

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation:                   INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS:  
  A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO  
  EXCELLENCE BASED ON A WORLDWIDE  
  DELPHI STUDY

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International public relations is one of the fastest growing areas in the public relations field. With 40,000 transnational organizations in operation, and with the myriad complexities of the international arena, there never has been a greater need for public relations practitioners who understand cultures, political systems, media, and other factors that affect these organizations. And more and more organizations and practitioners now are jumping into international public relations.

Despite the rapid growth, there are no adequate guides for those who practice internationally. Most articles on international public relations are anecdotal and offer little theoretical understanding of how to effectively practice. The few theoretical examinations mostly compare public relations from one country to the next. Virtually no one has examined the pertinent influences and necessary elements of an effective public

relations program in a transnational organization.

The purpose of this study was to gather theories and principles that could apply to international public relations and, by exposing them to a global panel of scholars and practitioners, to create a theoretical framework for practice and research in this expanding field. The study generated fourteen propositions from related disciplines about what constitutes effective international practice. The literature implied that effective practice would balance global imperatives with factors that affect local implementation. The study thus distinguished between generic propositions, or those that may be universal, and specific propositions, or the cultures, political systems, and other factors that influence local practice. To determine if certain principles were indeed universal, and also to examine the specific influences, the propositions were "tested" through a Delphi panel of public relations experts from eighteen different countries.

The results of the study indicated that the generic variables can be universally applied. The study also verified the influence of culture, language, political systems, development, the media, and activism on local and global strategies. International public relations was seen as different from domestic public relations in its increased complexities. The two-way symmetrical model of communication was accepted as the normative basis for effective public relations, and was viewed as more important for multinational entities than for exclusively domestic organizations.

INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS:  
A THEORETICAL APPROACH TO EXCELLENCE  
BASED ON A WORLDWIDE DELPHI STUDY

by

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## DEDICATION

To my dear wife, Clydie,  
who inspired me to get a Ph.D.,  
and stuck with me through it all;  
and my beloved parents,  
Melvin L. Wakefield and Marie Wakefield,  
who gave me life -- and love.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As the twenty-first century approaches, "a combination of shocks and surprises have thrust the public relations function onto the global scene" (pr news, 1990, p. 1). Several experts recently have referred to international public relations as a "hot topic" within the public relations field (Culbertson, 1996, p. 2). Whereas only a few written materials were available on international public relations before 1990, a significant number of sources have discussed the topic since that time.

Professional gatherings, including annual conferences of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) in 1991 and 1993, have emphasized the increasingly transnational nature of the field. And more and more students in university public relations programs seem to be interested in international practice as they envision the global world of tomorrow. With these and other occurrences, it has become "almost a truism to say that public relations has gone 'international' or 'global,'" according to other authors (Vercic, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996, p. 32).

Today, there are public relations societies and organizations in more than 100 countries. More than 70 national associations of practitioners exist in various parts of the world. Regional and international groups, such as the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) that has 1000 members in 60 countries, service an increasing number of practitioners whose interests extend beyond the borders of their native lands (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1995). PRSA now has its own international section, and lists more than 60 members who have "international," "worldwide," or "global" in their job titles -- more than double the number from just three years ago (PRSA Register, 1996).

## **Environment for International Public Relations**

This growth in international public relations undoubtedly has been fueled by the accelerating pace of change around the world. As Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1995) of the Harvard Business School explained, "Globalization is surely one of the most powerful and pervasive influences on nations, businesses, workplaces, communities, and lives at the end of the twentieth century" (p. 11). The nations and people of the world are becoming increasingly interdependent (J. Grunig, 1992a). More and more businesses are entering the international arena (Adler, 1997). Governments and businesses are competing and collaborating at the same time, and social forces, political unions, and non-government organizations are rapidly forming to deal with emerging global issues like AIDS, the environment, and population control (Epley, 1992).

Kanter (1995) listed several forces that foster social, political, and economic interactions on a global scale:

Information technology, communication, travel, and trade that link the world are revolutionary in their impact. Global economic forces -- and desires -- are causing regimes to topple, enemies to bury the political hatchet in a common quest for foreign investment, large corporations to rethink their strategies and structures, governments to scale back and privatize services, consumers to see the whole planet as their shopping mall, and communities to compete with cities worldwide for prominence as international centers that attract the best companies and jobs (p. 11).

One major force that is accelerating interchange across national boundaries is the

growing number of multinational businesses. International business has become such a powerful economic reality that "the very concept of domestic business may have become anachronistic," said management expert Nancy Adler (1997, p. 2). Harris and Moran (1991) indicated that 80 percent of American corporations face great competition from foreign firms -- as compared to just 20 percent 20 years ago. And the United States Commerce Department estimated that more than two-thirds of the world's chief executive officers now view international competition as a key factor affecting the future success of their businesses (Adler, 1997).

When people of the world interrelate, the resultant feelings and attitudes are not easy to predict. Interaction between people of differing cultures can lead to increased communication and understanding, or it can create even greater misunderstandings, territorialism, distrust, hostility, and other precursors of conflict. Kruckeberg (1995-96) explained that relationships around the world are entering a new and difficult era. "Existing relationships are being strained, and virtually everyone is being forced into new relationships within social systems that are becoming both increasingly diverse and correspondingly divisive" (p. 37), he asserted.

Intercultural conflict can occur within or between countries (Hennessy, 1985). Recent strife in Bosnia, Albania, Africa -- and even in the United States, where the Rodney King and O.J. Simpson trials and the Clarence Thomas hearings have caused great unrest and division -- exemplify the conflicts that can arise when cultures live together but fail to understand each other. Dissension that can occur between distant cultures has been shown in the frequently resurfacing tensions between the United States

and Japan over trade sanctions and economic differences (Haywood, 1991).

It should not be assumed, therefore, that the dramatic changes are creating one unified, homogenized global society. Maddox (1993) stated that global change, though unprecedented in its nature, is not occurring universally or in as predictable a manner as "the simplistic homogenistic model would lead us to believe" (p. 12). American soft drinks and fast food chains may be pervasive, and young people throughout the world may be wearing jeans and listening to or mimicking Western rock music. But these are only the superficial elements of a society's culture; the more ingrained cultural patterns remain firmly entrenched.

The international environment is much more complex and turbulent than the domestic arena. According to Maddox (1993), the pace of change is increasing so rapidly that "there is little comprehension of the enormous complexity of environmental factors" around the world (p. 3). L. Grunig (1992a) suggested that the global arena is increasingly characterized by "disensus, rather than consensus, heterogeneity rather than homogeneity, and rapid rate of change rather than stability" (p. 130). Vogl and Sinclair (1996) added that "So swiftly are world business conditions changing now ... that what may be a brilliant view one year could be inappropriate a year later" (p. 145).

Multinational corporations, particularly, encounter an unsteady environment around the world. Since the 1980's, a multitude of "interest groups and transnational organizations have increasingly figured in the decision making of multinational enterprises" (Nigh & Cochran, 1994, p. 52). These interest groups are waiting to see how multinationals will behave in host countries. As Sethi, Kurtzman, and Bhalla (1994)

argued, multinational entities will increasingly see "greater public scrutiny" and "increased sociopolitical accountability" regarding their behaviors overseas. "The challenge facing the multinational corporation is profound," they added. "Will the multinational be an agent of economic growth and human welfare or a harbinger of economic exploitation and sociopolitical conflict?" (p. 135). In this tense international atmosphere, Traverse-Healy (1991) explained, multinationals will face many "political, social and commercial issues which ... demand a public relations response" (p. 34).

Disasters like oil spills, explosions of airliners and manufacturing plants, or cultural blunders on the part of multinational corporations indicate the importance of sensitive communication programs that cross national or cultural boundaries. When the Exxon Valdez oil tanker ran aground in 1989, the parent company's poor response resulted in worldwide scorn and a shattered reputation. Exxon has since lost billions of dollars in cleanup costs and in criminal and civil payments (Fombrun, 1996). Likewise, the explosion of a Union Carbide manufacturing plant in Bhopal, India, in 1984, triggered activist opposition in countries as diverse as the United States, Japan, Malaysia, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom (Sen & Egelhoff, 1991).

When Pan American Flight 103 exploded over Lockerbee, Scotland, in 1989, groups from Scotland, England, the United States, West Germany, Finland, Israel, and the Palestinian Liberation Organization were involved either in the perpetration, operations, or investigations of the disaster (Pinsdorf, 1991). The TWA Flight 800 crash off of Long Island last year affected families of American and French passengers going to Paris and Italian passengers rerouted through Paris on their way to Rome; suspicions

were raised about influences from Greece, where the plane had stopped before coming to New York; and airports all over the world were forced to adopt even greater security measures, imposing more inconveniences and delays on all international travellers.

Perhaps the most classic example of how multinationals should tread carefully, however, was the tremendous financial and sociological damage stemming from Nestle's infant formula controversy. The corporation violated no laws, but its global reputation -- not to mention its profit margins -- suffered immensely from trying to market its infant formula in developing nations the same way it was marketed elsewhere in the world. Among the major problems created by these efforts, babies died when fed formula that was unrefrigerated or mixed with the unsanitary water that often exists in the developing world. This led to widespread criticism of Nestle, which culminated in a series of negative articles and campaigns, a strong anti-industry code by the World Health Organization, and an international boycott of Nestle products. Throughout the campaign, Nestle was singled out as "arrogant, aggressive, and manipulative" (Maddox, 1993, p. 30). It is easy to criticize Nestle in this instance, but many other multinationals have suffered equally from their own blunders -- mistakes that, Maddox stated, are an inevitable part of international management.

The global changes, instabilities, and disasters just described should illustrate the need for more public relations around the world. As Culbertson (1996) explained, "such developments lead to terrifying dangers and marvelous opportunities undreamed of just a few years ago. Very often, these dangers and opportunities cross national and regional boundaries, creating an urgent need for tolerance, cooperation, and mutual



understanding among people with different basic beliefs and ways of thinking" (p. 1).

Kanter (1995) stated that what global organizations need today are "mechanisms to build relationships that reduce tensions" across cultures (p. 80). This concurred with Culbertson's (1996) argument, that "the world must "build relationships that do not currently exist as well as manage and soften those that are now hostile and/or are based on misunderstanding" (p. 1). As a result of this need, Kanter explained, some organizations are even beginning to assign people to the role of "global integrator." These are people who "champion world concepts" through carefully-honed skills of "troubleshooting," consulting, and even "peacemaking" between headquarters and local offices. Global integrators, she said, will be key to the future reputations of multinational organizations.

Although Kanter (1995) likely did not have public relations in mind when discussing the relationship building concept, her vision of the needed skills closely parallel those in public relations who are thinking globally. L. Grunig (1991) suggested that in an international context, practitioners need "relational skills" -- skills of alliance building, cooperation, long-term compromise for mutual gain, etc. (p. 106). Botan (1992) likewise stated that when we look at international public relations, "we need a view that focuses on the process at the center of public relations -- using communication to adapt relationships between organizations and their publics" (p. 153).

### **Current Status of International Public Relations**

Public relations practitioners are beginning to capitalize on opportunities to satisfy the global demands noted above. In a recent survey of public relations

executives, more than 90 percent responded that in the past year they had administered at least one public relations program with an international component. Ninety percent also expected their international activity to increase in the future (pr news, 1993).

Fleishman-Hillard's chief executive officer, John Graham, predicted not long ago that all public relations practitioners eventually will be affected by globalization.

Despite this global growth of public relations, however, there still seems to be considerable confusion over what the term "international public relations" even means. Opinions run the gamut. Among writers who have broached the subject, at least one has argued that "there simply is no such thing as international public relations" (Angell, 1990, p. 8). Another said that any public relations activities -- even if they are conducted entirely within one country -- "sound international if you're on the other side of the ocean" (Anderson, 1989, p. 414). One scholar lamented that internationally, public relations serves mostly as a mere media relations tool supporting marketing objectives (L. Grunig, 1992a). Only occasionally will a multinational entity use public relations as a strategic function "to try to resolve, or at least minimize conflict ... to avoid the need for forceful intervention" on a global scale (Winner, 1990, p. 20). Even less often will a multinational build "bridges and relationships with publics [globally] to create an environment in which the organization thrives over time" (Wilson, 1996, p. 69).

If this confusion exists in thoughtful literature, imagine the myriad philosophies that flourish among those who conduct public relations for multinational organizations. For the past five years, while completing this study, I have worked full-time in an international public relations position. I have travelled to more than 20 countries and



conversed at length with dozens of scholars and practitioners in those places. This has revealed an enormous diversity of thought about international public relations. Some think it is the simple art of obtaining publicity in a host country. Others view it as correctly translating materials around the world. More see it as a way to keep an organization out of trouble in its host countries, and therefore a function to be guided by the legal department. Many organizations seem to say, "We don't know how to do this, so let's turn the entire program over to public relations agencies." Yet most agencies seem to be highly tactical in their international programs.

Over the years, public relations has suffered great criticisms from a variety of sources. Many of these criticisms come from within the field itself. Senior practitioners and scholars have called for greater professionalism in the practice, so that it can be more valuable to the organizations it is meant to service (Carrington, 1992; Lesly, 1991). Several want higher quality training for practitioners, even calling some education programs "truly terrible" (Wright & Turk, 1990, p. 12; Schwartz & Yarbrough, 1992).

International public relations could be even more susceptible to criticism as scholars and practitioners struggle to determine its value. Practitioners increasingly need to understand cross-cultural communication, conflict mediation, coalition building between diverse entities, and other skills to successfully compete in the global environment. Yet, Farinelli (1990) accused public relations people in the United States of lagging far behind the legal field, accounting, marketing, and other business sectors in "keeping pace with international changes" (p. 42).

Currently, international public relations is taught in only a handful of universities

(Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996). Half of corporate public relations executives believe that the field has insufficient expertise to conduct international public relations programs (pr news, 1993). Three-fourths have admitted that they themselves lack the expertise for practicing internationally (Fitzpatrick & Whillock, 1993). But despite this inadequate training, more practitioners are starting to work in international arenas.

Without consensus on the nature of international public relations, and with little perceived expertise to practice globally, organizations and individuals venturing into this environment do so with an unsteady roadmap to success. Practitioners who do not understand their own field fail to gain the trust of senior managers who desperately need solid advice and performance in the complex maze of international relationship building (even if they don't know they need it). Worse, practitioners who are unprepared become vulnerable to making, and possibly repeating, costly and embarrassing mistakes.

Despite this tenuous situation, few practitioners or scholars seem to be asking the important questions about the practice. What is international public relations? What is it intended to accomplish? Is international public relations different from domestic public relations, or is it essentially the same thing with a broader reach? Can there be any type of blueprint, or at least loose foundational guidelines, for the practice of international public relations? Should there be such a foundation? Is there any strategy to international programming, or is it all tactical? Is it performed globally, locally, or both? Can there be such a thing as an "effective" international public relations program, and if so, could its practitioners and academicians recognize it when they see it?

With these and other questions still unanswered, it is apparent that much more

theory building and research is needed for international public relations to grow into a mature profession. This is what my study attempts to address.

For the sake of this study, however, I first must reveal my own assumptions about what the term "international public relations" means. Public relations is not international just because, from our vantage point, it is practiced in a country other than our own. For example, if a company based in France conducts all of its public relations in France, and there is no reason for or threat of it crossing into another country, it is domestic public relations, not international public relations.

International public relations is a program or practice that has the opportunity of affecting or being affected by publics in more than one country. As Culbertson (1996) explained, it is "public relations in an international or cross-cultural context" (p. 2). This could be a program that reaches publics in more than one country, or it could be pressure or potential pressure an organization faces from publics in one or more countries that are different from where that organization is headquartered. International public relations is a process of establishing and maintaining relationships with publics in various countries, as Botan (1992) said, to minimize potential threats to the multinational entity. While cross-border strategy is implied, this does not assume that a program will be the same across borders. Its goals may be the same, but they could be orchestrated entirely differently in different cultures.

Also, I believe, international public relations is a part of or extension to the field of public relations. It is not a separate and distinct field of study or practice. Even though it may look different in implementation from culture to culture, the practice still

draws from the same philosophies about building relationships. Therefore, research and theory building in international public relations should be added onto the process that already has begun for public relations. (Some may argue, however, that international public relations is the broader context to public relations, not a narrower part of the practice.) Again, this should not assume that one can just take domestic theories and incorporate them wholly into the international context. We may need complete reconceptualization of the theories, or even entirely new theories, to become appropriate internationally. But we should not ignore or cast aside the currently existing public relations theories to begin work in a new domain.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is an exploration into a relatively new and unknown domain -- international public relations. It is intended to answer the questions addressed above and to develop a theoretical foundation for international public relations. For this process, I call upon a broad base of opinions from public relations experts all over the world. The perspective of others helps to legitimize the results and ensure that the foundation will be accepted and used by scholars and practitioners in the field (Pauly, 1991).

Introducing a book on international public relations theory, Culbertson (1996) identified two different types of research that can be performed in the global realm. The first he called "comparative public relations," which is pursued through cumulative explorations of the similarities and differences in the practice between countries. This type of research is becoming more prevalent, as a variety of individual studies have examined how public relations is practiced in specific countries. This research genre also

dominated the book by Culbertson and Chen (1996).

The second type of research Culbertson (1996) called "international public relations." This research mode "focuses on the practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context" (p. 2); in other words, how is public relations most effectively practiced in an organization as it crosses cultural or national borders. Culbertson identified several types of practice in this realm: international organizations like the United Nations and the World Bank; intergovernmental relations, including diplomacy, regional alliances and the like; transnational economic transactions such as investment trading or multinational financing; and interactions among citizens of different nations through tourism, cultural exchanges, and other means. Certainly, this list could also have included multinational corporations and the growing evidence of multinational activism and interest groups.

Culbertson (1996) claimed that most of the literature on international public relations to date involves the studies he called "international public relations." My own observations of the literature, however, have indicated that there are more of the comparative than the international type of research. Furthermore, the few treatises that could be called international studies were simple anecdotes on topics like "how to handle the media outside the United States" (Vogl, 1990) or "the future of PR is worldwide, integrated communications" (Stanton, 1992). Nevertheless, I agree with Culbertson's additional assessment that the few international studies that have been done merely "focused on adaptation of Western approaches, not on development of new ones designed specifically for varied sociocultural settings around the world" (p. 2).

This study attempts to satisfy Culbertson's urging for a new kind of examination in international public relations. Specifically, the study addresses organizations -- organizations that function across cultural and national boundaries. It is not about intergovernmental relations, diplomacy, nation-building, or any other activity that could conceivably be classified as public relations in the international realm. Since long before coming to the University of Maryland, I have been concerned about how a commercial or non-profit organization (i.e., a non-governmental entity or a charitable cause) operating in the international arena can construct a public relations program that effectively meets its needs. I also have been concerned about the sociocultural or sociopolitical factors affecting those organizations -- both within countries and on a regional or global scale. These are the issues I am trying to answer.

For this study, I have incorporated a theoretical framework from a symmetrical/ systems paradigm of public relations described by Botan (1993). The paradigm was developed largely through research and theorizing in the United States; however, several researchers believe that this framework was developed on universal foundations that may be appropriate in international settings (Leeper, 1996; Nessmann, 1995; Pearson, 1989; Traverse-Healy, 1991). Rather than manipulating a simple adaptation of the foundation for various countries as is often done in research (Adler, 1983), I am testing the efficacy of the principles through experts in those countries. Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, and Babik (1996) explained that, "Viewing Western values from the standpoint of others may lead to the ability to create or modify universal standards that account for cultural difference" (p. 159). To my knowledge, this type of study in public relations has not

previously been done in more than two or three countries at a time.

In conducting the study, I have two main challenges. The first one is to gather theories and information sources from many relevant domains to serve as a possible framework for international public relations. The second is to subject the framework to the opinions and arguments of "experts" in the field. And, if the study is to withstand international scrutiny, those experts must represent a fairly worldwide cross-section of opinions about public relations. The experts are asked to react to theories that have been developed for other contexts and determine to what extent they may or may not be appropriate for public relations in a global environment. They also will help determine which factors may contribute to or otherwise have an impact on the effective programming and practices of public relations in a multinational organization.

#### Method Used for the Study

Because the study is examining a new and unexplored domain, I am using a qualitative method to gather and analyze the data. This qualitative approach should be able to preserve the holism and "richness of data" that Lesly (1986) has said is so important to the public relations field. The study also crosses into the international environment, which renders the preservation of holistic information as doubly important (Kedia & Bhagat, 1988).

One qualitative assumption for gathering data in a holistic manner is grounded theory. Introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), this type of theory is "inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23). In other words, rather than beginning with a theory and proving it through

subsequent study, the researcher lets a theory emerge from an area of observation over a period of time. Grounded theory is closely linked with field observation, where an ethnographic researcher will spend years studying the behavior of a particular group, then start to produce theories about those behaviors based on his or her extensive observations. But grounded theory also can arise from other qualitative methodologies, if the data gathering and interpretations are performed systematically.

The qualitative method I have used is the Delphi technique. The Delphi has been used in many fields for forecasting, exploration, and other purposes (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). This technique uses a succession of questionnaires sent to a purposive sample of people identified as experts in a given field. By so doing, the researcher can obtain professional feedback to assess and challenge the validity of the questions and propositions in the study-- rather than relying on his or her own judgment. The purpose of the succeeding "rounds" is to eventually obtain consensus, but if that is not achieved on all variables, a qualitative researcher can examine reasons why "outliers" -- those who did not agree with the majority of the group -- existed (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975).

Several methodologists have concurred that the Delphi technique is a particularly appropriate research method when variables in the area of investigation are unknown, ambiguous, or complex (Delbecq et al., 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The Delphi is a particularly useful technique, as well, when participants are widely scattered and cannot come together (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). This certainly is the case in a study that solicits opinions from a broad sampling of panelists from all over the world.



Despite the use of a broad sampling of panelists, and although useful in its own right, this Delphi study I have selected would not be considered as pure grounded theory. Rather, it could be seen as a hybrid, or modification, of grounded theory. In this study, I have allowed participants to provide valuable data based on a series of open-end questions that fit the domain under investigation -- a criterion viewed as important by Strauss and Corbin (1990). However, in the purest sense, the data did not emerge from the perspective of the panelists. Instead, the study began with a few preconceived propositions derived from theories relevant to international public relations. These theories then were placed before the panelists as a starting point for the discussion.

#### Criteria for Sound Research

This study should satisfy at least three of the four purposes for qualitative research, as outlined by Marshall and Rossman (1989). It is an exploration, "to identify important variables for subsequent explanatory or predictive research" (p. 15). The study also is somewhat descriptive in nature: it should find out what is going on "out there," in the minds of those who practice or observe international public relations.

At the same time, I am attempting an explanation of whether and why the propositions of this study are appropriate for international public relations programming. I will combine theories of "excellent" public relations with theories from other domains that are pertinent to international contexts -- such as international business management, sociology, or culture -- then "test" the theories among public relations experts in many countries. The result should be a theoretical framework more specific to the practice of international public relations -- a more reliable road map.

This process seems similar to stepping into a cave that has never been explored. The explorer would want to offer a detailed description of the cave, such as how wide is it, how deep, what is its moisture content, or its mineral composition. This information would be beneficial to future explorers. But also it is essential to leave behind explanatory information on why the cave is there, and what equipment may be needed for future explorers to successfully navigate the cave, to enter and abide within it so as to protect their safety and possibly even preserve their lives. Therefore, an exploratory study of this type becomes a combination of description and theory building (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

As a result of the study, perhaps international practitioners and scholars conducting future research can have access to a more substantive theoretical framework by which to pursue further evolution of the field. I also hope to help formulate and crystallize the development of a specialty called "international public relations" by making more clear the distinctions between international practice and domestic practice. Although the underlying principles of the two can be similar, I believe a disservice is done to theory building in the international arena by viewing domestic and international practice as having no essential differences.

The principles to be developed in this study are normative, meaning how public relations should be practiced in an ideal situation to achieve the greatest and most long-lasting results. As Vercic et al. (1996) explained:

In developing a normative theory, theorists have no obligation to show that an activity actually is conducted in the way the theory describes. They must show

only that if an activity were to be conducted as the theory prescribes, it would be effective (p. 33).

