions and positions during communication. | 0.79 | 0.82 | 0.84 |
| | B7: Considering the impact on us | T23: The public has enough channels to express opinions about the impacts of the nuclear power on them. | A16: We considered how our public relations influenced them. | 0.71 | 0.77 | 0.88 |
| Construct Reliability | | | | 0.75 | 0.74 | 0.76 |
| Alpha | | | | 0.75 | 0.72 | 0.71 |
| Eigenvalue | | | | 2.30 | 2.23 | 2.36 |
| Percentage variance accounted for | | | | 57.50 | 55.81 | 58.90 |

TABLE 6: Summary of Model-Fit Statistics for Symmetrical/Ethical Communication

| Data Set | χ^2 | <i>df</i> | <i>p-value</i> | <i>CFI</i> | <i>AGFI</i> |
|--------------|----------|-----------|----------------|------------|-------------|
| 1st Data Set | 18.111 | 1 | <.001 | .938 | .726 |
| 2nd Data Set | 10.289 | 1 | < .01 | .991 | .953 |
| 3rd Data Set | 6.921 | 1 | < .01 | .983 | .895 |

Note. CFI = comparative fit index; AGFI = adjusted goodness-of-fit index; AIC = Akaike Information Criterion.

**TABLE 7: Regression Analyses of Symmetrical/Ethical Communication
on Performance Measures in Data Sets 2 and 3**

| | 2nd Data Set | | | | | 3rd Data Set | | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Performance Measures | R | R2 | beta | t | sig | R | R2 | beta | t | sig |
| Organization Reputation | 0.068 | 0.005 | 0.068 | 1.302 | 0.194 | 0.181 | 0.033 | 0.181 | 3.133 | 0.002 |
| Media Exposure | 0.066 | 0.004 | 0.066 | 1.276 | 0.203 | 0.201 | 0.040 | 0.201 | 3.488 | 0.001 |
| Market Performance | 0.363 | 0.132 | -0.363 | -7.090 | 0.000 | 0.120 | 0.015 | 0.120 | 2.041 | 0.042 |
| Overall Effectiveness | 0.365 | 0.134 | 0.365 | 7.392 | 0.000 | 0.120 | 0.014 | 0.120 | 2.059 | 0.040 |
| Conflict Resolution | 0.479 | 0.229 | 0.479 | 9.299 | 0.000 | 0.131 | 0.017 | 0.131 | 2.023 | 0.044 |
| Crisis Communication | 0.481 | 0.231 | 0.481 | 10.218 | 0.000 | 0.136 | 0.018 | 0.136 | 2.097 | 0.037 |

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