The normative, theoretical approach to this study is important because, as Kant (1974) argued, a broad-based theory is a blueprint for action, with "real world" qualities for those who incorporate it (Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996). Therefore, the study also should have some aspects of positive theory that, as Vercic et al. (1996) described, "correspond to reality" in today's global circumstances (p. 34; see also J. Grunig, 1992a). In other words, in the process of conducting this study, I expect to find examples of public relations practice that corresponds to the ideals laid out in this theoretical framework (even though those examples may be the exception rather than the norm).

Because the study is qualitative, it is pursued in the spirit of scientific observation stressed by Pauly (1991). He viewed qualitative research as "an ongoing conversation that the researcher now proposes to join" (p. 8). Once involved in the conversation, the researcher conducts the study and publishes the results, which publishing "marks a pause in the interpretive process, a measure in which writer, critics, and readers can catch their breath before moving on. That conversation never ends" (p. 21).

With this study, I am joining the conversation about international public relations (even though that conversation apparently has just begun). As Pauly (1991) added, acceptance of the claims in this study will depend upon the judgment of its readers as to whether I had uncovered the right kind of data and interpreted the data in "a reasonable, useful, thoughtful, and imaginative way." Readers will judge the study "based upon their own knowledge" and understanding of public relations and its international practice (p.

19). With the judgments of others added over time to the opinions and theories in this study, the process should eventually result in a more mature state of theories and guiding principles for the specialty of international public relations. This whole conversation should ultimately improve the practice.

### **Background of Research in the Field**

In this introduction, I have so far outlined why public relations is expanding into the international arena. Also, it is hoped, I have explained why international public relations is necessary in a global environment, as well as why practitioners in the field may not be ready to satisfy this critical need because theoretical frameworks are inadequate to guide the practice. The purpose of this study has been presented as an attempt to fill this void by developing that framework necessary for the practice.

Next, I will introduce the research and theory building that has served as a basis for my preliminary research on this topic. The following section will discuss the current status of research and theory building specific to international public relations. Then I will discuss the main direction in current theory building: a debate about whether international public relations should be centralized to satisfy global needs or localized to accommodate the varying cultural and political factors. Finally, I will present a proposed "middle ground" that combines both global and local viewpoints.

### **Status of Research in International Public Relations**

I have mentioned that international public relations has gained considerable attention recently in practical and scholarly publications. The term "international public relations" or similar nomenclature has appeared on the covers of at least five books

published in the 1990's.<sup>1</sup> The subject also has been discussed in several other books and dozens of journal articles. Before its demise in 1993, PRSA's monthly publication, the Public Relations Journal, highlighted the growing interest in the field with various cover articles.<sup>2</sup> Articles also have appeared in the journal of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), Communication World, and in the International Public Relations Association's (IPRA) journal, International Public Relations Review.

Theory building has begun to occur recently, but only on a limited basis. In the United States, the summer, 1992, issue of the Public Relations Review contained three or four articles with thought-provoking theoretical discussion. Last year, the first book was published on international theory in public relations, entitled International Public Relations: A Comparative Analysis (Culbertson, 1996). It had six chapters on general theory (the first of which I authored with information from my comprehensive examinations). Then, emulating Geertz' (1973) claim that "thick description" studies help build theory, the book included 14 chapters that described and compared public relations in specific countries (this, Culbertson said, was the main purpose of the book). Two final chapters discussed education in international public relations. Some of these works serve as foundations for my study, and will be discussed later.

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The five books are: Images of nations and international public relations (Kunczik, 1996); International public relations (Wouters, 1991); International public relations in practice (Nally, 1991); International public relations case studies, 2d. ed. (Black, 1995); and International public relations: A comparative analysis (Culbertson, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>These include, but are not limited to: Fry (1992); Hauss (1993); Josephs and Josephs (1992); Reisman (1990); and Vogl (1990).

A few sources from Europe also offer theoretical insight. Kunczik (1996) emphasized the images of nations in a book that was written first in German, then translated into English. The treatise discussed foundations of public relations from a European perspective, and also had theoretical views on international diplomacy. A book from England highlighted mostly the practice of international public relations (Nally, 1991). Its chapters offered minimal theory, and few distinguished between domestic and international public relations. However, a chapter written by senior practitioner Tim Traverse-Healy (1991) reviewed fundamental ways in which a multinational organization can balance its public relations activity between headquarters and its local offices.

Beyond these few sources, international public relations theory has been slow in developing. This is partly because public relations is still newly and haphazardly expanding across borders. But also, until less than a decade ago, even domestic public relations theory was what J. Grunig (1989a) called a "primitive science" (p. 22). Therefore, the majority of sources addressing the more loosely defined international specialty have so far been anecdotal in nature, or what Kunczik (1996) called "scientifically non-serious sources" (p. 24). They tell how to avoid cultural blunders, or how to apply certain techniques to achieve "success" in specific tactical campaigns in given countries outside of the United States. Such superficial discussions may prove useful to those who are entering international practice and grasping for any morsels of assistance, but they provide little theoretical understanding about the nature of international public relations or how it should be practiced.

For the field to progress toward a more professional stature, a more solid theoretical path needs to be identified and researched. It is hoped that this study will offer at least part of that essential theoretical foundation. Certainly, however, much more research will be needed following its completion.

Because this study is probing into unexplored territory, it is necessary to incorporate theories from more established disciplines that may be pertinent to international public relations. Public relations is the general field that the study is exploring; therefore, theories that have been developed for this field will be explored for their usefulness. But the study also crosses into an international and interdisciplinary realm. There are many theories on international business, cultures, and global society that may also prove useful for public relations in this global context. By integrating theories on public relations with theories related to international and intercultural interaction, it may be possible to develop a suitable framework for international public relations (Wakefield, 1996).

#### The Global vs. Local Debate

In the literature that is available, one of the fundamental questions is whether to centralize or localize strategies and operations of multinational organizations (Epley, 1992; Botan, 1992; Traverse-Healy, 1991). This same question has been discussed in comparative management, where Adler and Doktor (1986) referred to the pole of centralization as "culture-free" and localization as "culture-specific." It also has been examined in other fields similar to public relations, such as development management (Brinkerhoff & Ingle, 1989), international marketing (Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1993), and

advertising (Ovatt, 1988).

Anderson (1989) helped frame this issue for public relations. He distinguished between the poles of centralization and localization by referring to them as global public relations and international public relations:

1. Global public relations emphasizes the concept that programs can and should be created at a central headquarters and then, with only minor adaptations, be carried out in all local markets.
2. International public relations emphasizes the placement of resources and decision making authority in the local markets, where native communicators best understand the needs of their local audiences.

Both sides of this distinction have been defended by practitioners and scholars in past writings. Anderson (1989) apparently supported the centralization mindset. He argued that global imperatives of today "demand that programs in distinctive markets be interrelated," because they "will probably share more than they differ" (p. 413). Booth (1986) and Crespy (1986) agreed that globalization is not just a trend, but a necessity. Others postulated that local politics and cultures are so strong that public relations must be localized. Angell (1990) stated that the extreme diversities between local countries preclude any possibility of globalization. Dilenschneider (1992) also asserted that public relations should always be performed locally, by natives who better understand the customs, traditions, and laws of each country.

Debate of this type is beneficial to public relations literature because it begins to identify common issues and establish parameters for performance in the international realm. The discussion helps develop some definitions for this area of public relations practice, and also supplies simple models that are easy for practitioners to remember.



The articles address mutual concerns of practitioners and academics and thus contribute to scholarship in the field.

Despite these possible advantages, however, categorizing variables into polar extremes can create problems. Polarization can be misleading because it tends to show international practice as an all-or-nothing situation. Murphy (1991) and Creedon (1991) contended that polarization can exaggerate differences between variables and thus create a picture of the practice that is less than realistic. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) viewed polarization as "championing one value ... against its reciprocal (and equally necessary) value" (p. 12). This creates adversarial thinking and keeps the value holder from exploring possible alternatives.

Multinational organizations often choose one of the two positions for their public relations programs, rather than examining some of the alternatives that may be available. American firms, in particular, tend to view their structuring alternatives as an either/or proposition: they must be either all centralized or they must allow for complete local autonomy with no central control or vision (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1993). But American entities are not necessarily alone. Japanese organizations, by contrast, often choose the more globalized approach, while European firms tend to favor the localized, multidomestic structure (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1989).

But doing things entirely from headquarters or only in the host countries can be as harmful in practice as polarization is in theory. Complete centralization, Botan (1992) said, results in slow responses to international issues and creates activities that are inappropriate for host country conditions. Coordination in a centralized organization

usually is poor, and headquarters-created "plans and programs are often not brought into question" by natives in who know they will not work in host countries (p. 151).

Maddox (1993) offered a stark example of how "standardization resulted in the global failure of [a] firm" (p. 25). Parker Pen was once one of the world's most well-known corporations, with 154 markets. The company had evolved as a decentralized organization, until "a formidable team of internationally experienced executives" was recruited (p. 26). This new team brought all country marketing activities under one global umbrella. "Consumed with myopia," the team standardized packaging, pricing, promotional materials, and advertising, using a single, "world-class" advertising agency to create one global advertisement (p. 26). The theme, "Make your mark with a Parker," was pushed around the world, and graphic layout, photography, and color schemes for the advertisement were the same for every country.

Despite objections from all of Parker Pen's subsidiaries, the global team persisted. Unfortunately, the standardized program was an abject failure. Within just nine months, "Parker's chief executive officer resigned under pressure. The rest of the team members soon either quit or were fired. Not long after, the writing division of Parker was sold and all advertising was once again tailored to individual markets," said Maddox, (p. 26).

On the other side of the spectrum, handing over operations to host country staff fosters a "not-invented-here" mentality that undermines the mission of the organization (Hill, 1992). Also, local staff members may understand the local culture and conditions, but may be underqualified in public relations to put together appropriate programs even for their own countries. (For an example of this problem, think of the extreme range in

qualifications of those who practice in the United States, and the varying quality that emanates from comparative programs as a result.) A localized stance indicates that the multinational perceives little risk of crises that could cross national boundaries, and leaves it unprepared when such crises occur (Manu, 1996).

Kinzer and Bohn (1985) argued that this exclusive emphasis on local autonomy "risks a public relations disaster" (p. 5). Many of these disasters could be prevented if organizational headquarters would better control their subsidiaries.. Manu (1996) traced the Bhopal incident "to numerous errors and violations by [Union Carbide's] Indian subsidiary. These errors resulted from, among other things, "broken lines of communication within the company" as well as cost-cutting that rendered the subsidiary vulnerable to crisis (p. 55). In another incident, a subsidiary of one multinational manufacturing company dumped toxic mercury into Nicaragua's Lake Managua for thirteen years at twelve times the levels considered safe by the United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. The subsidiary did not inform government officials of these actions until fish in Lake Managua, a main source of local food, were severely contaminated. In addition, 37 percent of the workers in the plant suffered mercury contamination and its unhealthy consequences. Yet, as Manu stated, "The company made no effort to rein in the subsidiary" (p. 55).

#### Alternative "Middle Ground" Needed for the Field

Because polarization does not adequately explain or support international public relations, several writers have proposed a middle ground between what Vercic et al. (1996) called "cultural relativism" and "ethnocentrism" (p. 33 -- see also, Botan, 1992;

Epley, 1992; Ovaitt, 1988; Traverse-Healy, 1991) . To be truly effective in a multinational context, organizations must respond to both local and global demands. Vogl and Sinclair (1996) suggested that as organizations face the inevitable global environment, they must acquire a truly global "mindset -- an attitude that must pervade every part of the business" (p. 112). But that mindset is only half of the equation, they said: "In addition to thinking globally, companies must also keenly tailor approaches to local needs" (p. 114). Likewise, Traverse-Healy (1991) explained that an international public relations program should be a "two-tiered structure." It should have some centralized identification and coordination of vision, policies, and messages. Then it should strategize and implement these broad themes locally by adapting for language, customs, politics, and other factors.

The need for a balanced approach should not be surprising, if one considers the basics of sound public relations even within a given country. In the United States, for instance, senior practitioners have long understood that the fallacy of a "national public" (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). A so-called national campaign still requires central vision and organization, combined with attention to the needs and expectations of local publics in a variety of regions, cities, or neighborhoods around the country. A program conducted in Alabama surely would face different publics and look tactically different from one in southern Arizona or Alaska, even if the goals of those programs were the same.

The key, then, to successful public relations in a multinational organization seems to be in understanding how to strike that delicate balance between global and local programming. If both global and local activities are necessary for an effective

international public relations program, exactly how is that combination achieved? What should be done at headquarters to put together the proper vision, strategies, and messages? What should be done locally to ensure that the global vision is carried out, but in a way that pays attention to local publics and other influences? And, exactly what local factors affect the way public relations is implemented?

If theory could progress to the point that these questions were answered, then the field could move to the state of maturity and professionalism necessary for effective practice to take place. Armed with this more solid foundation of theoretical evidence, practitioners in the field could behave in a way that would make a difference to the multinational organizations in which they work. By so doing, they could begin to gain credibility with their senior management.

### **Theoretical Framework for this Study**

Five years ago, during the oral interview portion of my comprehensive examination process for the Ph.D. program at the University of Maryland, I discussed these concepts with my advisor, Dr. James E. Grunig, the committee methodologist, Dr. Larissa A. Grunig, and two other scholars on the committee. We agreed that theories on international public relations were, to that point, not sufficient for comprehensive understanding of effectiveness in the field. We also concurred that finding the proper middle ground was a good starting point for building the theory.

There was a precedent for this middle ground in related disciplines like comparative management, which for several years has examined factors of effective international management (Ricks, Toyne, & Martinez, 1990). Because these domains

have preceded theory building in international public relations, they could help scholars to understand the complexities of cross-border practice. We believed that theories could be brought in from these related domains, be combined with theories on effectiveness in public relations, then be organized into a suitable framework for effectiveness in international public relations. So, I set about to find and assemble those theories.

One of the theoretical frameworks particularly relevant to organizations was contingency theory. This theory, developed by United States organizational specialists Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), posited that there is no one best way to organize and manage that fits all situations. Instead, what is most appropriate is contingent upon many factors both within and outside the organization (Brinkerhoff, 1991).

Contingency theory had been expanded into examinations of international implications, and therefore we believed it could serve as a useful framework for this study. Negandhi (1983) claimed that contingency theory is the best suited for international management research because it accounts for the more complex and dynamic environment faced by all multinational organizations.

Traverse-Healy (1991) related this contingency philosophy directly to international public relations. "An international public relations department ... should not reflect the organization it has been created to serve, but rather the job it has to do and thus the various publics with which it has to provide an interface," he said. "Under pressure from the external environment, the department within a corporation that must change its shape, staffing, and activities first and more drastically than other staff functions is the public relations unit" (p. 31).

One contingency model, developed by Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) for the field of development management, related specifically to organizational structuring in a multinational environment. The theory was called the "theory of structured flexibility." This identified a combination of functions that were generic to good performance (in other words, that could be universally applied), and that were specific to local markets. The generic variables in their theory included short- and long-term objective setting, consensus on policies, strategic guidelines, establishment of overall responsibilities, and budgeting. The specific variables allowed for local flexibility, to modify and implement the global themes and programs as needed or appropriate for a given location.

This model of structured flexibility serves as a starting point for my study, for two reasons. The first is that it coincides well with the concept of symmetry found in public relations research (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) said that structured flexibility "melds a planned structuring of action ... with a concern for creating the capacity for flexibility and iterative learning" (p. 490). The principle of symmetry, by comparison, means that organizations use "research and dialogue to manage conflict, improve understanding, and build relationships with publics.... Both the organization and publics can be persuaded; both also may change their behavior (J.Grunig & White, 1992, p. 39). J. Grunig and White added that "In the long run, the symmetrical view is more effective: Organizations get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want" (p. 39).

The second reason that structured flexibility is applicable to my study is its focus on the generic and specific concepts. This combination can be applied to international

public relations in the same way it was applied to development management, and thus foster the middle ground that has been lacking in previous polarizations (Vercic et al., 1996). If certain variables can be identified as generic or specific, it may then be possible to determine the appropriate combination of these variables and their affect on international public relations.

Vercic et al. (1996) suggested that possible generic principles already exist for international public relations. Such a generic theory, they claimed, "would not deny that different forms of public relations practice can be found in different locations. Instead, it would maintain that ... those [forms] that are effective will share underlying generic principles that explain why they are effective" (p. 34). In addition to the underlying generic characteristics, the differing forms would respond to specific factors influencing the practice from country to country.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the principles that have been suggested as generic to the practice were developed in the field of public relations. Until early in this decade, theory building in public relations was still in its infancy (J. Grunig, 1989a). Hazleton and Botan (1989) reasoned that only a few scholars in the field had systematically addressed the development of theory or its relationship to practice. Most public relations, he said, is based solely on conventional wisdom or the collective intuition of practitioners about "how to do it" (p. 100). But in the late 1980's, the body of knowledge for public relations began to grow as a number of researchers started to closely examine various aspects of the field, like symmetry in communication, roles of practitioners, power in organizations, organizational culture, the influence of activism, and other important

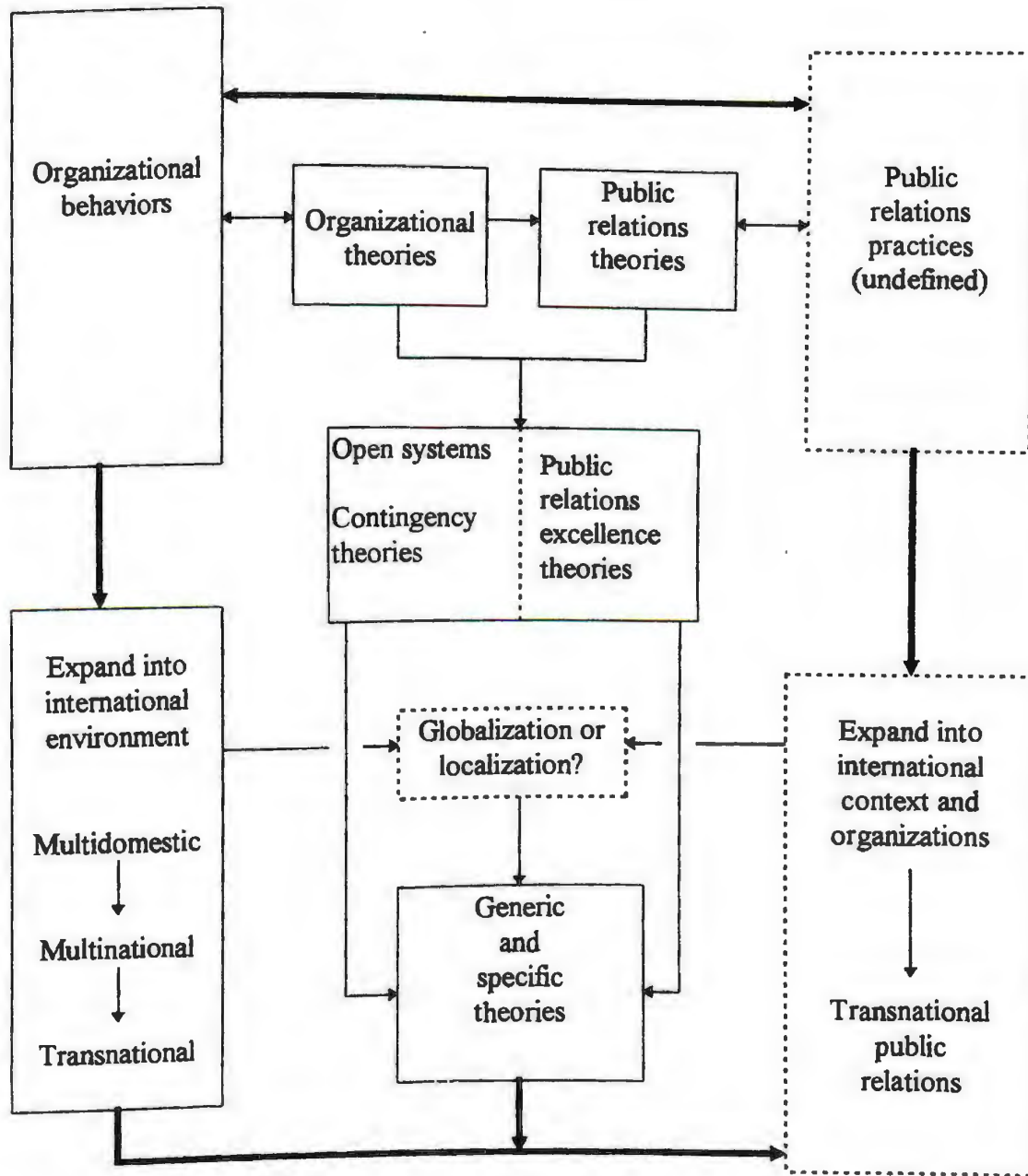


elements. These studies subsequently served as the ingredients for a groundbreaking project that was to come in the mid-1980's. The evolution of this research process in public relations is depicted in Figure 1 on the following page.

### Excellence in Public Relations

In 1985, a group of scholars embarked on "the largest research project in the history of public relations," a multi-year study to determine what variables comprise effective practice of public relations (J. Grunig, 1992b, p. xiii). The project, called "The Excellence Study," was funded through a grant from the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation. Over time, the research group identified concepts they thought would be relevant to excellent practice, then tested those concepts through a series of organizational studies. As a result of this monumental project, the field now has what many believe to be "a general theory of public relations -- a theory that integrates most of the wide range of ideas about and practices of communication management in organizations" (J. Grunig, 1992b, p. xiv).

The Excellence Study catalogued three "spheres" of excellent communication. All must be operative for public relations to be effective in an organization. The first sphere calls for practitioners with adequate knowledge of public relations. Senior officers should thoroughly understand strategic processes like research and scanning, counseling, and two-way communication, so that they can contribute to sound decision making. The second sphere includes shared expectations of senior practitioners and the organization's "dominant coalition" of decision makers. The dominant coalition must agree that the strategic communication processes are important, and fully support the



**Figure 1:** The evolution of research in public relations, incorporating theories from similar domains and expanding into the international environment.

senior practitioners in their vital role. The third sphere emphasizes a participative culture framed by the dominant coalition, based on worldviews that support participation and two-way communication (Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995).

There is evidence that the Excellence Study, with its symmetrical worldviews, can serve as a universal framework for international as well as domestic public relations practice. The main reason for this is that the Excellence variables are founded on the enduring and universal principles of coorientation, dialogue, empathy, and compromise (Childers, 1989). Dialogue was connected to ethical and humane communication as far back as Plato, and the principles of symmetry and coorientation have been discussed in Western European writings for several decades (Pearson, 1989). The value of these principles in a global context has pervaded the thinking of development communications scholars, many of whom come from outside of the United States. For example, one development scholar requested a global emphasis on "dignity through dialogue," and a shift in thinking from "communications (as means) to communication (as sharing and trust)" (Mowlana, 1986, p. 212 -- parentheses are the original author's).

If the Excellence study does serve as a good starting point for universal variables, then the other important task would be to identify the specific variables. The question to ask is, "exactly what factors cause public relations practice to differ from country to country?" Preliminary research has uncovered several possibilities, arising from a variety of domains whose theories relate to international interactions (Wakefield, 1996). This process of utilizing theories from outside of public relations to better explain the practice is not new; the Excellence Study researchers used a similar process, pulling in theories

from such diverse fields as management, sociology, philosophy, feminism, anthropology, psychology, political science, and others (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). The specific variables that I believe affect public relations will be detailed in Chapter 2.

### Testing Needed that Crosses Many Cultures

Although it is believed that the excellence study could serve for the generic variables, the concept needs more testing in a greater variety of cultures. Most of the theories that contributed to the Excellence Study had been developed and tested within the United States, rather than any international setting. The Excellence study itself was tested largely in the United States, although some organizations in England and Canada also were involved (J. Grunig, 1992b). Since then, additional studies examining parts of the Excellence theories have been conducted in countries other than the three English-language countries just mentioned -- specifically in Greece, India, Taiwan, and Slovenia (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995; Vercic et al., 1996). But no comprehensive study has been conducted to this point that examines all of the variables over a broad-based set of countries at the same time.

Adler (1983) suggested that if studies are tested across more than two cultures at a time and are conducted with cautious and systematic "doubt" by the researcher, they can offer important information and conclusions about universal possibilities. Valuable studies, she said, attempt "to identify those aspects of organizations which are similar and those aspects which are different in cultures around the world" (p. 29). She called for more studies that ask the question, "In which areas can . . . organizational policies and strategies be similar across all cultures, and in which areas must they be different?"

This process suggested by Adler (1983) helps to identify "an emergent universality" (p. 35). That universality comes to exist through patterns that arise from the various cultures under study. By using the theory of structured flexibility as a foundation for finding the "middle ground" between complete centralization or total local autonomy, it is possible to start to uncover an "emerging universality" for international public relations. It also is possible that this generic universality that the structured flexibility approach encourages is found in the variables of the Excellence Study.

I believe this study falls into the type of study for which Adler (1983) is asking. There are three reasons for this. First, there is evidence that most of the principles incorporated into the Excellence Study itself came from more deep-seated, universal theories. Second, added to this framework are theories that come from scholars who specifically study international patterns in culture, management, and other related fields, as will be explained more fully in Chapter Two. Finally, to satisfy Adler's requirement of exposing the theories to more than two cultures, my study is conducted among a group of experts who represent 18 different countries.

With this in mind, I now have introduced the rationale for the type of study I am conducting in international public relations. The public relations field is expanding into the international realm, but there is an inadequate theoretical framework to guide the increasing practice. This study attempts to build that foundation by combining many of the theories that are already out there and assembling them into a cohesive, relevant set of guiding principles. The establishment of this theoretical foundation and its various sources is the purpose for the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **CONCEPTUALIZATION**

In the first chapter, I outlined the rationale for a study on international public relations. I also introduced the basic elements in the framework for such a study. This chapter will explain the interdisciplinary theories that round out this framework. From these theories come the propositions that I am exploring through a Delphi study.

To start building a theoretical foundation, it may be useful to explain my assumptions about the terms "public relations" and "international public relations." The roots of public relations extend back hundreds of years, but the practice as we know it today evolved from the late 1800's (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1995). Modern practice is so diverse that there is no consensus about what it means to do public relations (Lesly, 1991). Public relations varies widely from one organization to another or from one practitioner to the next (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Often, organizations even maintain public relations units without really knowing why they exist (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

A discussion of basic definitions is important because, as J. Grunig and White (1992) explained, scientific theory and research is necessary to "help bring order to the chaos of public relations" (p. 32). This order is achieved by identifying and exploring the fundamental assumptions about the field. Many of these philosophies are revealed in the various definitions of public relations. I will examine these assumptions and definitions as well as the few existing constructions of international public relations. Then, I will suggest parameters for international public relations that can be more detailed and pertinent than what is currently available.

## Definitions of Public Relations

More than 500 definitions of public relations have been conceived over the years (Harlow, 1988). These range from descriptions of simple techniques, such as publicity or the appearance of a special guest at an event, to the more comprehensive views of public relations as a strategic process that includes research, planning, communication and feedback. In this range are even some strange ideas, such as, "doing good and getting credit for it" (Wilcox et al., 1995, p. 5), or "what public relations people do" (J. Grunig & White, 1992, p. 33).

Many position public relations as a managerial function for building and maintaining relationships. For example, J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) called public relations "the management of communication between an organization and its publics" (p. 6). Cutlip, Center, & Broom (1985) elaborated that public relations is a "management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends" (p. 4).

Some scholars have criticized this "blatant bottom-line orientation of strategic management" (Wilson, 1996, p. 71). Creedon (1991) argued that "we must deconstruct the philosophical assumptions that suggest that public relations should be a management function" (p. 80). Wilson explained that the "trends and stages in the history of public relations," fostered mostly by the management perspective, "have consistently edged away from a 'relations' orientation. In fact," she added, "the very term public relations has suffered disrepute ... because of the emptiness of the promise implied" (p. 70).

Other sources, while not against the managerial emphasis, have joined Wilson (1996) in advocating the greater value of relationships. Senior consultant Patrick Jackson has stated that "public relations is devoted to the essential function of building and improving human relationships" (Wilcox et al., 1995, p. 4). Another definition shows public relations as "the art or science of establishing and promoting a favorable relationship with the public." One more source claimed, "public relations is the conscious and legitimate effort to achieve understanding and the establishment and maintenance of trust among the public" (Wilcox et al., 1995, p. 6).

#### Managerial Status and Relational Orientation are Both Important

Actually, it seems pointless for people in the public relations field to debate whether its practitioners should strive for a managerial role or focus on relationships. To effectively serve organizations, public relations needs both managerial status and a relational emphasis. The managerial function gives practitioners the credibility they need to convince their organizations that relationship building is important. Even Creedon (1991), one of the critics of the public relations-as-management philosophy, acknowledged that those with power in organizations "select the manner in which public relations will be practiced" (p. 75); therefore, it is essential for public relations to be placed within this decision making group. Once with the decision makers, practitioners can convince them that building relations is not just a peripheral, "feel good" activity, but is in the best long-term interest of the organization.

The definition of what public relations should be, then, probably falls somewhere between the works of Wilson (1996) and J. Grunig (1992) and the Excellence team



mentioned in the first chapter. Wilson is one who has disagreed with the managerial function espoused by Grunig. With further analysis, though, their ideas on public relations sound oddly similar. Both adhere to the value of relationships built over the long term. Both acknowledge the potential for damage when these relationships are not maintained. The only difference seems to be that Grunig desires to manage these relationships, while Wilson equated "managing" with manipulation. (Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 123, addressed her concern by defining the term "manage" as "thinking ahead or planning, rather than as manipulation and control".)

Wilson (1996) said that a growing number of social issues have created negative effects for organizations. In fact, she added, public relations often exists in organizations specifically to counter "the organization's increasing inability to control the business environment" (p. 72). For public relations to really benefit organizations, she explained:

We must look toward building long-term relationships that reinforce the values our publics hold dear. Only in this way can we avoid manipulative practices that are neither truly ethical nor productive in the long run.... We must become ... focused on the good of all rather than being primarily self-interested (p. 79).

Grunig and his colleagues also have shown the necessity of building relationships to reduce external threat. Like Wilson, they recognized that organizations face "an unstable and threatening environment" (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Ehling, 1992, p. 72). Grunig and Hunt (1984) said publics "have made it clear that ... organizations frequently have not been responsible" (p. 47). But public relations can make organizations responsible, "in that it helps organizations build caring -- even loving -- relationships with

other individuals and groups they affect in a society or the world" (J. Grunig & White, 1992, p. 38). "Rather than persuading, manipulating, and dominating publics, communicators seek mutually beneficial relationships based on understanding," said Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig (1995, p. 92).

If we can concede that managing communications to build relationships is important, it still begs the question: For what purpose? Why should organizations even care about building relationships with their various publics? Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) offered some clues to this question. For years, they said, the American business community has emphasized short-term results, and thus lost sight of the one vital component "that makes all economic activity possible: human relationships" (p. 5). Wilson (1996) elaborated that "the truly strategic role of public relations in today's organization and society is not to manipulate the environment with a bottom-line mentality, but rather to build bridges and relationships with publics ..." (pp. 68-69). What does she think is the reason for this? "... to create an environment in which the organization thrives over time" (p. 69).

In building relationships with publics, public relations practitioners act as "go-betweens" -- sometimes advocating the position of the organization to publics, at other times arguing the public side to the organization (L. Grunig, 1992b). By achieving this purpose, public relations can help an organization gain some benefits like "employee productivity, stock prices, a hospitable climate, an organization's national standing, and even 'corporate image'" (Dozier, et al., 1995, p. 218). But perhaps more important, good relationships with their publics can help organizations avoid conflict and its

resultant negative coverage, regulation, litigation, and other external interventions that "could cost them money" (p. 218).

### Causal Reasoning Offers a Definition

Perhaps public relations can best be described by what Babbie (1989) calls "causal reasoning": If this happens, that will occur, or this condition leads to that effect. Following this reasoning, a comprehensive definition should address the purpose of public relations in an organization, or why the function exists in the first place. It should also address the intended outcomes.

Causal reasoning for public relations may look like this: Organizations act in an environment (society) containing opportunities for growth as well as threats and pressures (from various publics) that can erode revenues. Because organizations want to thrive and to protect their profit margins, they must identify and establish relationships (with publics) to avoid or reduce those outside pressures. Relationships are identified, built and maintained by a credible public relations program. The program can only be credible and effective if it is part of management, or the decision making group, and is completely supported by those decision makers.

Therefore, a definition of public relations might state: "Public relations is the management function that contributes to effective decision making by identifying, establishing, and maintaining relationships with an organization's various publics. Through these long-term relationships, public relations helps the organization it serves remain successful while simultaneously preserving the public interest." The definition addresses the three essentials. It is positioned within senior management circles to

influence the way it is practiced, it builds relationships for long-term success, and it helps balance the interests of the organization and its publics.

### **Beyond Definitions: Worldviews that Affect Public Relations**

The definitions just described have evolved over the years from fundamental assumptions of the various authors about public relations. Kearney (1984) referred to these assumptions and images as worldviews. Worldviews basically are the way people see and organize their surroundings. Worldviews are subjective (Kuhn, 1970), but they are important because behaviors of people are affected by how they perceive things. Therefore, when definitions are conceived for a given field, those definitions usually reflect behaviors resulting from the worldviews within that field.

Modern public relations covers a broad territory partly because it reflects a variety of assumptions about the field. J. Grunig and White (1992) identified four main areas where worldviews differ from person to person. The first is the social role of public relations -- whether it serves organizations only or ultimately serves society, or whether it helps preserve the status quo or fosters change. The second area, which crosses into what was just partly discussed, is whether public relations should be a management function or a tactical support role. A third area, related to the second, concentrates on gender and the various roles men and women perform in the field.

A fourth assumption about public relations centers on whether or not it balances mutual interests of organizations and publics. Botan (1993) referred to this question as a "paradigm struggle" between a "dominant applied model" of public relations and what he called a "symmetrical/systems" model (p. 198). The applied model is based on

traditional assumptions that organizations may manipulate publics to expand their own interests. The symmetrical model, on the other hand, sees an organization as just one entity in a sociopolitical system; therefore, through dialogue and compromise, it seeks the common good. Lesly (1992) argued that this philosophy can work in a real-world setting. "If exchange of opinion and suggestions is free, and if the tone is kept unheated so logic can prevail, the best of combined thinking is likely to prevail in the long run," he said (p. 330). This equilibrium parallels the definitions proposed above, where public relations seeks to balance the interests of the organization and its publics.

#### The Asymmetrical Worldview

Despite the lip service that is often given to balancing interests, there is evidence that many organizations do not care to have reciprocity with their publics (Rakow, 1989). In a study of 34 activist organizations, L. Grunig (1992b) found that few of the organizations targeted by activists practiced two-way communication that sought mutual benefits with their publics. Subsequent studies have supported those findings, although some instances of symmetrical behaviors also have been found (Dozier et al., 1995).

J. Grunig and White (1992) suggested that this reluctance to balance interests comes from a worldview they called "asymmetrical public relations." This mindset often is characterized by attitudes that the organization knows best. Organizations who practice asymmetrical public relations attempt to manipulate the behaviors of publics with no regard for their own behaviors. Organizational leaders with this worldview often force publics to accept a long list of "strange things," like pollution, health and social problems from smoking, drinking, and other ingestible products, overthrowing of

governments, higher prices, and so forth (pp. 39-40).

Sadly, this thinking is prevalent even among public relations practitioners, who should be championing mutual interests within the organization. That is why Botan (1993) referred to it as the dominant applied model. It surfaces in conferences, workshops, and articles written by senior practitioners in the field (J. Grunig & White, 1992). Olasky (1987) interviewed a large number of practitioners who expressed more interest in pleasing their bosses than in dealing with critical publics --even if this meant getting publics to accept what they did not want. Wright (1989) claimed that practitioners "often discover ways to justify unethical behavior" (p. 21).

Although commonly held, the asymmetrical worldview can be harmful to the public relations field. It tends to reduce public relations into the lesser realms of publicity, media relations or other functions that carry out decisions made by others in the organization. Often, these lesser roles support marketing goals rather than managing reputations or providing strategic input on attitudes and issues (Lesly, 1991). Even the president of a large public relations firm recently suggested that public relations should be merged into a "marketing mix" (Harris, 1989). However, when public relations is reduced to supporting roles, its practitioners become destined for lower salaries and lose opportunities for advancement in their organizations (Lesly, 1991). Ultimately, this could threaten the future of the field.

The asymmetrical worldview also harms organizations. When public relations is subsumed under marketing or other organizational functions, practitioners are taken out of the senior management circles. As a result, they lose their capability of consulting

with senior management about the effects of environmental influences on decision making. They also cannot help an organization effectively interact with its critical publics (Broom, 1986; Dozier, 1992). Without this needed input into management decisions, the organization suffers. As Broom, Lauzen, & Tucker (1991) said, "organizations cannot survive while ignoring the impact of social, political, technical and economic changes on relationships with others" (p. 220).

### The Symmetrical Worldview

With the damage that can result from asymmetrical public relations, J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) suggested a worldview that gives more than lip service to some of the definitions mentioned above. They referred to this worldview as "symmetrical public relations." This mindset seeks two-way communication for the purpose of benefiting both the organization and its publics. Symmetrical public relations is more effective, said J. Grunig and White (1992), because "organizations get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want" (p. 39).

With a symmetrical worldview, organizations see themselves as part of a larger system in which people and entities are intimately connected with each other. They see outside forces as providing their legitimacy and giving them permission to operate (Wilson, 1996). This position suggests a respect for publics, and provides a reason for communicating with them. It is a "process of compromise and negotiation and not a war for power" (J. Grunig & White, 1992, p. 39), and "communication is one of the most effective means we have to negotiate and compromise" (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 5).

Practical application of the symmetrical mindset means that organizations use

public relations to identify their publics and build relationships with them. Research would be an important part of this process, to determine which groups are attracted to the organization and its products or services, and which groups are hostile. After this determination, the organization would communicate with its publics -- not just giving information to them but also seeking information. When differences are identified, dialogue would help to improve understanding, reduce the differences, and build common interests. This, in turn, would establish long-term friends that could later support the organization during difficult times.

Effective public relations, then, helps build a solid reputation for organizations (Fombrun, 1996). It helps to make money by building relationships with consumers, donors, and other publics that lead to greater sales, better fund raising, and more long-term support. It helps to save money by communicating and compromising with publics that might otherwise initiate lawsuits, regulations, boycotts, negative publicity, or other negative consequences (J. Grunig, 1992b).

#### The Mixed-Motive Alternative

The symmetrical model of public relations has been modified since it was conceived. Murphy (1991) was a catalyst behind this redefinition. She argued that two-way symmetrical public relations, although laudable, is unrealistic -- that organizations cannot be completely altruistic at the expense of profit making. "Purely cooperative behavior is seldom found in the real world," she explained. "Even when two-way communication exists, the organization and its publics have different agendas, want different side-payments, retain some conflicts of interest" (p. 122). Sometimes conflict



helps opposing entities to understand what is best in the long run. True symmetry, she argued, "tends to discourage innovation and encourage custom and tradition" (p. 124).

As a compromise, Murphy (1991) suggested a "mixed motives" approach to public relations. With this approach, organizations and their publics do not aspire to congruency on every issue, but to understanding and accuracy. "Each side retains a strong sense of its own interests, yet each is motivated to cooperate in a limited fashion in order to attain at least some resolution of the conflict," she said (p. 125).

Because of its more relevant application, J. Grunig (1992b) and his colleagues have consented to the mixed-motive compromise. "Excellent public relations departments model more of their communication programs on the two-way symmetrical [model], although they often combine elements of the two-way asymmetrical model with the two-way symmetrical model in a *mixed motive* model," said Vercic, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig (1996, p. 38 -- italics are the authors'). Dozier et al. (1995) added that "organizations play public relations as a "mixed-motive" game" (p. 47). They then modified their own model into a "two-way model," "because it subsumes the former models of two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical practices" (p. 49).

This evolution into the mixed-motive model should not imply that organizations no longer need to search for mutual benefits with their publics. As Dozier et al. (1995) explained, the two-way model still carries a "symmetrical worldview that respects the integrity of long-term relationships" (p. 49). The model also means that public relations practitioners will not just work with the organization's publics to seek mutual interests or to negotiate compromises, but they also will view their own senior management as

another important public that is "influenced by communication programs" (p. 49). L. Grunig (1992b) explained that:

Rather than trying to manage the issue ... they end up helping manage the organization's efforts to contend with the problem. In so doing, the public relations manager becomes part of the reconciliation process as well as the accompanying communication effort (p. 505).

To summarize, a variety of definitions have been proposed for public relations. The definitions are founded on differing worldviews of the authors about how public relations should be practiced. Some see public relations as a management function, while others emphasize relationship building in the field. Another dominant mindset that some argue is tied to the managerial worldview, is that public relations should help entities achieve their ends by manipulating publics asymmetrically. An opposing worldview, however, is that public relations should foster mutually beneficial relationships with the organization's publics. By so doing, public relations is more effective for the organization in the long term. A mixed-motive alternative has been proposed to reflect real-life situations, where organizations and their publics have separate interests but must negotiate and compromise to get at least some of what each wants.

I view public relations as a combination of management and relationship building, and believe that both aims should exist together in order for public relations to be effective. Public relations must be positioned in the decision making circles so that its practitioners can represent the organization's publics and help influence decision making processes. Once that influence is achieved, they must plan and organize the relationship

function so that it balances the organization's interests with those of its publics. In this manner, public relations best services its organizations in the long term.

### **What about International Public Relations?**

If these definitions and viewpoints adequately explain public relations in general, what about international public relations? Is international public relations basically the same as domestic practice? The assumptions above were developed largely with single-country, or domestic, studies; only recently has consciousness been raised about public relations practice in multiple countries. Do these worldviews and definitions from domestic contexts now apply in the international arena? If not, are slight modifications sufficient? Or should international public relations be viewed as entirely different?

The few who have written about international public relations distinguished only slightly between its practices and the domestic conceptualizations outlined above. Many presume that public relations is conducted similarly throughout the world as it is in the United States, with minimal adaptations for local conditions. The only readily apparent distinction in the conceptions is that the latter is much more complicated -- in fact, "unprecedented in complexity," according to one senior practitioner (Wilkinson, 1990, p. 12). This complexity is evident in the environment in which multinationals function. This includes all of those diverse forces that have an impact on the organization, such as economic, technological, political-legal, communicative, sociocultural, and cross-border dimensions (Maddox, 1993).

Reed (1989), a respected leader in the international public relations community, offered one of the first informal definitions. He said, "International public relations

means you do it somewhere else, with audiences different from you culturally, linguistically, geographically .... International public relations requires that you bridge a cultural or linguistic gap -- or both" (p. 12).

Reed's viewpoint helped start the discussion about why international practice may be different from domestic public relations. However, his definition may not persuade those who see no real differences. Experienced practitioners (including Reed) recognize that "audiences different from you culturally, linguistically, geographically" exist within many countries as often as between countries. For example, I could easily travel from the western United States to New York City or Washington, D.C., and conduct public relations "somewhere else" -- and encounter quite different cultural circumstances in the process. A growing number of American organizations have had to communicate with publics for whom Spanish, Chinese, Japanese, or another language is not only their first, but only, language of fluency (Maddox, 1993). Thus, for international practice to occur, something must be present besides mere cultural or linguistic factors.

One realistic distinction between domestic and international practice was supplied by Wilcox et al. (1995). Like their domestic counterparts, their definition stressed the balancing of mutual interests between an organization and its publics. They conceived international practice as "the planned and organized effort of a company, institution, or government to establish mutually beneficial relations with the publics of other nations" who may affect or be affected by the entity in question (p. 414). The only significant contrast between this definition and the typical domestic construction is that it recognizes "publics of other nations."

### Differences Between Domestic and International Practice

When publics from nations outside of the organization's home country are added to the equation, some interesting things start to occur. Multinationals face multiple regulatory groups, not just the one they are accustomed to in their home country (Manu, 1996). The need to communicate in multiple languages becomes the norm, not the exception (Adler, 1997). Even internal communication becomes a multicultural exercise (Harris & Moran, 1991). External publics or interest groups are gaining the same multinational presence and power as many of the organizations they oppose (Nigh & Cochran, 1994). Public issues can cross borders, creating risk on a variety of fronts all at once; as a result, senior managers who may have great experience in the domestic arena often find themselves floundering in the international environment (Maddox, 1993). These factors are discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs.

#### Multiple Regulatory Environments

National and local governments are important publics to multinational organizations. As they expand globally, multinationals are burdened with an increasing variety of regulations. These include tax laws, pricing policies, diverse laws on products and ingredients, regulations governing employees, environmental standards, and other legal variations (Maddox, 1993). However, the nature and behaviors of multinationals make it difficult for governments to effectively regulate them (after all, governments do not have power over entities outside their own jurisdictions). Many governments lack the capabilities to assess the operations of multinational organizations, or to address hazards that arise from those operations (Manu, 1996). International regulations and

agreements are becoming more commonplace, but they usually are ambiguous and difficult to enforce.

Ironically, Maddox (1993) argued that the legal factor in the multinational environment is the easiest factor to handle, despite the variations. "The legal environment is relatively tangible and specific," he said. "It is easily viewed and evaluated. And the appropriate corporate response is generally relatively clear" (p. 10). (Imagine how American attorneys would react to that claim.)

Even though the legal environment and its problems are the domain of attorneys, public relations still can play an important role within this international legal context. It is important for practitioners in multinationals to understand the various legal complexities of their field. Where regulations are more ambiguous and less enforceable than in the domestic arena, cultural interpretations become more important. Practitioners should know how to seek the advice of opinion leaders in host countries who can interpret how legal decisions will affect local public opinion.

There are many countries where cultural mores and obligations take precedence over legal contracts, thus requiring a different form of interaction than is the norm for most legally-bound American organizations. To build long-term working relationships, for example, many Asian countries rely on connections, trust, and compromise rather than adversarial contracts. (Many Asians have told me that having an attorney present in meetings is an automatic sign of mistrust.) If properly trained in intercultural communication processes, practitioners can assist in gathering diverse groups and moderating between the differing philosophies and interests.

### Multicultural Employee Communication Concerns

Domestic organizations usually need not worry about diverse internal publics like multinationals face. Sophisticated global companies reduce their headquarters staffs and transfer project leadership around the world (Kanter, 1995). Robbins (1997) wrote:

Management is no longer constrained by national borders. Burger King is owned by a British firm, and McDonald's sells hamburgers in Moscow.... Toyota makes cars in Kentucky; General Motors makes cars in Brazil; and Ford (which owns part of Mazda) transfers executives from Detroit to Japan to help Mazda manage its operations (p. 9).

Multinational employees carry multicultural perspectives and attitudes. Maddox (1993) explained this situation. "We are not now dealing with one group of employees from the same country, but with employees of many nationalities in many different countries." As a result, even internal communication becomes highly complex, and "the implications of this one environmental factor are enormous" (p. 6).

Employees within each culture, Maddox (1993) illustrated, will respond to a different system of values, have different motivations, and different ways of behaving than those in home country offices. Host country employees require dissimilar human resource plans with differing incentive programs, managerial styles, and expectations. They will respond to different employee regulations in their own countries. "Now to all of these cultural variations," he said, "add the dimension of constantly increasing change" (p. 6). It is easy to see why this one factor, if poorly handled, can create enormous public relations problems as well as human resource concerns.

### More Diverse and Far-Reaching External Publics

Along with multicultural internal publics, multinational entities also must respond to external publics in other nations. Nigh and Cochran (1994) suggested that interest groups, like non-government organizations, are forming global networks that can place pressure on organizations in any country. Lesly (1992) added:

Never have so many altering forces been active at the same time. Any of them would cause the social fabric to be transformed. All of them together pull that fabric in many different directions simultaneously.... Together, these forces add up to a new milieu in which events are determined not by powerful leaders but by ... the mass of attitudes among groups of people that determines how all institutions and organizations can function (p. 326).

Publics around the world often are hostile toward multinationals because the organizations are wealthy, powerful, or simply foreign to their own interests (Nigh & Cochran, 1994). Public interest groups have become much more sophisticated in the way they utilize media and other communication techniques to achieve their goals (Pires, 1989). The pressures they apply to organizations can build as they expand from country to country, and organizational responses must be filtered through a variety of government regulations, media systems, and other varying local factors typically not faced by domestic organizations (Nigh & Cochran, 1994).

### Cross-border Implications

Many activities of multinationals have implications that cross borders. One example was the Chernobyl nuclear fallout, which originated in the former Soviet Union



(now Ukraine), then spread its effects throughout Europe (Manu, 1996). Additional toxic emissions and waste problems, chemical spills into international waterways, human rights concerns, AIDs awareness and prevention, and other issues also can cross borders and raise problems in many countries at once.

Cross-border factors, Manu (1996) explained, raise "complex questions about jurisdiction and assignment of responsibilities, all of which [make] government control more difficult" (p. 56). For instance, it is difficult for a government to control problems that originate somewhere else but spread into its borders. As a result, governments have cooperated on international agreements like the Basel Convention, MARPOL (Convention to Prevent Marine Pollution from Ships), and others. However, these provisions often are too vague to serve any real enforcement purposes.

Cross-border situations allow for multinational public relations. Cross-cultural communication is needed to help understand and resolve complex issues. Organizations must also be better at self-policing to ensure social responsibility in all countries, not just in their homeland. Public relations can play a role in these circumstances by acting as organizational conscience and leader in intercultural problem solving tasks.

#### Inexperienced International Management

A final distinction comes in basic knowledge levels of senior managers with whom public relations functions. Senior managers in domestic organizations know how to run their entities after spending years working into management. When they move into the international realm, however, that knowledge base often disappears or becomes ineffective. "Many are finding that cultural differences are posing special problems that

they had not anticipated. And, many have been unable to deal with these differences successfully," Maddox said (1993, p. 3). Therefore, managers who might have been independent before now find themselves needing help in their decision making processes. Others who have used counselors in the past now need them more than ever.

Managerial inexperience in the international arena creates a need for someone who can educate senior management about sociocultural sensitivities. Public relations practitioners should be able to facilitate this role, because tuning in to various publics and seeing the world from their perspective is a prerequisite for public relations. However, much more training in international issues and cultural sensitivities would be necessary before practitioners could effectively function in this process (Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996).

So, this discussion suggests both comparisons and contrasts between domestic and international public relations. According to Wilcox et al. (1995), relationship building is still crucial in international practice. This relationship orientation also must have managerial status if it is to be effective. However, the international environment seems to be much more complex, crossing into a variety of issues that are either different from or more complicated than domestic pursuits.

In a practical vein, it seems that many functions typical to domestic contexts would be at least as important globally. For example, research still would be necessary to identify various publics. However, that research becomes much more complicated: Is it performed in each country according to local cultural mores for research, or are sampling procedures and instruments held consistent throughout the world to achieve reliability? Is scanning necessary on a global scale to identify those publics, interest

groups or organizations that transcend national boundaries? If so, how is that accomplished? Also, counseling of management on potential behaviors of publics would still be important, but now it would carry highly dynamic and complex cross-cultural connotations. The tactical functions of communicating with groups would continue to be critical, but would be carried out using a variety of multicultural communication experts to ensure that accurate communication is occurring.

#### Asymmetrical/Symmetrical Worldviews in an International Context

Now that similarities and differences between domestic and international public relations have been suggested, it may be useful to determine how the fundamental assumptions about public relations apply in an international environment. This can be done by examining literature on how multinational organizations operate, and what effects have surfaced around the world as a result of these operations. Then, these operations and effects can be placed into a public relations context.

Multinational businesses today are expanding and gaining greater power (Adler, 1997; Maddox, 1993). In the United States alone, there are more than 3,500 multinational corporations, 30,000 exporting manufacturers, 25,000 companies with branches or affiliates overseas, and an additional 40,000 firms operating abroad on an ad-hoc basis (Harris & Moran, 1991). Vogl and Sinclair (1996) declared that multinationals are taking advantage of a "borderless economy that is generating breathtaking ambitions" (p. 8). Annual sales figures of more than 300 of the largest corporations exceed those of many nations (L. Grunig, 1992a).

The influence of multinational organizations is not limited to the United States.

Japanese and German firms are growing faster than American corporations. Six thousand Japanese firms employ more than 500,000 Americans in the United States. The United Kingdom invests more than \$122 billion in American interests (Wilcox et al., 1995). And organizations from other nations are also entering the international arena in unprecedented waves (Maddox, 1993). Even an estimated 700 corporations from the old Soviet Union and European socialist nations are conducting business abroad, with about two-thirds of those in developing nations (Harris & Moran, 1991).

Because of their expansion, today's multinationals are able to overwhelm their environment. L. Grunig (1992a) argued that too often, "the power of the conglomerate dwarfs that of the local politicians, not to mention the citizenry" (p. 129). An increasing number of multinational activities are beyond the jurisdictions of individual national governments (Manu, 1996). In fact, some managerial experts have predicted that the accumulation of multinational enterprises will radically alter the nation-state system under which individual and global societies have operated for more than 400 years (Barnett & Muller, 1974).

As guests in host countries, multinational enterprises have a responsibility to be good community citizens. As community citizens, organizations can be positive forces in building infrastructures that lift societies out of poverty and spark economic growth in the host countries. They can encourage the protection of basic human rights in all parts of the world. They can harness local resources in ways that assist, rather than harm, the local environment (Sethi, Kurtzman, & Bhalla, 1994).

Sometimes, despite their attempts to assist, multinationals still run afoul of local

perceptions and attitudes. Often, even without knowing, they foster objectives that conflict with the goals of their hosts (Sethi et al., 1994). Wilcox et al. (1995) cited Chevron's attempts to develop a \$1 billion oil field in New Guinea. It laid a 159-mile pipeline to minimize damage to the rain forest; built a highway, schools and clinics at a \$45 million expense; and gave money to local people in need. Yet, that did not override the perceptions of many locals that the company was disrupting hunting and fishing and offering fewer benefits than had been expected. They set up roadblocks in the forests and attacked Chevron officials.

Many multinationals seem to have no desire to assist local causes or consider the needs and values of the host countries. There are numerous examples of organizations that run into trouble for these reasons. Some of their problems are cultural practices that are not adapted to local environments, overaggressive management and interpersonal styles, or products that do not fit local market needs or ways of life (Maddox, 1993). Other examples are miscommunication between host country and headquarters, failure to adequately assess risks in the host environment (Manu, 1996), covering up underlying dangers with "window dressing," and bribing local officials or cooperating with oppressive governments to satisfy mutual gain (Vogl & Sinclair, 1996). Many more instances could be cited.

Unfortunately, even organizations that act responsibly in their home country can be susceptible to "double standards" in host countries. Multinationals often expand into new territories specifically to capitalize on lax controls and to undertake activities generally not permitted in their own countries (Manu, 1996). This was evidenced in the

Bhopal explosion and in some of the more recent complaints about "sweatshops" operated by some United States retailers in other countries (Young, 1996).

Organizations that think they know what is best for their publics often have the same tendency in the international arena. Harris and Moran (1991) stated:

There are naive multinational executives who think what is good for their corporation is automatically good for the nation in which they operate. Like the 'missionary' do-gooders of the past, they point to what they are doing for these less fortunate peoples of underdeveloped lands -- they bring jobs, technical know-how, training, and capital." However, they warned, "not every endeavor of advanced countries and their representatives is a benefit to the consuming nation (p. 533).

#### Asymmetrical Public Relations Leads to Hostility

Domination of people and the environment in other countries, exploitation at the expense of short-term profit, and similar manipulations are typical of the asymmetrical worldview (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Because this asymmetrical mindset was referred to as the dominant worldview in the United States (Botan, 1993), it should not be surprising that the same philosophy would prevail among United States-based multinationals. Maddox (1993) revealed, however, that multinationals from a variety of other countries also exhibit these types of behaviors.

Even among public relations practitioners, the asymmetrical view often surfaces. Articles with an international emphasis reveal philosophies like "extending [global] advertising and promotions through public relations methods" (Haus, 1993); or,

"trend[s] that will affect public relations ... require an understanding of international marketing" (Ogbondah & Pratt, 1991-92). Articles often emphasize techniques of communication within a given country, rather than examining coordinated management of global communication. And yet, technical functions meant simply to create publicity or support marketing are incapable of responding proactively to the dynamic international environment because they are not strategic.

As a result of asymmetrical behaviors, many organizations face skepticism or even hostility in their host countries. Particularly in developing nations, critics see capitalism as a way for wealthy nations to maintain power over other nations and people (Jones, 1993). Even those who do not criticize the ideological connotations often see multinationals as strange outsiders who do not fit with their cultures. Wilcox et al. (1995) stated that "multinational" is a pejorative word in many countries -- that there is a "dislike grounded in such factors as national pride, past relationships, envy, and apprehension, especially in regard to the United States, concerning foreign cultural, economic, political, and military influence" (p. 417).

In the past, poor behaviors of multinationals were excused or accommodated; but this no longer is the case. Maddox (1993) explained, "Public scrutiny has come to be expected in the United States ... However, attention is increasingly being focused on the activities of multinational firms operating in other countries.... Public scrutiny has greatly expanded and is reaching all-encompassing proportions today" (p. 28). Vogl and Sinclair (1996) added that as asymmetrical activities of multinationals increase, "More independent newspapers are being created, more vocal, nongovernmental organizations

are being established, and pressures are mounting for more independent judicial systems" to monitor and expose these activities (p. 90).

In an attempt to modify the behaviors of multinational organizations, Donaldson (1989) argued that these powerful entities maintain a "social contract" with the societies that allow them to function. This contract carries with it certain "derivative obligations" that multinationals must realize that extend beyond the mere need to make profits (p. 49). He suggested three culture-neutral conditions within a social contract by which the performance of multinationals can be judged. These are (a) an organization should enhance the long-term welfare of employees and consumers in any society in which it operates; (b) an organization should minimize the drawbacks associated with being productive in a given society, such as pollution or the depletion of natural resources; and (c) an organization should refrain from violating minimum standards of human rights in any society in which it operates. Unfortunately, Donaldson concluded, many multinational organizations fail to recognize these long-term obligations and thus cause problems for their host countries and, ultimately, for themselves.

#### Symmetrical Public Relations Needed Internationally

The problems created by poor behaviors, and the local hostilities that result from those behaviors, indicate an even greater need for symmetrical public relations in the global environment. Vogl and Sinclair (1996) emphasized the value of symmetry: "The successful corporation in this new era will be the one that ... seeks partnership, recognizing that open, honest, long-term commitments in the emerging economies are the soundest and surest roads to success. To operate profitably, corporations must



change their approaches to competitiveness and their attitudes" toward those new nations and people where they operate (p. 98).

Traverse-Healy (1991) explained that the major characteristic of the global environment is its extreme complexity and propensity for rapid change. Therefore, multinational organizations must have a function that effectively balances their policies and needs with interests of the publics in their host countries. Public relations can fill this role by acting as corporate consciences and promoting responsibility. But there must be solid programming at headquarters and in each host country.

To be effective in the international arena, public relations must be strategically managed to identify key publics -- those that can harm an organization or help it succeed -- and build relationships with them (J. Grunig, 1992c). This is consistent with the definitions of public relations that emphasize symmetrical communication (J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Pavlik (1987) said that most multinational organizations have no procedures for analyzing emerging social and political issues and placing them into the management realm. However, he argued, "it is becoming increasingly important for multinational corporations to take an active, aggressive role in managing public affairs and communications efforts" (p. 64).

It also is crucial to emphasize two-way communication in international public relations. In fact, Botan (1992) contended that when public relations across borders is not two-way, it cannot be called "international public relations" (p. 152). Instead, it would be "trans-border" public relations because it is based on ethnocentric assumptions of the home country. He added that instead of building mutually beneficial relationships

as public relations should, "this practice can cause significant harms." True international public relations should be a "two-way multicultural exercise" (p. 151).

### **Parameters for International Public Relations**

This lengthy discussion of definitions and assumptions about public relations should have indicated some prerequisites that must exist in forming a definition of international practice. It seems that at least four important factors must be present for the practice to be called "international public relations." These are:

1. The public relations program must be positioned with management and founded on two-way communication.

Two-way communication is a precondition to the very name of "international public relations" (Botan, 1992). Such a requirement is consistent with the accepted definitions of the field explained above. Likewise, the function must be positioned within management circles to be effective for the multinational organization.

2. The program must have the potential to take into account publics and consequences in countries that are different from the multinational's headquarters.

Many activities sound international simply because they are on the other side of the ocean (Anderson, 1989). A campaign conducted solely in Nigeria may sound international to Americans, but it is domestic. To be truly international, public relations must build relations with key publics in countries different from the one in which it is headquartered.

3. The public relations activity must have a global orientation.

It is essential to have a global perspective, "to see the trees *and* the forest" (Anderson, 1989, p. 414). For public relations to build consistent, long-term relationships with multinational publics, it must have global vision and coordination.

4. The program must have the capacity and flexibility for responding quickly to local audiences in any country.

Traverse-Healy (1991) said "the action" is wherever the organization must deal with its publics. In today's global environment, the focus is moving away from mass communication toward speedy, personalized response to publics in any given location.

With these parameters identified, it seems possible to put forth a working definition of international public relations for the purpose of this dissertation.:

International public relations is a multinational program that, recognizing the potential for consequences or results in more than one country, uses multicultural resources to identify and manage the relationships and communication processes between an organization and its publics in the nations where those consequences could occur.

With such a base-line definition, it should be possible to examine what is necessary for excellent practice of international public relations. The remainder of this chapter will explore potential variables of effectiveness in the international sphere. This includes variables already established for domestic public relations, as well as those from other domains that could be important in the international environment.

### **Effectiveness and Excellence Defined**

In examining what comprises effective public relations, it would be useful to understand what I mean by the term effective. Also, because the principal foundation for this study comes from the Excellence Study in public relations, it is important to explain

what those authors meant by the term excellence. As J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1991) explained, "the concepts of effectiveness and excellence provide[d] the key building blocks of our theory of public relations" (p. 259).

Etzioni (1964) defined effectiveness as the degree to which an organization realizes its goals. Robbins (1990), however, asked, "Whose goals? Short-term or long-term?" (p. 49). He argued that everyone has differing opinions about which goals are important but that the necessary condition for an organization's success is survival, or remaining profitable. Early definitions were based on closed systems of management, meaning that management could control its inputs and outputs with no concern for outside interference. Robbins defined effectiveness from a contingency perspective, as "the degree to which an organization attains its short- (ends) and long-term (means) goals, the selection of which reflects strategic constituencies, the self-interest of the evaluator, and the life stage of the organization" (p. 77).

J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1991) positioned public relations as a function for helping organizations achieve these short- and long-term goals. Thus, they said, "a theory of organizational effectiveness tells us how public relations contributes to the success of an organization" (p. 259). They based effectiveness in public relations on three main concepts: autonomy, interdependence, and relationships. These concepts help foster an open systems approach by recognizing that, for organizations to achieve the most over the long term, public relations must reach out to the environment and interact with it in mutually beneficial ways.

The concept of excellence surfaced in the book, In Search of Excellence, by

Peters and Waterman (1982). They identified eight attributes that would distinguish an excellent organization from a not-so-excellent entity. In the same light, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1991) described a theory of excellence in public relations as what attributes a program should have to contribute to organizational success. Therefore, effectiveness would include the choice of appropriate goals as defined by interactions with strategic constituents, and the subsequent attainment of those goals; excellence, by comparison, is the type of program put into place to help attain those goals. I will examine these concepts, and how they apply specifically to international public relations, in the remainder of this chapter.

### **Generic Variables in International Public Relations**

In Chapter One, I reviewed the current state of international public relations literature. In the majority of those writings, the main emphasis is whether to centralize or localize programs to produce the most effective public relations. It was concluded that neither centralization or localization is favorable -- that a combination of the two is necessary for effective public relations to occur.

To more realistically examine international public relations, I drew from systems and contingency theory. Those theories posit that no one management style works best; rather, the most effective management depends on the myriad and rapidly changing situations an organization faces in conducting its business. I then proposed Brinkerhoff and Ingle's (1989) argument that effective multinational organizations combine central managerial roles with local programs that adapt to these changing environments.

In the theory outlined by Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989), the centralized variables

were called generic and the local adaptations were specific. Traverse-Healy (1991), Botan (1992), and J. Grunig (1992a) all contended that a realistic combination of central and local structuring can be applied to public relations to develop an effective international program. Ovaitt (1988) argued that the generic/specific combination should be viewed as a continuum. The question then becomes not whether to centralize or localize, but in what proportions is the combination most effective. Exactly what activities should be centralized and what should be performed locally?

J. Grunig (1992a) asserted that the generic variables are contained in the Excellence Model outlined in the book, Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management (J. Grunig, 1992c). Traverse-Healy (1991) called this Excellence project "a sign of progress" toward understanding what constitutes effective international performance. Nessmann (1995) also illustrated its importance in a European context. If that is true, what exactly does the Excellence study include that has promise for applicability worldwide?

#### The Study on Excellence in Public Relations

In this section, I will discuss the Excellence project through which J. Grunig (1992a) and other authors have determined the variables that define excellence in public relations. Their argument has great support for public relations in a domestic context. After discussing the main elements of their study, I will try to explain why these variables might also be applicable in the international environment.

The Excellence Model was proposed in the mid-1980's, when a group of scholars realized the need for a comprehensive set of theories to explain the value of public

relations to organizations. They believed that fundamental theories existed, but more were needed to determine what makes public relations effective. These theories then needed testing to validate their utility for the field. So, the group responded to a call for proposals from the Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and received a \$400,000 grant for a multi-year project.

The Excellence project has been conducted in several phases. The authors first gathered relevant theories that they believed provided a model for excellent public relations. The theories were detailed in Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management (J. Grunig, 1992c). The second phase, conducted in 1990-1991, was an extensive survey of 321 organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. The excellence theories were tested in this phase to determine their validity in organizational settings. The third phase included follow-up case studies of 24 organizations that had participated in the second phase (Dozier et al., 1995).<sup>3</sup> The results of the second and third phases are now being prepared for a future book.

#### Excellence Based on Symmetry

The basic foundation for the Excellence Model was the concept of symmetrical public relations discussed in previous sections. In fact, without all of the principles embodied in the symmetrical model, it would be difficult to conceive of a public relations

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Dozier explained only two phases of the Excellence Study. He noted the first phase as the quantitative survey, and the second as the follow-up case studies. He did not mention what I have understood, through my association with the Grunigs, was the actual first phase: gathering the theories that could be operationalized and tested through the phases mentioned by Dozier. Therefore, Dozier's first phase was actually the second, and his second phase was really the third phase of their study.

program that would have much positive effect. There are too many examples of organizations that try to preserve their short-term interests through stonewalling information, covering up misdeeds, "strong-arming" their publics into accepting less than desirable behaviors, and other one-way, manipulative tactics. In many cases, such behaviors come back to harm the organization. Eventually someone finds out about the behaviors, gets angry because the behaviors have failed to match their expectations, and creates negative pressures against the organization (see J. Grunig & White, 1992; L. Grunig, 1992a; Nigh and Cochran, 1994; Olasky, 1987).

According to J. Grunig and White (1992), symmetrical public relations includes philosophies that an organization is interdependent with publics and other organizations in its environment; the organization freely exchanges information in an "open systems" mode; and it bases its decisions on equity, innovation, and decentralization. People within the organization practicing symmetrical public relations are given the autonomy to function freely and fulfill their goals in line with those of the organization's mission; and the organization seeks equilibrium with its publics and in society through dialogue, negotiation, and compromise. These philosophies thus undergird each of the attributes of an excellent public relations program (J. Grunig, 1992c).

#### Characteristics of Effectiveness

The Excellence Model contained fourteen characteristics of effectiveness in public relations. The characteristics were organized into three levels: the program level, the departmental level, and the organizational level. These elements of the Excellence



Model will be described below and outlined in Table 1.<sup>4</sup>

### Program-Level Characteristics

At the program level there is only one characteristic, but it joins symmetrical communication as a foundation for effective public relations. The characteristic is that public relations must be a strategic management function, allied closely to core decisions and goals of the organization. J. Grunig and Repper (1992) defined strategic management as a symmetrical process of "thinking ahead or planning rather than as manipulation and control" (p. 123).

In this planning mode, strategic public relations interprets the organization's environment and identifies and builds relations with strategic publics. Strategic publics are identified as "stakeholders that are critical, crucial, essential, important, or vital for an organization" (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992, p. 123). The Excellence authors thus distinguished strategic management from routine management functions such as developing budgets and overseeing technical communication activities that support the whims of senior decision makers. With strategic management in place, public relations can help the organization behave and communicate proactively, rather than always reacting to situations that management had not anticipated.

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To fully comprehend the 14 characteristics of excellence in public relations, I would encourage the reader to peruse the book, Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management (J. Grunig, 1992c). In this treatment of just a dozen pages, it is impossible to adequately explain the more than 600 pages of comprehensive information that is contained in the book.

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Table 1: Characteristics of Excellence in Public Relations

**Characteristics at the Program Level:**

1. Managed strategically

**Characteristics at the Departmental Level:**

2. A single or integrated public relations department
3. Separate function from marketing
4. Direct reporting relationship to senior management
5. Two-way symmetrical model of public relations
6. Senior public relations person in the managerial role
7. Potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by:
  - a. Knowledge of symmetrical public relations
  - b. Knowledge of managerial role
  - c. Academic training in public relations
  - d. Professionalism
8. Equal opportunities for men and women in public relations

**Characteristics at the Organizational Level:**

9. Worldview for public relations in the organization that reflects the two-way symmetrical model of communication
10. Public relations director has power in or with the dominant coalition
11. Participative rather than authoritarian organizational culture
12. Symmetrical system of internal communication
13. Organic rather than mechanistic organizational structure
14. Turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups

**Effects of Excellent Public Relations:**

1. Programs meet communication objectives
2. Reduces costs of regulation, pressure, and litigation
3. Job satisfaction is high among employees

Note: From "An overview of the book," by J. Grunig, 1992, in J. Grunig (Ed.),

Excellence in public relations and communication management (p. 28). Hillsdale, NJ:

Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992.

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### Department-Level Characteristics

The departmental level consisted of seven characteristics. Perhaps foremost is that the senior public relations staff member must report directly to the senior manager in the organization, such as the chief executive officer, executive director, or president. To help the organization be effective, the senior practitioner performs a "boundary spanning" role. Boundary spanners were described by White and Dozier (1992) as "individuals within the organization who frequently interact with the organization's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision makers in the dominant coalition" (p. 93). This role must be performed before and while decisions are being made, not after the fact as so often happens. In reporting directly to the senior executive, the public relations practitioner can keep her or him constantly abreast of changes and arising issues. Without this daily interaction, the organization is destined to become reactionary.

Another characteristic at the departmental level is that public relations must be integrated into a single unit. In many organizations today, the function is distributed among many different departments as a means of technical support. When this happens, it is impossible for public relations to have a voice in senior management because each practitioner is reporting to some other line manager. It also is difficult for practitioners in the various departments to form a cohesive public relations strategy that helps the organization respond quickly to environmental changes. Often, they are required to perform separate and different -- even conflicting -- activities based on the whims of their respective unit managers (Dozier & L. Grunig, 1992).

A third departmental characteristic was closely related to the first and second: The senior public relations practitioner must serve in a managerial role. If the senior practitioner reports to the chief executive and the public relations department is integrated, it is likely that the senior practitioner over the department will perform a managerial role. Roles are defined as "abstractions of behavior patterns of individuals in organizations" (Dozier, 1992, p. 327), or, in simpler terms for public relations, they are the everyday activities of practitioners. Role research in public relations has spanned more than a dozen years and has included comparisons of many differing roles as well as the impacts and involvement of gender on roles. In a summary of this research, Dozier (1992) categorized two main roles: the managerial function and the technician role.

The distinction between the managerial role and the technician is critical. Technicians are important conduits of communication, but they do not make the important decisions about what kind of communication is needed, to what audiences, and why. The technician performs tasks that often are defined by and serve the purposes of higher-level decision makers. Such tasks can include creating newsletters and videotape presentations or working with the media -- "low level mechanics of generating communication products," said Dozier (p. 333). Most practitioners spend at least some of their time in these technical roles. However, public relations is effective only when the senior practitioner, at least, also performs a managerial role.

In the managerial role, a senior practitioner can help make policy decisions and can be held accountable for those decisions. In this role, practitioners "facilitate communication between management and publics and guide management through ... a

"rational problem-solving process" (Dozier, 1992, p. 333). If the senior practitioner does not participate with senior management, it is probable that senior management will not perceive the public relations function as important. The organization will lose the essential functions of boundary spanning and problem-solving related to its environmental factors, because one in the managerial ranks would be trained to examine situations and to help make decisions from the perspective of strategic publics.

To serve effectively in the managerial role, the senior practitioner must have the proper qualifications. This was another characteristic identified in the Excellence Study. Many practitioners in managerial roles still do not understand public relations enough to be effective (Lesly, 1991). The senior practitioner must understand the importance of the managerial function, know how to perform vital boundary spanning and problem solving activities, and have the professionalism to attract respect from senior management. This knowledge requires academic training in a quality public relations program and continual upgrading of relevant knowledge (Ehling, 1992).

The senior practitioner also must understand that, in the long run, two-way symmetrical communication is the most effective organizational worldview. Unlike asymmetrical communication or the one-way models of press agency or public information (other models contrasted by J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the organization that fosters a symmetrical worldview does not attempt to dominate its environment (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1992). Rather, it works within the environment to seek mutual benefits with its publics. When an organization communicates in this way, it uses research to identify and understand its publics. It also respects its publics and builds

programs to interrelate with them. By so doing, it can gain the essential long-term understanding and support it requires to continue to operate. If communication shows that the organization needs to change, it will be willing to do so.

Another departmental characteristic was that public relations must be separate from marketing, legal services, or other functions. Public relations and marketing have distinct purposes that contribute to the organization in different ways. Marketing transacts with consumers and potential consumers; public relations responds to any public that can affect or be affected by the organization. These publics include consumers but also employees, donors, stockholders, communities, regulators, media, members, students, suppliers, or activist groups. Another difference is that marketing is strictly a money-making venture, while public relations can help the organization make money (e.g., through donations) and save revenues by avoiding costly boycotts, lawsuits, regulations, or negative publicity (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1991).

Unfortunately, in many business organizations public relations is subsumed by the marketing function, with the idea that its single purpose is to help generate more profits. When this happens, practitioners are reduced to the technical roles of marketing support, product publicity, promotion, and the like. As a result, the organization concentrates only on those publics who can help bring in revenues. It fails to identify additional publics and also loses the valuable strategic role of "managing its interdependence with its strategic publics" (Ehling, White, & J. Grunig, 1992, p. 357).

Similarly, when public relations becomes a technical support to the legal function, it usually assumes the task of disseminating "no comment" notices or employing other

diversionary tactics during crises and other hazardous situations (Fitzpatrick & Rubin, 1995). When this happens, the organization loses its open, communicative stance with important publics. Such a stance in times of crisis could ultimately destroy critical trust levels and lead to more, longer-term opposition.

The final characteristic at the department level was that there must be equal opportunity for placement and advancement within the public relations function. Research has indicated that men typically are advanced more readily into managerial roles and paid higher salaries than women (Creedon, 1991). Ironically, however, feminine perspectives and values -- things like collaboration, negotiation, and compromise -- are considered more suitable to effective public relations than the aggressive and individualistic traits common to men (Wetherell, 1989). Thus, women should be provided equal opportunities for promotion within the department (Hon, L. Grunig, & Dozier, 1992). This is not only important to the organization's long-term success, but, as Dozier (1988) argued, "The fate of women in public relations -- particularly their participation in management decision-making -- is inexorably linked to the survival and growth of public relations as a profession" (p. 6).

In the United States, other minority groups suffer similarly to women from limited opportunities for advancement in public relations (Kern-Foxworth, 1989). The field has been slow to embrace diversity and to include the perspectives of minorities. However, organizations are facing domestic and international publics that are increasingly diverse. Only organizations whose ranks reflect that diversity will succeed in meeting the needs of those diverse publics (Banks, 1995). It is anticipated that as

public relations begins to foster diversity and include more minorities, all practitioners will become more sensitized to the cultural diversity of their publics. In turn, they will help their organizations gain more meaningful relationships with a broader range of publics (Sriramesh & White, 1992).

There is evidence that equity is more important in international contexts than it is domestically. Adler (1993) illustrated that women represent more than half of the world's population, but less than 10 percent of the senior managers in developed nations. Yet, with an increasing need for talent in the globally competitive environment, organizations cannot "dare to limit their potential talent pool to half of the human race" (p. 4). Interestingly, her research has discovered that transnational organizations are among the leaders in including women, because they have greater flexibility to overcome local prejudices and stereotypes.

Prugl (1996) noted that management styles of women in multinational entities correspond closely to what public relations experts view as the symmetrical approach. They combine task-oriented and people-oriented management and "focus more heavily on processes" (p. 17). This is exhibited by "showing more concern for their subordinates by taking into account their ideas, building their self-esteem and showing appreciation for good work" (p. 18). L. Grunig (1991) unearthed similar findings in her study on women in the foreign service. She maintained that if organizations retain more women and promote more into the managerial ranks, "they may go on to influence the priorities of their organizations and those of the groups with which they interact" (p. 110). It is anticipated that more excellent public relations would result from these influences.



### Organizational-Level Characteristics

The organizational level of the Excellence Model contained six attributes of excellence. The first was that organizational leaders must have the same two-way symmetrical worldview as the public relations department. Organizations that do not foster symmetrical communication typically hire a public relations staff with limited experience to serve as technicians. Even if the practitioners have the symmetrical worldview, if it is not shared they will spend most of their time trying to educate senior managers. This will frustrate the practitioners, and the organization will not be prepared to respond to changes in its environment. Worse, an organization that shuns the symmetrical model eventually will be seen as self-serving and could attract pressure from publics that would limit its autonomy (J. Grunig & White, 1992).

A second organizational trait was that public relations must have influence within the dominant coalition. The "dominant coalition" is the group "with the power to make and enforce decisions about the direction of the organization, its tasks, its objectives, and functions" (White & Dozier, 1992, p. 93). Thompson (1967) referred to the dominant coalition by a more common term, "inner circle." This group may or may not reflect the formal structure (informal connections often are more powerful than the formal linkages), and it may include outside stakeholders such as advisory board members, substantial donors, or influential regulators (Mintzberg, 1983).

The dominant coalition strongly influences the practice of public relations. As L. Grunig (1992c) said, "organizations practice public relations as they do ... because the dominant coalition decides to do it that way. Public relations has a better chance of

being excellent ... if the senior communication manager is a member of that coalition" (p. 483). Repper (1992), a public relations consultant, put into practical terms the necessary relationship with the dominant coalition:

Mutually determine what your communication goals are for your organization.

Arrive at strategies. Agree on objectives and the expected results.... You will be thinking on the same terms. You will have a common language. You will have taken your first steps to communication excellence (p. 114).

The third and fourth organizational characteristics are related to corporate culture and internal communication. Corporate culture is seen as "the glue that holds excellent organizations together and keeps mediocre organizations mediocre" (Sriramesh, J. Grunig, & Buffington, 1992, p. 577). Effective cultures foster a participative style of management, in which employees have an active stake in the decision making process. When broad participation is encouraged, productivity increases and the organization is successful. Therefore, this participative style, as opposed to an authoritarian environment, is another characteristic of excellence.

Participative cultures imply interaction and trust, so organizations with such cultures are more likely to establish two-way symmetrical communication. Two-way communication is just as important with employees as with external publics -- if not more. This is particularly true in the international context, where employees from different countries carry a highly diverse set of values and philosophies (Maddox, 1993). When these employees are treated as equals and have a stake in organizational outcomes, their job satisfaction and loyalty to the organization increases. As a result, the

organization gains multicultural input into its decisions and increases its chances for long-term success (J. Grunig, 1992d).

Another organizational attribute addressed the environment. Research has shown that organizations facing a rapidly changing, turbulent environment develop more flexible structures and communication programs than do those with stable environments (L. Grunig, 1992b). When management acknowledges potential threats from activist publics, it will be more likely to involve public relations in decision-making processes. With a public relations program, the organization can identify potential points of conflict and build relationships with pertinent publics before dissension arises. Therefore, activist groups may create threats for the organization, but they also provide opportunities for excellent public relations programs -- if the organization interacts with them in a symmetrical fashion (L. Grunig, 1992b).

The final characteristic at the organizational level was an organic structure that can respond quickly to a dynamic environment. Such a structure decentralizes decision making and limits rules that restrict rapid responses at the points of contact with publics. Traditional organizations, by contrast, foster bureaucratic, assembly-line structures. Such mechanistic structures inhibit response to changes in the environment (L. Grunig, 1992d). Usually, public relations programs within mechanistic organizations perform traditional, technical roles that emphasize one-way communication. They do not research their environment to identify changes, and cannot adapt to those changes. As a result, the organization will react defensively to outside pressures, instead of building relations with relevant groups and alleviating potential conflicts before they occur (L.

Grunig, 1992b). In the international arena, an organic structure is much more adaptable to the constant changes that take place.

### An Excellent Public Relations Program in Action

To summarize then, excellent public relations is founded on two-way symmetrical communication and strategic management within the dominant coalition. If the senior practitioner is actively involved in decisions by senior management and the dominant coalition, if that practitioner understands and practices the principles of excellence, and if both the organizational leaders and the public relations department foster and implement two-way symmetrical communication, then the organization will have the foundation for an excellent public relations program as described by the Excellence research team.

With this combination of symmetrical and strategic worldviews, all other characteristics should fall into place. Senior management should want to integrate public relations and separate it from marketing or other line functions; it should foster a participative climate and two-way internal communication (assisted by the public relations staff); it should value the equal employment and advancement of men, women and all minority groups; it should establish an organic structure that identifies supporters and recognizes activist threats to the organization's long-term success; and it should implement the boundary spanning and problem-solving processes that help identify and build long-term relationships with all of these groups.

The Excellence team also determined that entities that build the environment just described will achieve certain positive effects. It will: (a) meet all of its communication objectives; (b) reduce costs of regulation, pressure, and litigation, and perhaps bring in

revenues through increased sales, more donations, and other beneficial means; and (c) help create job satisfaction among employees of the organization. In turn, these positive effects will contribute to the organizational goals of continued survival and growth.

The generic variables were created as normative concepts, or as how the practice should occur under ideal circumstances. In international public relations, these propositions also can have a practical element (J. Grunig and L. Grunig, 1991). As senior practitioner Fred Repper (1992) explained to fellow practitioners, "You will feel at home with the normative theory because it involves activities you are probably familiar with -- strategic planning, segmentation, issue management, research, choosing goals and objectives, and evaluation of results" (p. 112).

Traverse-Healy (1991) expounded variables in similar terms to those noted above, outlining functions that should be performed centrally in a multinational organization. He said the central function (at the organization's headquarters) must establish and maintain: (a) policies about the organization's identity, culture, and ethics; (b) communication objectives and themes that support the corporate missions and business plans; (c) benchmarks for evaluating all public relations activities; (d) budgets, controls, and reporting procedures; (e) procedures for gaining assistance at the local level; (f) resources for establishing and maintaining global information flows; and (g) programs for training those executives responsible for local programs.

Traverse-Healy's (1991) practices revolve around the strategic managerial roles mentioned in the Excellence study. All of his functions correlate with one or more of the Excellence propositions. The first and second are similar to the symmetrical worldview

for the organization. Others address the need for well-trained public relations practitioners who serve as managers. Still others are crucial components for integrating and managing public relations programs that will be effective around the world.

### **Can the Excellence Model be Universally Applied?**

So, the question for this study is how do the attributes proposed in the Excellence Model relate to international public relations, if at all? At this moment, there are growing indications that the traits are universal. J. Grunig (1992a) argued that the Excellence attributes can be applied worldwide as generic variables for excellence. If his theory is correct, these characteristics, or at least a great portion of them, would contribute to an effective international program.

The search for universals is not new to management theorists. Peters and Waterman (1982) claimed that their attributes of excellence would hold across cultures and in a variety of settings. Collins and Porras (1994) later produced a similar typology of what they called "visionary companies." Visionary companies, they found, incorporate "timeless" principles of management to be "more than successful ... more than enduring" (pp. 2-3). Visionary organizations combine a profit motive with another, more timeless ideology: genuine concern for the well-being of their constituents. In some ways, these views sound similar to those of symmetrical communication. The researchers, like the Excellence Study scholars, argued, "The basic dynamics of being a visionary company will hold up across cultures and nationalities, but we also suspect that the flavor of those dynamics will vary -- perhaps dramatically -- across cultures" (p. 255).

Theories that are purported to be universal often are subject to criticism from

many ranks. Studies of this type ask whether theories applicable to one country can apply to other cultures. Adler (1983) referred to these claims and the resulting studies as "ethnocentric." Hill (1994), a European consultant, suggested that American theorists are "the most productive in coming up with panaceas" (p. 224), but such models can oversimplify "real world" situations. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) agreed that it is "largely Americans who believe that any universal code of management is possible" (p. 24). The Japanese and other cultures, by contrast, "do not believe that anything ... can be covered by a coherent set of universally valid laws" (p. 24). Therefore, the act of producing universals is, in itself, a cultural activity.

While skeptical of universal assertions, two scholars acknowledge that appropriately conducted studies can be valuable to international theory building. A problem with assumed universality, Adler (1983) said, is that these studies ignore cultural differences. If projects get beyond this barrier and use sophisticated methods for researching equivalency of meaning across cultures, they can create an "emergent universality" (p. 35). She called for more attempts to understand similarities across cultures or patterns of relationships when people from more than one culture interact within a work setting. She also saw the need for studies that ask, "In which areas can ... organizational policies and strategies be similar across cultures, and in which areas must they be different" (p. 29). Hill (1994) argued that management theories can be universally applied if they emphasize people over tasks, "flexibility of outlook, intuition and the maximisation (British spelling) of human potential" (p. 234).

It seems that the Excellence study is beginning to meet the criteria for universal

applicability. When presenting the study in a "condensed manager's version," Dozier et al. (1995) argued for its universality. They said, "Communication excellence ... applies to all organizations, large or small, that need to communicate effectively with publics on whom the organization's survival and growth depends" (p. vii). Then they added:

It is the same for corporations, not-for-profit organizations, government agencies, and trade or professional associations. That is because communication excellence involves knowledge or expertise that transcends any particular public, organizational division or unit, industry, organizational type, or national setting (p. 4).

Scholars from outside the Excellence group have suggested that the Excellence study or its founding principles could be a universal model for public relations. For example, Leeper (1996) contended that the symmetrical foundation of Excellence works universally by focusing on processes rather than outcomes. Because the process provides a forum for dialogue, its participants determine that which is mutually beneficial. He also stated that the symmetrical model is based on universal norms outlined by Immanuel Kant, Jurgen Habermas and other philosophers.

Kruckeberg (1996) argued for ethical codes in public relations based on an "international normative consensus on human rights" (p. 89). Transnational organizations should "demand reciprocal respect, tolerance, and accommodation" (p. 88) -- all principles embodied in the symmetrical foundation of the Excellence Study. And Roth et al. (1996) claimed that the dialogic norms of relationships are prevalent outside the United States, thus assuming that symmetrical principles would be more acceptable



outside of the United States than within this country.

European scholars also have implied that the Excellence Study may have universal application. Nessmann (1995) stated that the two-way symmetrical model is "enjoying lively debate in Europe" (p. 157). Its applicability has been investigated in Germany, Austria, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and other European countries. The consensus so far seems to be similar to that in the United States -- that the symmetrical model and the Excellence study are valuable as normative theories but "utopian, illusory, and useless in practice" (p. 158). However, Nessmann also conceded that social changes may make the model more practical in the future.

Adler (1983) said that one key to a successful universal investigation is that it holds up to testing in more than two cultures. As mentioned, the Excellence variables originally were tested on organizations in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (Dozier et al., 1995). Subsequently, parts of the Excellence study have been examined qualitatively in India, Taiwan, and Greece (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995). More recently, the quantitative methods used in the Excellence study were replicated in an examination of 30 Slovenian organizations (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Vercic, 1997). In every instance, the generic nature of the variables held from country to country, with recognition for cultural adaptations for actual practices.

Like the follow-up studies just noted, this study will qualitatively examine the variables of the Excellence Study across cultures. The difference between this study and the other subsequent studies, however, is that it has sought information from experts in a number of countries at the same time. In this regard, it should be a valuable addition to

examining the universal applications of the Excellence Study.

### **Propositions from the Excellence Study**

Anticipating that the Excellence Study can serve as the generic foundation for an effective international program, I created from the Excellence variables propositions to be tested. If the propositions are well constructed and accurately reflect the Excellence variables, they should hold up internationally. The propositions were as follows:

#### Proposition 1

Excellent international public relations is based on a philosophy of two-way symmetrical communication that pervades the organization worldwide. Top management at headquarters and senior managers in each market carry a philosophy of mutual trust, respect for others, and the need for establishing two-way mutual benefits between the organization and all publics -- internal and external -- on whom its success or failure depends.

#### Proposition 2

This two-way symmetrical philosophy will be reflected in the organizational culture and in internal communication styles worldwide. Management would respect all employees as important contributors to organizational success and would implement methods that foster participation and two-way symmetrical communication among all of its employees throughout the world.

#### Proposition 3

Excellent public relations is a strategic management function working as part of and directly with senior management and the dominant coalition, worldwide. In an international program, the senior practitioner at headquarters will perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning, counseling with the dominant coalition, and setting communication strategies that support organizational goals. Senior practitioners in each region and country must also perform strategic roles that identify local audiences, build relationships with them, and adapt quickly to changing local conditions.

#### Proposition 4

Excellent international public relations is integrated, meaning that worldwide, practitioners report to the public relations department at headquarters and work under a single umbrella (as opposed to, for example, public relations in one country under marketing, in another country under human resources, etc.).

#### Proposition 5

An excellent public relations program is not subordinated to marketing, legal, or other organizational departments.

#### Proposition 6

Senior practitioners all over the world will be qualified for their positions. They will be trained in public relations, not marketing or another field. They will understand the importance of having integrated public relations worldwide, as well as the importance of advising the senior managers and the dominant coalition. They will be qualified to perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning and counseling, and will value and foster the use of two-way symmetrical communication. However, there certainly would be variations in necessary qualifications directly related to the given culture.

#### Proposition 7

In an excellent multinational organization, hiring and promotional practices would foster diversity by offering equal opportunities to women and "minorities" (those who typically are not accepted in the cultural mainstream) in every country. Particularly, the organization's philosophy would be to recruit and promote individuals who are empathic to others and who have ingrained the two-way symmetrical values of respect, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise.

#### Proposition 8

Because the organization faces a turbulent, dynamic environment internationally, the public relations program is structured to be flexible and adaptable to that environment, worldwide.

With these eight generic propositions now in place, the remainder of this chapter will focus on specific variables that may affect local public relations performance in an excellent international program.

### Possible Specific Variables

If the variables discussed above are shown to be useful in an international context, the centralized part of the puzzle should be satisfied. What is left, then, is to determine the specific variables that must be added to the generic concepts for a comprehensive program of excellence. Epley (1992) stated, "no matter how small the globe shrinks, it is still made up of many tiny segments, each with its own unique culture, language, politics, and idiosyncracies. Global public relations is local public relations" (p. 111). This means an effective international structure must have clear policies from headquarters, communication of themes that support the overall mission, and guidelines for evaluation, controls and budgets. However, those global policies and themes must be augmented with local expression and specific interaction with local audiences. "The public is 'out there'... and therefore 'out there' is where the action has to be," said Traverse-Healy (1991, p. 34).

Local programs must help develop an environment in which communication can occur between local publics and the organization (Epley, 1992). Therefore, Epley stated, local practitioners should be responsible for: (a) qualifying themselves to practice effectively in their country; (b) creating and maintaining local strategies and programs; (c) developing the machinery for implementing these programs, including the appointment of necessary staff or retaining an outside agency; and (d) establishing a training and evaluation system that corresponds with the central program.

How can practitioners establish these local priorities, however, if they do not understand the factors in the environment that can affect their communication programs?

Anecdotal sources on international public relations currently indicate great confusion about what factors can affect local practices. Thus, identifying these factors and learning what impacts they create is vital to building a theory of effective international public relations. So, what are these specific variables?

Perhaps the local factors can be identified from scholarly research from both within and outside the domain of communication. According to Pavlik (1987), public relations is a form of human behavior. Budd (1995) added that the practical aspects of the field are themselves highly interdisciplinary, in that effective implementation of public relations must incorporate disciplines like sociology, anthropology, political science, psychology, economics -- "whatever it takes to add proportion and relevance to our counsel" (p. 179). Therefore, perhaps greater comprehension of the field can be gained by studying it in that broader context. In fact, some researchers with this philosophy already have applied interdisciplinary theories to the study of public relations (Botan, 1993; J. Grunig, 1992b).

Human behavior and interaction do not stop at borders, so it should be possible to incorporate interdisciplinary theories into international public relations, as well. Some of the disciplines that already have compiled extensive theories with international application are comparative management, cultural anthropology, speech ethnography, sociology, development communication, and mass communication. With sources like these as a foundation, scholars can develop theories that will contribute to future understanding and practice of international public relations.

Currently, literature from the various disciplines suggests six major variables: (a)

Development also is correlated with literacy rates and the types of media resources that are available within a country. As Botan (1992) explained, highly developed nations usually have high literacy rates. They also have competitive media, and individuals are able to access those media. Therefore, media in those countries often are important conduits for communication. In developing nations like India, however, where half of the population cannot read and numerous languages are spoken, it makes little sense to use the mass media for transmission of messages. Rather, more traditional, direct vehicles of communication would be the most appropriate (Sriramesh, 1992).

Several scholars have indicated that national development has an effect on local public relations practice. After an examination of public relations in Slovenia, Vercic et al. (1996) referred to level of development as a possible specific variable in international programming. Botan (1992) asserted that development not only is important but may be the most important influence on local practice. The obvious followup question to these assertions is, if development is so important to public relations, why? How does development affect the practice from country to country?

Van Leuven and Pratt (1992) suggested that public relations activities in developing nations differ markedly from those in the developed world. In developing nations, public relations acts as a tool for national development or for rallying citizens toward national unity. This is evidenced specifically in Saudi Arabia (Al-Enad, 1990) and in Latin America (Simoes, 1992). Sharpe (1992) found similar one-way public relations in other countries while travelling through the developing world.

In many cases, the government (or sometimes a dominant religion that is allied

with the government) controls all communication outlets in the country (Kruckeberg, 1996). The government dictates the use of public relations to educate its citizens about pertinent issues and to publicize societal advances so the citizens can be satisfied with the progress of their country (Al-Enad, 1990). Criticisms from citizens, including practitioners, often are restricted. This makes it difficult or impossible for public relations to perform its essential boundary spanning role. Also, building relationships with potential critics of the client is not necessary, because few within the country dare criticize the organization in question -- the government or the dominant religion (Botan, 1992). Brazil is one example of those countries where, stated Sharpe (1992), "government support and approval is needed for almost every aspect of life" (p. 104).

In developed nations, by contrast, public relations is fostered not by the government but by economic forces and market competition (Botan, 1992). In the United States alone, there were more than 150,000 practitioners in 1990. Of that number, almost 47 percent were on the payrolls of corporations. Another twelve percent worked either for public relations agencies (serving mostly corporate clients) or for financial institutions that are directly related to maintaining or interpreting the economic machine. It also is estimated that less than 60 of the Fortune 500 companies do not have public relations departments (Baskin & Aronoff, 1992).

A surface analysis, then, would indicate that Van Leuven and Pratt (1992) are correct: Development levels lead to differences in the practice of public relations. The majority of practitioners in the United States and other developed nations would be enhancing marketplace causes by building relationships between commercial entities and

their publics. Practitioners in developing nations, by contrast, would work mostly for the government, enacting one-way information and education programs. Few would be working for commercial entities because there are not that many commercial outlets large enough or powerful enough to require public relations services in these countries.

However, it is possible that self-selection biases typical of qualitative research entered Van Leuven's and Pratt's (1992) arguments. Their research was centered on government communication in developing nations, to the exclusion of other types of public relations. They ignored the massive public relations vehicles of governments in developed nations and the growing commercial aspect of public relations even in the very countries they studied. A dissection of their work produces two comments: First, a similar study of government communications in a developed nation might show fewer differences than Van Leuven and Pratt claimed within the government communication; and second, if they were to examine commercial public relations in developing nations, they may find growing similarities to western-style public relations.

It is easy to find government public relations in developed nations that is not so different from the developing world. The Japanese government has been known to send out communication to rally its citizens, or to educate its masses. And to accomplish those purposes it has used the nation's mass media, many of whom wish to keep their government connections intact. Even in the United States, government entities often conduct communication efforts intended to inform and educate the citizens. The only differences probably are in the frequency and intensity of the messages. The pluralistic nature of United States society lessens the impact of one-way government



communication, and the plethora of media sources and our open-forum environment allow for an array of critical voices that are not found in many developing nations.

On the economic side, commercial organizations in developing nations are beginning to emulate some of the western styles of public relations. For example, Kruckeberg (1996) noted studies that found many similarities in public relations practice between the United Arab Emirates and developed countries. In another study conducted in Singapore, Wee, Tan, & Chew (1996) found that more and more commercial firms are emphasizing community relations and financial relations. Like their counterparts in the United States, these programs are driven mostly by asymmetrical marketing orientations. Sharpe (1992) learned that in Turkey, public relations not only helps the government promote the country to tourists from Europe and the United States, but more frequently practitioners are aiming to help their commercial organizations compete in the world markets. Gruban (1995) also noted how principles of western public relations that were used to help overthrow authoritarian governments in Central and Eastern Europe now are being used to ignite the economic enterprises in those countries.

These arguments are not to imply that there is no difference in public relations between the developed and developing spheres. There are cultural, political, and economic differences that certainly affect the practice country to country. Those differences, though, can be found as easily within developed and developing countries as between them. More comparative research is needed to explore both similarities and differences in practice between the countries. The research should examine why the practices are the same or different and, from an international perspective, what exactly

that means to public relations programs in multinational organizations.

Another interesting argument that has surfaced about development is that public relations could actually benefit from low levels of development (Sharpe, 1992). Because of the one-way, journalistic traditions from which western public relations evolved, it is difficult for practitioners to overcome these traditions and implement two-way symmetrical programs. But public relations in developing nations is not burdened by these traditions. As a result, the progress of public relations in some of these lands has been much more rapid than within the western world. As Sharpe explained, "advancements that have taken us nearly a century to achieve have been accomplished in a decade in many countries" (p. 103).

One example of this phenomenon comes from Africa. Sharpe (1992) claimed that Nigerian public relations is more advanced than in the United States. Nigeria has a strong public relations association, an excellent code of ethics, and requirements for education and continuing education in order to practice. The practice is fostered by participative communication between the government and its citizens. Admittedly, however, not all developing nations have made such progress. In fact, evolution of the profession in developing nations reportedly has been very uneven (Botan, 1992).

Level of development, then, is the first of the specific variables that is claimed to affect international public relations. In this study, I examine what effects development has on local practice and on the multinational organization as a whole. Do low levels of development restrict public relations activity or merely change it? Is the impact of development a positive or negative factor? If the practice is substantially different

between the developed and developing worlds, what does this mean to the multinational that sets up facilities in the developing countries? All of these questions need more comprehensive answers than we now have to better understand development as a specific variable.

With this discussion in place, the potential impact of development may be stated as another proposition in the series. This is as follows:

Proposition 9

A nation's level of development will affect the practice of public relations; but a local component of an excellent international public relations program will adjust to the particular nation's level of development and develop effective programs of communication to respond to that environment.

Political Environment

For decades, communication scholars have examined the effects of political systems on the mass media. One study in the early 1970s led to "four theories of the press." It predicted correlations between government types and the roles of media. Authoritarian regimes and those of developing nations were seen as fostering closed media systems that "rallied the troops" into obeying government aims. Only in the more democratic countries were media systems free to serve as public forums and to criticize established institutions (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1972).

Dynamic changes in political systems have forced scholars to reexamine media roles, the influence of global technologies, and public opinion within societies (Hiebert, 1992b). Many claim that for economic or political reasons, authoritarian regimes reluctantly opened their societies to the outside world. As a result, for the first time,

audiences in these states were able to see and hear images of freedom and economic prosperity through expanding global media systems. They also gained a sense of global support for human rights in their countries. This encouraged these publics to revolt against the more suppressive regimes (Hiebert, 1992b; Sharpe, 1992). In many cases, techniques of western public relations were instrumental in the revolutions and the subsequent transitions away from authoritarianism (Hiebert, 1992b; Vercic et al., 1996).

As changes have taken place in authoritarian societies, public relations has been introduced through agencies, associations, and other means. Even in countries that still have totalitarian governments, public relations is expanding to meet the growing economic and political needs of its organizations. An example is the People's Republic of China. Chen (1996) estimated that even though western practice was not introduced there until the early 1980s, about 100,000 people now call themselves public relations practitioners. She concluded that public relations probably is one of the fastest growing professions in China. Certainly, many practitioners promote the Chinese government, both internally and internationally. But Chen claimed that the greatest increase in the practice has been in private enterprises and in all other sectors of society.

Perhaps some public relations practices always existed in authoritarian countries, but the recent openness of these societies allows scholars to examine them more than ever before. As governments release their hold on citizens, many are finding their way to the United States and Western Europe to study in graduate public relations sequences.

They have a great interest in building theories relative to their native lands.<sup>5</sup> Many studies are underway or will be soon as interaction between people and organizations of the world proliferates.

Because of this new access, some scholars have been able to study political influences on public relations in various societies. Studies have been conducted by Sharpe (1992), Chen and Culbertson (1992), Hiebert (1992a), Sriramesh and White (1992), and others. More recently, the topic was addressed in Slovenia (formerly a part of Yugoslavia) by Vercic, a practitioner in Slovenia, and L. Grunig and J. Grunig, who developed a relationship with Vercic after visiting the country (Vercic et al., 1996).

Vercic et al. (1996) claimed that public relations cannot be practiced in an authoritarian regime. Authoritarian governments foster propaganda, which often is compared with public relations. But the authors defined propaganda as one-way information the government uses to "make people aware of the system of constraints on their behavior" (p. 23). Propaganda works because governments have the ability to use violence against their own citizens who don't follow the rules. By contrast, public relations requires "lateral" relationships between a government and its publics. Publics in "lateral" societies would be just as capable of communicating for change in the government as the government is able to change its publics.

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This was evidenced in just the few years that I have been studying at the Brigham Young University and the University of Maryland. In that time, more than a dozen graduate students have come through each program, from countries such as China, Bulgaria, Iran, Taiwan, Germany, Greece, India, Japan, Venezuela, Mexico, and Spain (admittedly, most of these are not authoritarian states). Many of them have written theses or dissertations on public relations in their countries.

The conclusions of Vercic et al. (1996) differed from those of Sharpe (1992). After visiting authoritarian countries, Sharpe concluded that western-style public relations can exist there. He used China and Turkey as examples of nations where public relations is practiced despite strong government prohibitions. He admitted, though, that public relations developed in these countries because of economic needs and the influx of democratic ideals through global technologies. It can be argued that minus these outside influences, authoritarian regimes still would stifle public relations as practiced elsewhere.

Kruckeberg (1995-96) offered a comprehensive view of the relationship between political systems and public relations. He even outlined the need for symmetrical public relations. But, like Sharpe (1992), he viewed the situation from the standpoint of economic politics. He argued that in "noncapitalistic" regimes:

nothing inherently restricts implementation of public relations practices....

Rather, it could be argued that the historic affinity between democracy and capitalism fosters the greater use of public relations practice.... Furthermore, one could submit the corollary proposition that symmetrical practice of public relations inevitably will encourage nondemocratic nations to become more democratic (p. 38).

Perhaps it is true that public relations can exist in most or all societies but can flourish only in capitalistic, democratic states. If so, what is needed are more examinations of the differences that occur in public relations practice in democratic versus nondemocratic countries. It also is necessary to examine the role symmetrical public relations can play, if any, in authoritarian states. This study intends to achieve that

by investigating the differing political influences on public relations practices.

These potential differences thus become another specific variable to examine for effective practice. Exactly what effect these environments have on the practice is still to be determined. This proposition can be stated as follows:

Proposition 10

The political system of a society will influence public relations; nevertheless, a local component of an excellent international public relations program will respond to and build relationships with whatever political entity it faces.

Cultural Environment

Culture is an ambiguous concept. As Ellingsworth (1977) claimed, "the term culture ... is plagued with denotative ambiguity and diversity of meaning" (p. 101).

Adler (1991) added that "culture remains generally invisible" as a term for study.

Sriramesh and White (1992) explained that not only is culture difficult for scholars to decipher and operationalize, but "the people of the culture themselves may not be able to verbalize some of their ideologies" (p. 606). Despite this ambiguity, scholars continue to examine culture and its influence on global interactions. Exactly what influence it has is still widely debated (Tayeb, 1988).

As early as the 1950s, there were more than 160 definitions of culture (Negandhi, 1983). Hofstede (1980) defined it as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another ... the interactive aggregate of common characteristics that influence a human group's response to its environment" (p. 25). Adler and Doktor (1986) suggested three elements that determine culture: (a) it is something shared by all or almost all members of some social group; (b) older

members of the group pass it on to younger members; and (c) it embraces morals, laws, or customs that shape the group's behaviors or views of the world.

Adler and Doktor (1986) claimed that cultural differences, despite the inherent difficulties in studying them, are the most significant influence on multinational organizations. One reason is that these differences are new to organizations, at least in the United States. Most U.S. managers have learned management principles specific to domestic consumers and publics. They do not understand how to recognize and handle the suddenly diverse marketplaces and publics of the multinational realm. Hill (1992) argued that European managers have equivalent problems because they hold too closely to their own cultural influences.

But the main reason that culture causes multinationals problems is its sheer complexity. As Maddox (1993) explained, the necessary organizational responses to factors like legal issues "are relatively clear" because regulations tend to be tangible and specific. Cultural factors, on the other hand, "are quite different. They are less tangible and less measurable" (p. 10). For organizations to succeed in the multinational environment, they must find appropriate ways to understand and assimilate these intangible cultural factors into their thinking and decision making.

The influence of culture on communication and public relations also is widely accepted (Ellingsworth, 1977; Nessmann, 1995; Vercic et al., 1996). Hall (1959) linked the two concepts into virtually the same thing when he said "culture is communication and communication is culture" (p. 191). This is important to public relations, because communication and public relations also have been seen as synonymous. Sriramesh and



White (1992) proclaimed that "the linkages between culture and communication and culture and public relations are parallel because public relations is primarily a communication activity" (p. 609). If this is true, it seems that of all people in the multinational organization, public relations practitioners should be the best equipped to resolve cultural dilemmas that are faced by multinationals.

Two different but related directions in cultural research indicate the impact culture can have on multinationals and on public relations activities throughout the world. The first area of research covers examinations of cultural convergence and divergence. The second involves culture-free vs. culture-specific theories of cultural anthropology and comparative management scholars. This area also includes the growing amount of research and theory building related to cultural dimensions.

As people of the world come together and begin to interact, scholars are debating whether this process is bringing cultures together (convergence) or pulling them apart (divergence). Dozens can be found in either camp, arguing their respective positions with great fervor. A closer look at convergence and divergence, though, indicates that probably both groups have valid points. The cultures of the world are coming together and pulling apart at the same time. These opposing forces portend that changes will certainly take place in the future, creating both opportunities and problems related to intercultural interactions.

Convergence theories posit that as the world becomes more integrated, its societies are growing more similar. Among those who see cultures coming together, Robertson (1990) postulated that "the world is much more singular than it was as

recently as ... the 1950s" (p. 25). Just after that time, McLuhan (1964) imagined a "global village" strung together by advancing technologies and economic interchanges. Some sociologists have argued that worldwide interrelationships now are so complete that scholastic emphasis should shift from local societies to internationalization and global issues (Tiryakian, 1986).

Robertson (1990) presented a historical path to society's globalized state. It started in 15th century Europe with the advent of modern geography and the spread of the Gregorian calendar. Three successive phases fostered national identities, international competition, increasing trade and communication, and world wars. The current "uncertainty phase" began in the 1960s and has included the end of the Cold War, the spread of global institutions and materialism, and more tendencies for crisis.

Appadurai (1990) asserted that five major factors are influencing the globalization process. He called them: (a) ethnoscapas, or the movement of tourists, employees, and officials across national boundaries; (b) technoscapas, the transfer of goods and technologies across borders; (c) finanscapas, the increasing interactions of stock markets and currencies; (d) mediascapas, the globalization of the media (supported by Bagdikian, 1989, and Merrill, 1983); and (e) ideoscapas, the growing ideological movements of freedom and democracy that come when technologies and the media bring greater understanding of the world to more people.

One natural outcome of this convergence is the creation of a "third culture" that transcends boundaries through global mass media, transnational education and professionalism, intercultural exchanges, and other international technologies and

interactions (Featherstone, 1990). Third culture people, or marginals who arise from these intercultural interactions, spend considerable time outside their own culture. They become as accustomed to living in other cultural environments as in their own. While moving in and out of these diverse environments, they become "agents of change" (Ellingsworth, 1977, p. 103.)

Kanter (1995) referred to third culture citizens as cosmopolitans. "Comfortable in many places and able to understand and bridge the differences among them, cosmopolitans possess portable skills and a broad outlook," she said (p. 23). Kanter described these people as understanding global concepts and ideas, having the competence to operate with the highest standards at any time and in any place, and possessing powerful global connections. She argued that as the world becomes more interconnected, the growing separation of cosmopolitans and locals (those who stay home and ignore the trend toward globalization) will create class distinctions as great as those between white- and blue-collar workers of the industrial revolution.

As this convergence occurs, however, there is an equal and opposite reaction: divergence. Divergence eschews the idea of an increasingly monolithic world, identifying instead the increasing diversity and richness of cultural discourses, codes and practices (Featherstone, 1990). Robertson (1990) explained that the world is becoming "united but by no means integrated" (p. 18). Indeed, nationalistic feelings are becoming more intense (Hennessy, 1985). Cultural groups desire to isolate themselves from what they perceive as western imperialism (Robertson, 1990). Naisbitt (1990) explained this reaction: "Even as our lifestyles grow more similar, there are unmistakable signs of a

powerful counter-trend: a backlash against uniformity, a desire to assert the uniqueness of one's culture and language, a repudiation of foreign influence" (p. 117).

Maddox (1993) illustrated the delicate balance of convergence and divergence, as well as the implications of these forces for multinational organizations. He cited the global spread of visible cultural icons like Coca Cola and McDonald's golden arches, blue jeans, rock-and-roll music, movies, and international fashions. But such icons are superficial elements of a society's culture, "while people hold on to the more entrenched cultural values of language, religion, art, literature, authority systems and interpersonal obligations." Therefore, to see these as proof that world cultures are converging can be misleading and dangerous. "There is enough truth in the idea of the homogenization of world cultures to be enticing, but relying on this as a universal condition will cause [organizations] to make many costly mistakes," Maddox explained (p. 11).

To adequately respond to complex cultural issues, multinational organizations need people who can distinguish between convergence and divergence. As Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, and Babik (1996) explained, those people must eschew the idea that one merely need "learn about" the "quaint customs" of each culture -- "don't show the bottom of your shoes to people in Arab lands, remember to bow when meeting the Japanese, take a gift when you are entering someone's home" (p. 154). They should recognize when the icons of convergence are masking the more enduring cultural traditions. They also must understand subtle signs of resistance among cultural groups, and be capable of acting as cultural interpreters, integrators, and bridge builders. If public relations practitioners are performing their natural role of boundary spanner, and if they

become well trained in cultural nuances, they may be able to perform this crucial role.

In an organizational context, Child (1981) provided additional insight into convergence/divergence that could assist multinationals in their intercultural frameworks. He found evidence for convergence at the organizational level and divergence at the personal level. At the organizational level, structures and technologies lead to more global imperatives. At the personal level, the culturally derived, longer enduring values and interactions tend to foster divergence.

Child's (1981) distinctions could be important factors for the generic and specific practices of international public relations. It means that practitioners can create universal structures and goals to achieve global communication needs. At the same time, they must be concerned about local issues that arise when the multinational brings in different cultural values. They must implement environmental scanning techniques that account for changing local opinions. This argues for specific programs that identify and communicate with crucial local publics.

Similar to the convergence-divergence debate is the second research direction on whether organizational management is culture-free or culture-specific (Tayeb, 1988; Sriramesh & White, 1992). Culture-free theories claim that management practices can be transferred from one country to another without cultural adaptation. Culture-specific theories posit that culture demands that functions change across boundaries. Tayeb (1988) argued that the methodologies behind culture-free studies look only for similarities between cultures, and thus find only similarities. When differences are examined, they are easy to find. Culture-specific theories, she said, reflect cultural

realities better than culture-free theories.

One outgrowth of culture-specific studies has been the creation of cultural dimensions. Dimensional studies are not without problems. For one thing, categorization tends to distort meaning (Adler, 1991). In actuality, the dimensions of culture, even if they can be identified, "vary from time to time and place to place within any social group," according to Carbaugh (1990a). Another problem is that cultural dimensions often are equated with national boundaries. Yet, Adler and Doktor (1986) argued that culture is quite distinct from national boundaries. Ellingsworth (1977) agreed that "nationality ... is not by itself a reliable indicator of the cultural behaviors of its citizens" (p. 105). Despite these problems, cultural dimensions have helped scholars come to terms with factors that are important to management across cultural boundaries.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) were among the first scholars to produce cultural dimensions for subsequent study. They summarized the dimensions as follows: (a) how cultures perceive the individual (basically good vs. basically evil); (b) how they perceive the world (dominating nature vs. harmonizing with it); (c) activity (doing things and achievement vs. being); (d) time (focus on the past and tradition, the present and its short-term rewards, or the future and commitments); and (e) space (whether personal space is public or private).

Another foundation of cultural dimension studies was Hofstede's (1980) examination of managers from 39 nations. From this analysis, he developed four dimensions that can predict behaviors within given societies. The first dimension positioned societies as either individualistic or collectivist. Individualistic societies, like

the United States, value the individual and independence. Collectivist societies, like Japan and other Asian states, value the group and interdependence.

Additional Hofstede (1980) dimensions were power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. Power distance refers to hierarchical distribution and the extent to which power is diffused in a society. The United States has relatively low power distance, while many developing nations have great power distance. Uncertainty avoidance measures a society's tolerance for ambiguity. Americans tend to accept ambiguity, while those in Japan and other societies are highly uncomfortable with it. Masculinity/femininity measures the extent to which a society values traits like aggressiveness (on the masculinity side) or cooperation (on the femininity scale).

Many scholars have used Hofstede's (1980) study to offer alternative dimensions. Tayeb (1988), for example, added interpersonal trust and commitment. Trust refers to the amount of cooperation or hostility between management and workers, or exploitation of workers by management. Commitment highlights the differences in organizational loyalty by managers and workers.

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) identified cultural dimensions like Hofstede's (1980), but their interpretations were quite different. For example, one dimension was universalism versus particularism, which paralleled Hofstede's dimension of individualism vs. collectivism. However, they saw American organizations as some of the most universal in the world -- the opposite of Hofstede's positioning of the United States on the dimensional scale. They reasoned that because Americans value individual freedoms, universal standards are needed to codify behaviors and protect the common

good from aberrances.

Other dimensions Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) identified were analyzing versus integrating and inner-direction versus outer-direction. The "analyzing" English-language nations value bottom-line results over immeasurable human elements. They are inner-directed, focusing on internal needs and ignoring their environment. By contrast, organizations in integrating, outer-directed societies automatically view themselves in the larger context. As a result, the human elements of interaction, networking, and cooperation are prioritized over expenses and revenues. Because most of the world values these principles of integration, networking, and cooperation, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars warned that the United States, by culturally ignoring these traits, is in jeopardy of losing its leadership in the changing global environment.

The Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (1993) dimensions could be relevant to the specific variables in international public relations. For example, rigid societal standards often are responsible for pushing activist groups into attempts to change the predominant mindset, or status quo (Duffy, 1984; Schmid & de Graaf, 1982). Thus, public relations practitioners in codified societies like the United States and Europe may need to deal more frequently with activist groups than would practitioners in other nations. However, they also face greater organizational pressures (from the codifiers) to "justify" their practices through measurable research methods (Lesly, 1986). By contrast, two-way symmetrical public relations may be more readily accepted in integrated societies that already value the underlying principles of communication, cooperation, and compromise (L. Grunig, 1991).



Public relations scholars Sriramesh and White (1992) also examined the potential correlations between the various cultural dimensions and the practice of excellent public relations. They concluded that organizations usually are bound to the cultures of their home country, which means that whatever decisions they make will reflect their own cultural values. Excellent public relations programs would more likely be developed in cultures that display low power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism, but higher levels of interpersonal trust. Since the Sriramesh and White study, other researchers in the field have conducted similar investigations relating the cultural dimensions to public relations, and they agreed that public relations practices often are correlated to the cultural dimensions of the countries involved (Coombs, Holladay, Hasenauer, & Signitzer, 1994; Hazleton & Cuthbirth, 1993; MacManus, 1994).

Additional studies provide understanding of other influences of culture on public relations. For example, Kedia and Bhagat (1988) looked at cultural constraints of technologies transferred across national boundaries. They claimed that transfers involving people-oriented concerns are much more difficult to accomplish across cultures than transfers of scientific processes or products. Cultural factors such as language, common ancestry, shared history, and physical proximity play an important role in the success of the transfer. If their theory is accurate it would be important to public relations, which deals specifically with individuals and groups of people. As the more difficult people-oriented transfer, international public relations should require more specific attention to the way it is assimilated into various countries.

In summary, the cultural variable seems important for determining effective local

practices within an international public relations program. The convergence of globalization fosters the search for universals in management decision making, goals, production, and other aspects of the multinational. But the cultural reactions to this convergence mean that multinational organizations must be particularly sensitive to local opinions and behaviors. For example, these cultural values may affect the type of research an organization conducts in a given country, the issues of requisite variety in staffing headquarters and local units, the types of products that enter given markets, and other important considerations.

This study examines exactly how the cultural variable affects local practices. It also looks at how the multinational should be structured to respond to these cultural sensitivities. What needs to be in place at headquarters, or on a global basis? What needs to be left entirely to the local office staff? Tentative answers can be stated in the following proposition:

Proposition 11

An excellent international public relations program will respond to varying indicators of cultural differences within and between each country. These indicators, and the way an organization deals with them, become important to the success or failure of the organization in each market.

Language Differences

Language complexities are closely related to the cultural variable. The two are so interrelated, in fact, that it is difficult to distinguish whether culture shapes language or is an outgrowth of it. Geertz (1973) and Phillipson (1987) both have stated that culture is a context, and language offers some of the symbols and meanings that specify

the cultural boundaries. Saville-Troike (1989) added that "the very concept of . . . culture is dependent on the capacity of humans to use language for purposes of organizing social cooperation" (p. 32).

Language may be a subset of culture, but it is included as a possible specific variable because it is such an obvious factor in the international arena. It also offers a tangible manifestation of culture. Many nations have multiple official languages, not to mention differing dialects and accents (Wilcox et al., 1995). And language translation problems are a renowned nightmare in international public relations practice (Howard, 1995; Howard & Mathews, 1986).

When examining communication in culture, the concern is not so much the forms of language -- such as the usage of words, grammatical constructions, or speaking patterns -- but the function of language and the meanings behind the forms and patterns. As Saville-Troike (1989) explained, "without understanding why a language is being used as it is, and the consequences of such use, it is impossible to understand its meaning in the context of social interaction" (pp. 15-16). Carbaugh (1990b) added that cultural groups use communication as norms (moral order), forms (of coordinating, conceptualizing and evaluating social life), and codes (common meanings that render group life mutually intelligible). Therefore, native and non-native speakers of the same language may have different customs, methods of interaction, norms of appropriateness, and linguistic patterns (Varonis & Gass, 1985).

Just as the broader cultural patterns can vary from one country to another, the forms of language also differ from place to place. Okabe (1983) contrasted language

usage between the typical American and the Japanese. Americans often employ a confrontational mode of organization, with polarized, dichotomous examples. The Japanese seek harmony through cautious and complementary communication. Americans use constructive, unified paragraphs that emphasize themes and details. They start with a topic sentence, provide details to support the topic, then end with a general statement. But the Japanese resort exclusively to a whole series of specific details or to general statements. Finally, the Japanese emphasize the "what" from the beginning, while Americans explain the "why" and the "how" on their way to "what."

Increasing globalization combined with decades of American influence on world affairs has fostered a "global language" -- English has become "the primary medium of international contact," said Ellingsworth (1977, p. 104). Yukio (1992) added that the English-speaking people and countries dominate the world's media and control the channels and content of communication. What Hazleton and Kruckeberg (1996) observed in Europe could be accurate in most parts of the world:

The advantage of a nation-state's use of the English language cannot be overstated. English is the most commonly used second language.... Even though many Europeans may not feel comfortable speaking English, the language is widely understood throughout Europe. Furthermore, English is the common language of international business in all European countries -- as well as worldwide (p. 369).

This diffusion of the English language has led to direct interactions and communication that would not have been possible years ago. The third-culture people

mentioned earlier leave their countries to be educated elsewhere. They frequently cross cultural and national boundaries in their dealings and often interact using the English language (Hammer, Gudykunst, & Wiseman, 1978). Furthermore, English-language media such as CNN, CNBC, or Voice of America are relayed to many parts of the world, where people who do not travel can learn the language by watching or listening to the content of these media (Hiebert, 1992a).

Even with a "world language," however, misunderstandings can arise from different culturally-rooted perceptions. Reed (1989) stated that "the first cross-cultural barrier has to do with words. Nouns and verbs simply do not mean the same everywhere -- no matter how precise the translation" (p. 13). One example he offered is the word "magazine." Americans understand this to be a periodical for a general or special interest audience. In France, it refers to a specific genre of television. In authoritarian nations, it usually is an organ for propaganda.

Pinsdorf (1991) hypothesized that, in the right circumstances, loss of precision when using non-native languages can lead to tragic or even fatal consequences. Misinterpretation of a word between Colombian pilots and American flight controllers was the overriding factor behind the Avianca Airlines crash on Long Island that killed 72 people in 1990. Speaking English, a second language for them, the pilots used the word "priority" when they meant "emergency." Tragically, the controllers did not treat the situation as the emergency it really was. Sloppy usage of language also was one factor in an Ethiopian relief project that failed in the 1980s (Chapel, 1988).

Howard (1995), a long-time public relations practitioner, explained the

difficulties of intercultural communication in practical terms:

Each conversation in an international country takes place on two levels. You are thinking and speaking in English. But your colleagues probably have to do the translation in their heads before they can comprehend and respond.... People sometimes pretend to understand, not wanting to interrupt the flow of conversation for clarification. Or maybe they think they *do* understand -- but subtleties are lost" (p. 9, italics are the original author's).

Because of these problems, Howard (1995) explained, communicators must constantly check to ensure that their expectations match those of the listener.

Even when people from different cultures interact in the same root language, whether English or another tongue, linguistic variations can add to "misinterpretations of intent, misunderstandings generally, a lack of coordination in moment-to-moment interactions, discrimination among classes of people, negative stereotyping, and so on" (Carbaugh, 1990a, p. 157). Often in such interactions, interlocutors will request more clarifications, repetitions, and expansions. But, as Varonis and Gass (1985) argued, "even with earnest non-natives and cooperative native speakers, misunderstandings are inevitable" (p. 328). Carbaugh (1990a) referred to these problems as "asynchrony" in cross-cultural communication.

The inevitable climate for misunderstandings in cross-cultural communication is one reason why public relations should be localized. Ideas can be transferred in any language, but people accept ideas in their own language (Corbett, 1991-92).

Articulation of ideas and precision in communication is essential to effective public

relations (Lesly, 1991). As Pinsdorf (1991) argued, precision in language mandates native-to-native interaction. Maddox (1993) added that performing within all the subtle nuances of another language "would be difficult for a foreigner who spoke the language. It is practically impossible when the language is not spoken" (p. 7).

These reasons are why language is an important specific variable. Whether speaking in the same root language, a second language, or through translators, communicating interculturally can be difficult at best, dangerous at worst. This study examines the importance of language and how it affects international public relations. It looks at considerations for structuring within the multinational to most effectively respond to the language variable. This factor is stated as another proposition below:

Proposition 12

Because language nuances vary from place to place, an excellent international public relations program will place people in each country who understand those nuances and can deal with them most effectively.

The Potential for Activism

Throughout this document, I have discussed the importance of building relationships with publics. However, I have not discussed who those important publics are. This section will show that publics are closely linked to activism, and that activist publics can have an impact on international public relations.

The traditional view of publics is that organizations choose them based on certain logical demographics. Certainly, government entities seem important, as does the local community, media, and civic and business leaders. These are relatively constant and easily identified, so they can be placed on lists of publics who can then be pursued for

relationship building efforts.

In the past several years, practitioners have been encouraged to see publics in a different light. J. Grunig and Hunt (1984) explained that organizations often do not choose their publics, but the publics choose the organization. Although this fact is overlooked by most practitioners, it makes sense when looking at the basic definitions of public relations mentioned earlier. Many of those constructions state that organizations can affect or be affected by publics in their environment.

Those publics who can be affected by an organization frequently are the recipients of behaviors that have a negative impact (or what J. Grunig and Hunt, 1984, called "consequences"). These behaviors include dumping chemicals into local waterways or polluting the air, producing poor and even unsafe products, offering poor service, and such. After recognizing these actions and seeing that others also are affected, people coalesce into publics and attempt to do something to change the situation. At this point, they affect the organization with their pressures.

Esman (1972) long ago positioned these reactionary publics as important for organizations to recognize. He produced a theory of "linkages," or categories of publics with which an organization must relate. The four important groupings were: (a) enabling linkages of publics that provide the authorization and control the resources by which an organization exists (such as stockholders, regulators, or boards of directors; (b) functional linkages that control production and consumption (employees, suppliers, or customers); (c) normative linkages, which include similar professional interest groups; and (d) diffused linkages, or those publics that cannot be clearly identified. Among this



latter group are media, voters, and interest groups such as minorities or environmentalists. It is from this latter category that many of the activist groups arise -- groups that organize to rectify perceived problems.

Recognizing that many publics choose to pressure an organization rather than reacting to it, J. Grunig (1979) developed what he called a "situational theory of publics" to show what kind of publics pursue an organization, and why. Three factors interact to determine whether a person or group of people will become publics: the degree to which they recognize that a problem exists (problem recognition), how many impediments they see for the action (constraint recognition), and the degree to which they feel connected to the situation, or their level of involvement. Those who recognize that the problem exists, feel free to do something about it, and feel highly connected to the situation are most likely to become active.

L. Grunig (1992b) defined an activist public as "a group of two or more individuals who organize in order to influence another public or publics through action that may include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics or force" (p. 504). Activist publics also are called pressure groups or special interest groups (Rose, 1991; Mintzberg, 1983). They can damage an organization through their attempts to pressure it through costly lawsuits, negative media coverage, government regulations, and a host of other harmful behaviors.

If publics are groups that put pressure on organizations, the potential for activism in host countries becomes another specific variable. It is one that organizations do not control, but to which they must respond if they wish to have an effective international

public relations program. However, the potential for activism also creates opportunities for public relations practitioners who help the organization respond proactively to the activist groups (L. Grunig, 1992b).

Activism is a specific variable because it can differ from country to country, depending upon a variety of factors. Some of these, like a country's cultural systems or its potential for constraining public expression, have been mentioned. Activism also can cross into the generic realm, however, because it is increasingly becoming a transnational force that organizations must interact with across country borders..

Until recently, it was widely believed that an open, democratic society was necessary for activism. When communism existed throughout the world, it was assumed that it would be impossible for activist groups to organize under governments that suppressed the media and limited forums for public debate. As Rada (1985) said, "Without the power of the press, there is no event, no drama, no coalescing of public opinion, and thus, no hope for influence or change" (pp. 30-31).

Today, however, there is evidence that activism can exist even within totalitarian regimes. Activism occurs more and more in these countries precisely because of growing dissatisfaction or anger with the behaviors of the controlling governments. Kruckeberg (1995-96) suggested that activism is helping to change governments from nondemocratic to democratic states. The potential for activism to influence these changes was dramatically portrayed in the recent breakup of the Soviet states, as one government after another was changed after the masses rose up in revolt (Hiebert, 1992a). In Communist China, student protests at Tiananmen Square captured the

attention of the world for months in the late 1980s. Although the protests were eventually squelched by the military, the ideals espoused by the students are slowly leading to changes within that society (Chen & Culbertson, 1992).

Global technologies have fostered the rise of activism. The television, telephone, radio, facsimiles, satellites, microwaves, and fiber optics have led to revolutionary changes in the way the world conducts its politics. Schmid and de Graaf (1982) suggested that "as the authority of the mass media has grown, political authority in democratic countries has ... declined. Increasingly politics is made in the media, rather than in parliaments" (p. 108). In bringing the world together, these technologies have offered hope and global support to publics who are struggling to overthrow oppressive conditions (Sharpe, 1992). Pressures brought against governments by the increasingly transnational women's rights movements is an example of an outside pressure that supports oppressed groups within countries (Prugl, 1996).

In addition to governments, other institutions are experiencing increased activist pressures. The mass of public attitudes, said Lesly (1992), are causing "all kinds of organizations and institutions their greatest troubles" (p. 327). Problems arise from a variety of sources with vastly different, often conflicting, expectations. They come from advocates of causes ranging from legitimate to bizzare: dissidents whose nature is to be sour towards about anything; activists who want something done or changed; zealots who are distinguished by their overwhelming singlemindedness; and fanatics who, as Lesly explained, "are zealots with their stabilizers removed" (p. 328). But, regardless of the source, the demands often come unexpectedly and tend to disrupt the traditional,

"efficient" workings of the organization.

Activist pressures can be particularly disruptive for multinational organizations. Relationships between organizations and publics are more complex when cultural boundaries are crossed. They are characterized by greater diversity, conflict, and rapid rates of change (L. Grunig, 1992a). Publics in the global arena are better organized, more powerful, increasingly hostile and more difficult for organizations to understand than they were just a decade ago (Dowling, 1990). Maddox (1993) revealed the reason for this. Publics for years have seen manipulative behaviors from outside sources that negatively affect their societies. "While these influences have traditionally been borne in silence by the whole society, this is increasingly not the case. Public scrutiny has greatly expanded and is reaching all-encompassing proportions today," he explained (p. 28).

Nigh and Cochran (1994) gave additional reasons why responding to activists and issues is more complex in the international environment than in the domestic context. First, multinational organizations face more actual or potential stakeholders than domestic organizations. Second, it is more difficult to identify international issues and publics than domestic ones. Third, multinational organizations may face transnational interest groups that can quickly move across boundaries but are of no concern to domestic organizations. Finally, issues resolution for the multinational organization must involve communication across cultures.

For international public relations programs, the type and extent of activism probably will differ from country to country. As mentioned earlier, activism can be affected by a society's imposition of universal standards that some groups resent (Duffy,

1984). Another influence is the degree to which a government allows public debate (Schmid & de Graaf, 1982). Yet another is related to Hofstede's (1980) variable of power distance. Sriramesh (1992) reported that in India, for example, outside of occasional conflicts between organizations and their labor groups, there is little activism. This is largely because the societal elite who manage organizations dominate their publics, and citizens who are not of the elite are not acculturated to press for changes. Another reason is that India is a traditional country where change comes slowly.

Regardless of how much pressure is placed on a multinational by activist groups in a country or around the world, the entity is harmed by the action. And often the organization causes the pressure through its own behaviors. L. Grunig (1992a) claimed that because of the reach and power of multinationals, they can dominate local politicians and have their interests supersede local interests. This often results in great hostility. She explained:

Domination or exploitation in developing countries, pollution of the environment, industrial accidents or occupational disease all have the potential to mobilize social opposition to the offending organization--whether or not its negative impact is conspiratorial. And whether activist opposition results in revolutionary change or marginal reform, the organization forfeits some degree of autonomy (p. 134).

Where activist groups previously relied on government processes to effect change, they now attack organizations directly (Duffy, 1984). Over the years, they have become more organized and more sophisticated in using communications and the media

(Rose, 1991). They realize that the media respond to their interests much more quickly and sympathetically than do the bureaucratic processes of governments (Schmid & deGraaf, 1982). Thus, it has become much more critical for organizations to identify and communicate with activist publics before damage occurs (Rose, 1991).

Some scholars argued that organizations can avert crises from activists long before the crises occur. They explained that issues created by activist groups arise in stages. The issue has potential when an individual or group recognizes a problem. Interest is broadened during imminent status. At current status, it begins to receive media coverage. It reaches critical status -- or crisis mode, as some would say -- when the conflicting parties become polarized and some action must be taken (Crabbe & Vibbert, 1985).<sup>6</sup> The importance of stages research is that it shows organizations how to recognize and respond to activist publics before the issue reaches critical stage.

Excellent public relations programs communicate with publics early and often in an attempt to prevent crisis stages from occurring (L. Grunig, 1992b). According to J. Grunig and Repper (1992), strategic public relations "segments active publics ... and resolves issues created by the interaction of the organization and publics through symmetrical communication ... early in the development of issues" (p. 150). This process of building relationships, or managing interdependence with key stakeholders, is the essence of public relations (J. Grunig & L. Grunig, 1991).

As explained earlier in this discussion, however, activist groups are not

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For more comprehensive discussions on the stages of issues, see also Jones & Chase (1979), Buchholz (1989), and Nigh & Cochran (1994).

necessarily the same as other publics described in Esman's (1972) linkages concept. Rather than letting the organization choose them as a relevant public, they force the choice upon the entity by acting against it. Banks (1995) explained that the process of dealing with activist groups is therefore the inverse of the normal process of selecting and communicating with publics. In the normal process, he said, "an organization reaches out to create a genuine dialogue with diverse groups of people who might be affected by the organization." But in activist communication, "organizational decision makers establish receptivity to genuine dialogue with those self-designating groups whose actions are intended to change the organization" (p. 81).

Some scholars have referred to this proactive stance as issues management. Crable and Vibbert (1985) discussed issues management in a Public Relations Review article, but never referred to it as public relations. Jones and Chase (1979) essentially reclassified public relations as issues management (Ehling & Hesse, 1983). J. Grunig and Repper (1992) also asserted that effective issues management is the same as strategic public relations. It appears, however, that issues management is one of the public relations functions being transferred into other areas of the organization, like corporate planning (Schwartz & Glynn, 1990; Heath, 1990) -- perhaps because practitioners have not shown that they are capable of directing this function.

Because global issues are so complex, multinational organizations must carry multiple perspectives on how to identify and resolve them. As Nigh and Cochran (1994) wrote, "exactly which issues get identified depends on who is doing the identifying and where they are within the multinational firm" (p. 7). Similarly, how the issue is resolved



depends on which cultures are involved in the process. Issue resolution in a multinational setting also can depend on the degree of cooperation between headquarters staff and those in the various host countries.

This discussion, then, should indicate that activism is more complex and influential in international public relations than in domestic public relations. Activism also can differ in extent and type from country to country, which can necessitate differing public relations responses. In one country, a public relations staff might spend a great deal of time monitoring the environment for sudden changes among activist publics. In another, practitioners may be able to devote their full attention to relationship building, without constant worry about imminent pressures.

Because of these variances in international issues and activists, it should be possible to examine activism as a specific variable. Most important, of course, is the intervention of culture and politics on the identification of publics, on building relationships in local settings, and on the resolution of potential conflicts. In this study, I will try to examine exactly what influences activism has on the international practice of public relations. This may be stated as the following proposition:

Proposition 13

The potential for activism makes the international environment particularly turbulent, but the extent and type of activism may differ from society to society. Therefore, excellent international public relations will contain a component in each country that can scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and build programs to deal with them. The means for accomplishing this, however, may vary from country to country and even within countries.



### Role of the Mass Media

It generally is assumed that the mass media greatly influence public relations -- and vice versa (Motamedi, 1990; Hiebert, 1991). The notion is so pervasive that many people believe working with the media is the only activity important to public relations. Even some practitioners equate the broad, scientific practice of public relations with the narrower, technical functions of publicity or media relations. They believe that if you can influence the media to write good stories about your organization, or at least not write negative articles, your public relations has been successful (Lesly, 1991). This tendency to concentrate solely on media relations increases in the international realm, as today's communication technologies expand around the globe and create an explosion of information that is readily accessible anywhere in the world (L. Grunig, 1992a).

In reality, practitioners should be careful not to overemphasize the effects of the media on their activities. Considerable research indicates that media effects are not as great as generally assumed. Klapper (1960) asserted that the mass media have limited effects on the attitudes and behaviors of their audiences. This has been questioned since then, but there still is debate about whether media have the effects they generally are thought to have. Davison (1982) adhered to the "limited effects" theory, stating that "people will tend to overestimate the influence that mass communications have on the attitudes and behaviors of others." Other theorists have suggested that the media help to set agendas for public and private discussions, but don't tell people what to think (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 1977).

Despite questions about the extent of the media's power, few scholars disagree

that they have some influence on world affairs. In the first place, decisions are made because the media are believed to affect public attitudes. Pavlik (1987) explained that because of the overemphasis on media effects, the media "lead to action, not because of its effect on the ostensible audience, but because others believe it will influence its audience" (p. 107). Hennessy (1985) concurred that "decision makers often think [the media] are important. If enough people whose collective influence is great think that the New York Times editorials are important ... then these media presentations do become influential" (p. 249).

In the global arena, advancements in communication technologies have changed the nature and reach of the mass media. Global technologies have carried the mass media, and the political and cultural ideologies they espouse, across the world at increasing speeds and lower costs. "Never before in history has so much been communicated so rapidly to so many people," said Martin and Hiebert (1990, p. 5). Bagdikian (1989) claimed that with this unprecedented communication, "national boundaries grow increasingly meaningless" (p. 805).

Because of the rapid progress of technology, individuals have great access to and control over information. As media options increase for consumers, authorities lose their ability to control the new systems and the media forfeit their gatekeeper roles (Martin & Hiebert, 1990; Miller, 1990). Epley (1992) explained that "the proliferation of instant communications has made the planet's populace more knowledgeable and opinionated than ever before. Local news is world news, and world news can be seen in anyone's home every minute of the day ... as it happens" (p. 110).

This increased access to information generates at least two possibilities for affecting the practice of international public relations. The first, as mentioned in the previous section, is an increase in activism and the proliferation of issues that are more global in nature. The second revolves around the nature of media messages in a global context. Added to these potential effects is the mere fact that media are different from country to country. This makes the role of the media, regardless of their influence, important to practitioners in the international environment.

Hiebert (1992b) claimed that global media reach has helped integrate publics and issues worldwide. Special interest groups are getting more sophisticated about creating issues and achieving their goals through media systems. In fact, media manipulation has been identified as a major tactic of activist groups (Pires, 1989). They stage events such as protests, boycotts, marches, and sometimes even violent demonstrations (L. Grunig, 1986; J. Grunig & Repper, 1992). The media do not purposely favor activist groups but they advance these causes by covering their staged events (Pires, 1989). This coverage ensures a public audience for activist ideologies and, as a result, special interest groups now are influencing opinions of decision makers throughout the world (Hiebert, 1992b).

As for media messages, Kunczik (1996) stated that the influence of the mass media [and television in particular] is especially great when no other source of information is available. In a local context, people can check the "reality" of media coverage through primary sources like friends, teachers, or ministers. (This is consistent with the two-step flow theories of Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955, where personal influence is shown as more important than media influence for attitude formation.) But the

situation changes with information about foreign issues.

In the global environment, Kunczik (1996) posited, "most people depend on second-hand experiences or information for what they know or want to know" about events and issues in foreign countries (p. 27). In most cases, this second-hand information comes from the media. Distance makes it difficult to check on "media reality" from primary sources. A stark example of this was the daily coverage that bombarded Americans during the Persian Gulf conflict, which Hiebert (1991) called a "media event" (p. 109). Because few Americans other than soldiers visited the region at that time, most of the populace received information about the conflict exclusively from the media (Hiebert, 1991). Yet, media reporting often creates its own version of "reality," which can be quite different from actual events (Kunczik, 1996). This monopoly of media images in foreign reporting can create unrealistic pictures and images about other countries, or about individuals and organizations from those countries.

The third media effect on international public relations practice is strictly logistical. The means for working with the media vary from country to country. For example, PRSA's code of ethics prohibits the compromising of communication channels through media "bribes." Yet, payouts for editorial coverage are common in many countries (R. White, 1986; Cutlip, 1987). Media relations in areas like Europe or the Pacific Rim also differ radically from one country to the next. In Japan, for instance, practitioners must work with a complex maze of press clubs that are not part of government but are not entirely independent either (R. White, 1986). Media in China are entities of the government but are exhibiting more independence in covering business

(Chen & Culbertson, 1992). Australian media relations is regional in nature, and rivalries between major cities make it difficult to conduct national campaigns (R. White, 1986).

So why, then, do these effects from global media create concerns for international public relations? Mostly because the combination of activism and the distorted images in the media about foreign entities can be harmful to multinational organizations. Perhaps these distant images coming through the media have contributed to hostilities directed at multinationals in the host countries. And local activist groups, in particular, are growing increasingly negative toward multinationals and more threatening in their behaviors.

One of the most critical functions of international public relations is to scan the environment for these groups that may pressure the organization and disrupt its autonomy (L. Grunig, 1992a). Practitioners must monitor media coverage for trends in opinions and activism against other multinationals or even toward similar industries in the countries in which their organizations operate. It is very difficult to do this entirely from some distant corporate headquarters. Therefore, it is important to use local practitioners who are close to the activist sources and may have a better cultural and political understanding of their concerns.

In the end, effective public relations still comes down to sound local communication. For the most part, the mass media are not equipped to be two-way channels of information, either domestically or globally (although this will change in the future as a greater variety of media technologies are created with more interactive features). Merrill (1983) argued that the mass media are not capable of being a panacea

for world problems. "Mass communication is obviously no substitute for direct involvement of persons" in problem resolution, he said (p. 7). Epley (1992) stated that for international public relations practitioners to be effective in their work, they must "jump beyond infatuation with modern gadgetry and learn how to use these new sophisticated communication vehicles to narrow our scope and better define very specific messages to targeted audiences" (p. 115).

At the 1993 PRSA conference, culturalist Peter Cummings said that Americans tend to overemphasize the influence of technology, believing that those technologies fostering the "global village" can dissipate "hostilities rooted in cultural differences." This idea is so ingrained that Americans do not recognize the subtle but more important nuances of cross-cultural interaction. This, in turn, leads to the philosophy that communication has occurred when in reality it has not. There really is not a great difference between cultures, Cummings said, but "those differences make all the difference in the world" (cited by Bovet, 1994, p. III).

This again argues for international practitioners who can build cultural bridges, as well as for experienced native practitioners who can establish local communication programs that understand and respond quickly to local publics. Usually, when a multinational organization has an office in the host country, local practitioners could help offset any "false realities" among local publics about that organization.

As Traverse-Healy (1991) explained, direct response activities are gaining in importance -- perhaps for the very purpose of building understanding with local audiences. Haywood (1991) added that "communication is extremely local and very

personal." Sometimes transcontinental messages may be acceptable, but those that really affect people must be presented personally, "in a language and style they can accept, and with an opportunity to debate, challenge, argue and (it is to be hoped), endorse" (p. 22).

Thus, the role of the mass media, and how practitioners work with them, is a specific variable because local understanding and action is paramount for success. It is important to understand how the media function in each society, then create effective programs to interact with their particular nuances. In this study, I examine the role of the mass media as a specific variable by investigating what effect local media have on the practices and what differences must be considered from country to country. This perceived effect can be stated in propositional form, as follows:

#### Proposition 14

The mass media differ from country to country, with differing degrees of government control and of specialization and localization. Also, because of distance between host countries and organizational headquarters, media coverage can influence the way people think about multinationals. An effective local component of an excellent international program will build relationships with local media and with publics who may have received unrealistic pictures about the multinational organization.

#### **Summary of Questions and Propositions for Study**

In the first two chapters, I have outlined some of the fundamental worldviews about the practice of public relations in an international context. I have dissected the assumptions around combining central and local activities in an international public relations program. Following that was a review of the generic and specific variables that may comprise an excellent international program. Included in that overview were propositions generated from these variables of excellence.

To summarize the discussion and set the stage for the remainder of the study, I will remind the reader of its purpose. The study is intended to develop a theory of excellence in international public relations. The theory would be normative, one that indicates how international public relations should be practiced, but would also have a pragmatic element in that effective organizations would already display evidence of these variables. To initiate such a theory, I have formulated 14 propositions for excellence.

As mentioned, the study reaches into a new, complex, and relatively uninvestigated domain. Therefore, the 14 propositions put forth in this chapter will not be tested, as would be the case with well established hypotheses. Instead, they will be explored; I plan to gain information and feedback from a number of public relations scholars and practitioners in a variety of countries who are identified as experts in international practice.

The generic and specific variables are once again summarized below.

#### Generic Attributes of Excellence

1. An organizational worldview that fosters two-way symmetrical communication.
2. An organizational culture that fosters participation and two-way symmetrical internal communication, worldwide.
3. Public relations that is managed strategically throughout the world in conjunction with the dominant coalition.
4. A public relations program that is integrated worldwide, with all practitioners reporting to a headquarters public relations unit.
5. A public relations program that is separated from marketing, legal, and other organizational functions.



6. Senior practitioners in each location who are trained in public relations, understand the managerial role, and foster two-way symmetrical communication.
7. A public relations worldview that fosters diversity and equal opportunities in hiring and promotions, and emphasizes the personal attributes of the two-way symmetrical worldview: respect, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise.
8. A flexible public relations program that can adapt quickly to changes in the turbulent international environment.

#### Specific Attributes of Excellence

9. The influence of varying levels of development in given societies, and a public relations program that adjusts to those influences.
10. Variations in the local political entities, and a public relations program that build relationships with whatever political entity it faces.
11. Indicators of cultural differences between and within markets, and a public relations program that responds to these indicators.
12. Variations in language nuances, and a public relations program that places practitioners to respond to and not be harmed by those nuances.
13. Potential for activism in any market, and local strategies that scan the environment to identify and build relationships with relevant publics.
14. Differences in local media, and a public relations program that builds relationships with those media and with publics who may have gotten an unrealistic picture of the multinational organization through those media.

In addition to exploring these propositions, this study will seek answers to the following questions related to the generic and specific variables:

1. Do the variables in the Excellence Model generally work as the generic variables for excellent international practice? If so, do some variables need to be changed or removed from the model to make it applicable to excellent generic practice? If not, is it possible to find an alternative generic model?

2. Do the specific variables identified above truly have an influence on local practice, to be added to the generic variables, and thus create a comprehensive model of excellent practice in international public relations? If so, in what way do they contribute to effective international practice? Have variables been omitted that should be included as important specific variables?
3. If the variables in this study offer a suitable framework for international public relations, how would the multinational organization most effectively structure its public relations to suitably balance global and local strategies and activities?
4. If the generic and specific variables are contributors to the effectiveness of the practice, is it possible to create a theory of international public relations?

Now that this framework has been conceptualized, showing the variables and propositions to be studied, the next thing to do is to show the manner in which this study was conducted. The next chapter will outline the type of study that was performed, and exactly what procedures were utilized for the study.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHOD

When conducting formal research, it is necessary to find the method that will best fulfill the needs of the study. If a research project is descriptive or is in an established domain with hypotheses and concrete variables of study, quantitative methods such as random-sample surveys or experiments can be used. But if the project is investigating a complex or loosely defined topic, qualitative methodology such as case studies, in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, or focus groups typically are used (Babbie, 1989).

Marshall and Rossman (1989) said that qualitative methods are appropriate where "there is a need to explore interactions among ambiguous or unclear variables" (p. 42). Pauly (1991) explained that qualitative methods offer a holistic perspective on human behaviors in the real world, rather than the artificial laboratories of codified studies. It also is appropriate to utilize qualitative methods like case studies even when trying to establish or prove causal relationships of the variables under study (Yin, 1989)

This study crossed into two main research domains -- public relations and cross-cultural management. These arenas are complex and dominated by dynamic and often ambiguous human interactions. Such interactions require holistic analyses and interpretations that maintain a richness of meaning and accurately portray the entire situation being examined. This richness and accuracy of meaning often is lost in quantitative methodologies that reduce complexities into small, analyzable units, then reconstructing them for interpretation (Pauly, 1991).

I have used qualitative research in this study to examine the propositions and to

establish a realistic foundation for effective public relations research and practice in an international environment. The relevance and benefits of qualitative methods for both public relations and intercultural management are explained in the next sections.

### **Qualitative Research in Public Relations**

Qualitative methods are suitable for studying public relations. A variety of qualitative approaches (case studies, focus groups, in-depth interviews, field observations, etc.) have been used or suggested for examining the field. Lesly (1986) said that qualitative research is appropriate for investigating complex human processes that are always changing -- a scenario that certainly characterizes public relations. Mariampolski (1984) also asserted that qualitative studies, if appropriately conducted, are useful and timely methods for identifying publics. In the book, Using Research in Public Relations, Broom and Dozier (1990) did not advocate qualitative over quantitative research, but they did agree that there is a place for formalized qualitative research in the public relations field.

Toth (1986) explained that critical, qualitative methods should be used to extend our understanding of public relations theories like the symmetrical model, roles, or the situational theory of publics. The variables of the Excellence Study have been tested qualitatively to find the "why's" behind descriptive data that were collected in the earlier quantitative study (J. Grunig, 1992c). Vercic, L. Grunig, and J. Grunig. (1996) also used the qualitative methods of in-depth interviews and participant observation to examine variables of effectiveness in Slovenia.

## **Qualitative Research in the International Realm**

If the complex nature of human interaction makes qualitative research appropriate for domestic public relations, these methods should be even more useful in the international arena, where intricacies of culture, politics, and economics are compounded. Hofstede (1983) and Adler and Doktor (1986) argued that human interactions are more complex and communication is increasingly difficult as cultural and national boundaries are crossed. As public relations extends throughout the world, holistic examinations of why things happen will become more important (Sharpe, 1992).

There are more practical reasons why qualitative research methods may be the most appropriate for international public relations. First, these methods are suitable for cross-cultural research. When respondents speak foreign languages or English as a second language, qualitative methods are more suited than survey methodology or experimentation because they are more adaptable to language differences (Rieger & Wong-Rieger, 1988). Second, as Christians and Carey (1989) noted, the positivist view underlying quantitative methods is not as readily accepted in many countries as are the more popular qualitative approaches.

Perhaps the most important reason for qualitative methodology is that it helps reduce the debilitating effects of research bias. Pauly (1991) and Agar (1980) both suggested that any research is fraught with inherent bias in the researcher. Rather than apologizing for those biases, qualitative methods address the problem by allowing the data to emerge from the subjects' own perspectives. This way, the researcher can become distanced from his or her own perceptions as much as possible and better ensure

the accuracy of the resulting data (Spradley, 1980; Agar, 1980). Agar (1986) added that whenever one conducts research, he or she should maintain "systematic doubt" about the results. Researchers should seek to "falsify" conclusions by challenging their own cultural notions and theoretical assumptions.

Recognizing my own potential biases after forming the propositions for this study, I used a Delphi technique to complete the research. The Delphi is a qualitative research method that incorporates a broad range of responses from selected experts in a given domain. Because the responses in this case represented a diverse, multinational range of perspectives in public relations, the study should be relatively bias-free. As a result, it may offer a good basis for future research in the international public relations field. The Delphi method is explained further below.

### **The Delphi Research Method**

The Delphi technique was developed in the 1950s. It was first attempted by the Rand Corporation, from where it gained a following not so much for its utility but because of the notoriety of some of the participants in that study -- people like Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov (Woudenberg, 1991). Since then, the technique has been used mostly for forecasting trends and events (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). The term Delphi refers to the town in ancient Greece, from which Apollo's predictions were transmitted to scholars and other interested futurists throughout the land. As a result, Delphi always has been associated with forecasting (Uhl, 1983).

The Delphi is a structured group process that harnesses the opinions of a number of experts on a complex or ambiguous subject. This is important because, as VanSlyke

Turk (1986) stated, a Delphi is "where individual judgments must be tapped and combined to arrive at . . . decisions which cannot be made by one person" (p. 17). She added that "increasingly, situations faced by today's organization . . . demand this kind of pooled judgment, for this is an age of 'maximum feasible participation'...." (p. 17).

In group studies, however, the very nature of socialization can create "process problems." Typical of these negative impacts is a halo effect that can develop when one or two respected individuals dominate the conversation, or a bandwagon effect, when some group members are intimidated into silence or mask their real opinions to be seen as agreeing with the majority (Tersine & Riggs, 1976). A Delphi can ameliorate these negative characteristics because the participants are purposely kept from gathering for the study. Therefore, their most candid individual opinions are allowed to flourish in relative anonymity (Rowe, Wright, & Bolger, 1991).

The Delphi technique is appropriate in a problem-identification situation in which there is a "lack of agreement or incomplete state of knowledge concerning either the nature of the problem or the components which must be included in a successful solution" (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 5). It seems to work best as a normative process, in which experts within an organization or a given domain seek to identify the practices and procedures that should exist to enhance maximum effectiveness (Rieger, 1986). Because of its effectiveness in this regard, Rieger (1986) discovered that more than 80 percent of all the dissertations using the Delphi technique in the early 1980's (more than 250 dissertations) were seeking answers to normative questions.

The Delphi also tends to stay tuned in to the most recent scientific advances.

Articles and books frequently lag behind actual research because of the time necessary for writing and printing. A Delphi study, by contrast, can provide a more updated exchange of information than a literature search by drawing upon the current knowledge of experts (Delbecq et al., 1975) and reproducing it in rapid fashion.

Tersine and Riggs (1976) claimed that the Delphi method has been incorporated into a variety of situations and diverse fields. It has been used broadly to achieve its specific intent of forecasting in social or technological realms. The method also has been incorporated into decision making processes and has been used to analyze needs within education, business and industry, public administration, health and nursing, and several other research fields (Rieger, 1986).

The Delphi method occasionally has been employed for investigating various aspects of public relations, as well. McElreath (1980) was the first researcher to use this method when he examined priority needs for public relations in the 1980s. Blamphin (1990) later utilized this method to explore the value of focus groups for public relations research and practice. Sheng (1995) also completed a Delphi study at the University of Maryland, analyzing the various issues of multicultural public relations in the United States (with some application internationally, as well).

#### The Delphi Process

There is no one prescription for conducting a Delphi, according to those who have written about or used the process (Delbecq et al., 1975; Linstone & Turoff, 1975; Tersine & Riggs, 1976). Sackman (1974) claimed that there is no universally acclaimed, working definition of the Delphi technique. It has many variations of application, some

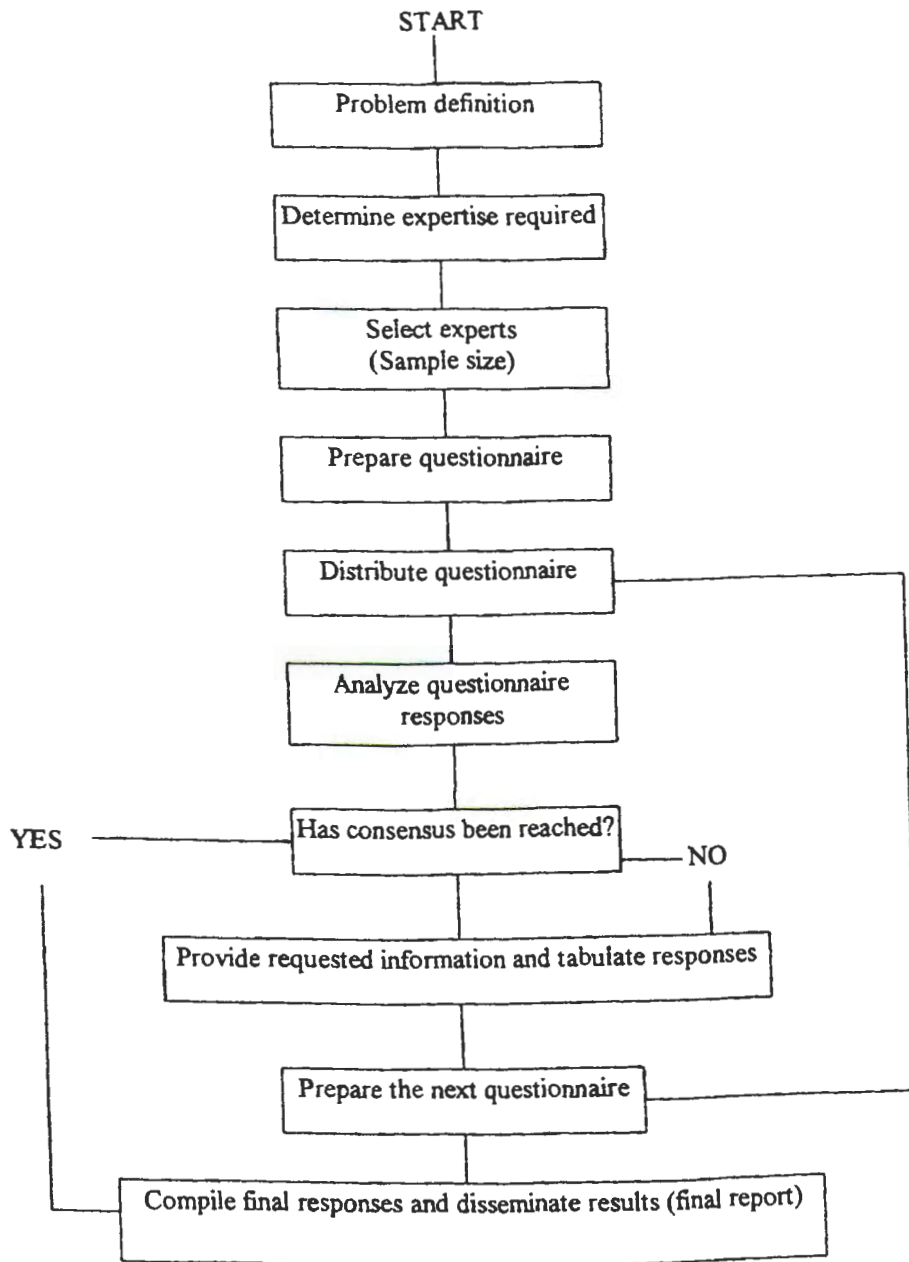


of which resemble the "conventional Delphi" developed by the Rand Corporation only slightly (Goldschmidt, 1975).

When reviewing Delphi studies, certain elements seem typical. The Delphi process usually takes place in two or more iterations, or "rounds," of questionnaires, where the combined feedback from each round becomes the basis of information for the next round (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). The ultimate objective, said Sheng (1995), is "for panelists to work toward consensus by sharing and reconsidering reasoned opinions with regard to comments, objections and arguments offered by other panelists" (pp. 99-100). However, Delphi studies can be useful even if consensus cannot be achieved, as long as the "holdouts" (those who continue to disagree with the majority) are given an adequate vehicle for voicing their continued rationale (Rowe et al., 1991). Those outlying opinions should then be represented somehow in the final report (Pill, 1971).

The Delphi usually involves a ten-step procedure, as outlined by Delbecq et al. (1975). These ten steps can be reduced into four main phases that include: (a) development of the initial Delphi question or questions; (b) determination of sample size and selection and contacting of respondents; (c) development, distribution, and analysis of two or three increasingly precise questionnaires to the respondents (in the iterations just mentioned); and (d) preparation of a final report. Riggs (1983) offered a similar, but simpler, outline of the process, which is shown in Figure 2.

After the main research question is conceptualized and the Delphi is determined as the best method for investigating that question, the selection of Delphi panelists begins. Panel members should be experts selected according to five criteria: (a) they



**Figure 2:** Ten steps to producing a successful Delphi study.

**Note:** From "The Delphi Technique. An experimental evaluation" (p. 90), by W.E.

Riggs, Technological Forecasting and Social Change (1983).

must have a basic knowledge of the problem area; (b) they must have a performance record in the particular area under study; (c) they must be objective and rational; (d) they must have time available to participate until completion of the study; and (e) they must give the time and effort to participate effectively (Tersine & Riggs, 1976).

The desired experts usually are chosen through a snowball approach. A few widely acclaimed experts are selected and asked if they would be willing to participate. They are then asked to produce names of others whom they view as experts in the field. Often, four or five lists of experts are obtained this way. The best potential panelists are those whose names appear on more than one of the lists (Delbecq et al., 1975). Once the list is produced, the people on the list are contacted and asked to participate.

After participants are selected, a first questionnaire is developed and sent to them. This is called the first round. The questionnaire contains either open-ended or closed-ended questions or propositions that seek detailed responses. Rieger (1986) claimed that the most effective Delphis are those whose first round instruments are open-ended, to allow the experts the greatest opportunity to help frame the questions to be investigated. Once the responses are returned, they are transcribed and coded. In previous times, the responses often were separated into individual declarative statements, with each statement placed onto an index card. Then the statements were analyzed for patterns and exceptions (Delbecq, et al., 1975). Today, this can be done by computer.

The second "round" of the Delphi begins by creating a second instrument to which the participants again respond. The instrument usually contains closed-end, declarative statements that reflect the first-round responses. With this process, the

participants can react to each others' opinions and ideas. In creating the instrument, the researcher should be careful not to infuse his or her own biases into the process.

Participants are asked in the second round to re-examine their own positions and revise opinions as they feel necessary. According to Delbecq, et al. (1975), Likert scales can be attached to each of the statements in the second instrument so that respondents can indicate to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement shown.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of the second round is to achieve consensus. The important consideration in this process is that group members are communicating with each other -- they are responding, as much as possible, to verbatim statements of their peers. When the responses are returned, the researcher again analyzes them to determine how much consensus has been achieved. At this point, if the data show no significant consensus, it is typical to send out a third round of questions based on second-round feedback. This process can continue until consensus has been reached (according to Woudenberg, 1991, the number of rounds can vary from two to ten). If consensus is not possible, those who dissent are encouraged to provide their reasoning. Though consensus is the goal, it also can be valuable to learn that the field still has great fluctuation in opinions and attitudes (Rowe et al., 1991).

#### Reasons for Choosing the Delphi

Because my study is exploring international public relations, where little is known about how it should be effectively practiced, I wanted to ensure that the conclusions of the study reflected a broad range of expertise, not just my own viewpoints and theories. This use of pooled judgment was intended to satisfy the criteria outlined by Van Slyke

Turk (1986) for advancing the understanding of a relatively unexplored domain. It also was meant to overcome the problems of potential personal bias mentioned by Agar (1986), the difficulties of group socialization outlined by Tersine and Riggs (1976), as well as the sheer impossibility of pulling together a group from all over the world.

In a thesis completed at the University of Maryland, Sheng (1995) gathered rationale for Delphi studies from a variety of sources (Delbecq et al., 1975; Eason, 1992; Helmer, 1966; and Linstone & Turoff, 1975, to name some). She then produced her reasoning for conducting a Delphi. Although my study was actually begun before Sheng's work, I had been exposed to many of the same sources, and my reasons for using a Delphi were virtually the same. Essentially, those reasons are based on four criteria summarized by Woudenberg (1991) for a reliable Delphi study. These criteria are as follows:

1. Anonymity. An international study would of necessity include respondents who were scattered all over the world. A Delphi is ideal in this situation because it requires that the participants remain in their own locales rather than coming together in one common facility. Participants in this study were from 18 different countries, a dispersion which would have made it virtually impossible to come together--particularly if this student researcher had to pay for the gathering.

Physical separation places fewer demands on both the participants and the researcher and actually can enhance the Delphi process. As mentioned above, it overcomes some of the weaknesses of a focus group, such as personality conflicts, egos, and the uncertainty of stating one's mind when perceiving that it holds the minority

viewpoint. As Tersine & Riggs (1975) noted, the Delphi allows for great freedom of expression; opinions can be considered in privacy and on their own merits. Panelists also can feel free to change their minds without undue embarrassment or pressure. They should not be swayed by the opinions of other members who may be highly respected in a group process. Data gathered from a Delphi therefore are based on the quiet and deliberate judgments of the combined individual respondents, rather than on any superficial compromise of the group.

2. Use of experts. A Delphi strives for reliability by incorporating perceived expertise. In addition to the criteria for expertise mentioned above, the Rand Corporation had viewed an expert as a highly educated and experienced specialist in the area under study (Pill, 1971). This factor is important to the exploration of ideas about an emerging field (in contrast, for example, to a random sampling of anyone who happens to appear on a pertinent listing).

In this case, I originally suggested a sample survey of PRSA or IABC members with job titles suggesting that they practice internationally. However, because international practice in public relations is so underdeveloped, my advisor, Dr. James Grunig, believed that such titles offered no guarantee that the person really understands international practice. In such a case, he said, we could be "pooling ignorance." (My own experience since that time has verified Dr. Grunig's concerns -- there are not many people who really have expertise in the international realm of public relations.) A Delphi study, by comparison, starts by purposefully identifying those who are already seen as having an appropriate level of expertise.

3. Iteration (or successive rounds). The Delphi's design considerations are well suited for flexibility in collecting and accommodating data (Sheng, 1995). Research instruments are created after each round based on the feedback from the respondents to the earlier rounds. This helps to avoid research bias by reflecting the diverse perspectives of the respondents rather than those of the researcher (Pauly, 1991). The original purpose of the Delphi's iteration, Woudenberg (1991) explained, was to have the least informed participants change their minds through the rounds. The goal now is to reach consensus, so that the collective wisdom of the panel becomes a reliable indicator of the conclusions reached in the study. Even if consensus is unattainable, focusing in on the issue through the subsequent rounds allows for a clarification of issues in the research area under study (Helmer, 1966).

In a Delphi, data collection can be performed either through an open-end approach or through a structured research process of closed-end questions. This study combined both approaches; the first round instrument allowed for open-ended responses, while the second round incorporated a structured, closed-end instrument. In the typical Delphi, instruments for subsequent rounds almost always are closed-end, and often incorporate complicated mathematical evaluations of the data into the process. However, some critics have noted that too many rounds can cause the participants to lose interest. And, many studies of Delphi methodology have concluded that the participants do not necessarily converge more as subsequent rounds are conducted; in fact, in almost every study, the greatest increase in accuracy has been found between the first and second rounds (Woudenberg, 1991). This is one reason why I felt it was

appropriate in this study to stop after the second round.

4. Feedback. The Delphi technique fosters interaction among the panelists by seeking feedback through each round. The central idea behind the provision of feedback is to share the available information with all the experts on the panel so that they can be made aware of the opinions of the other members. This interactive procedure, in turn, helps refine the research conclusions by accommodating the various perspectives of the panelists. Participants should not be pressured to conform, but those who see that their opinions are deviant from the majority can make either more compelling arguments in subsequent rounds or conform more closely to the majority (Woudenberg, 1991).

In an international study like this that is seeking standards across so many physical boundaries, such a diversity of perspectives should prove beneficial. Feedback opportunities were offered to the group in the second round by showing the representative declarative statements from the first round and allowing additional comments on those statements. The importance of expert feedback, and of the need for sound data resulting from that feedback, has been verified by the great interest displayed by the respondents to the fact that a study of this type is being conducted. Others who practice or research in international public relations also have expressed great interest and a desire to receive the results when the study is completed.

When combined, the four characteristics make the Delphi a suitable method for this particular research project. The Delphi is especially appropriate considering the tremendous geographical diversity of the respondents and the fact that the topic is in a new, complex, and unstructured field of interest. Like all research methods, however, the



Delphi is not without certain weaknesses. Some of these are discussed below.

### Limitations of the Delphi

Over the years, the Delphi technique has attracted as many critics as it has supporters. The main limitations of the Delphi were pointed out by Sackman (1974). As Goldschmidt (1975) and Rowe et al. (1991) have argued, however, the criticisms are not so much about the Delphi method itself as about the improper application of the method by so many researchers. Nevertheless, criticisms involve such potential weaknesses as improper selection of the participants, mortality (panelists dropping out of the study), and inappropriate configuration of the first round instrument. Another limitation, related more to the intercultural aspect of this particular study than to the characteristics of the Delphi, is the potential for misunderstanding the instruments and responses due to language and cultural differences of the researcher and participants.

The first weakness, poor panel selection, surfaces when the "experts" selected for the study are not really experts. As Kuhn's (1970) research suggested, the "traditional wisdom" that has been accepted in a domain may be invalid. Thus, there is no guarantee that the opinions of experts will produce accurate results. This could be problematic in an exploration of a field as ambiguous as international public relations. As pointed out in the first chapter, no one really knows yet what constitutes "excellent" international public relations; thus, it is difficult to determine whether any of its practitioners or scholars are truly experts in the field. However, it is acknowledged that if a person has significant education and experience in a given field, that person's opinions should be valuable in helping that field grow toward a state of maturity (Pill, 1971).

The respondents for this study all had many years of practical or academic experience in public relations. They were selected by people who are widely accepted as experts who understand effective practice in the field. Most of them have graduate degrees in public relations or communications. Therefore, the information gained from such individuals should be useful to their public relations colleagues even considering the potential limitation that the pool of experts is subjectively determined.

The second limitation involves research mortality, or participants dropping out before completion. Even when all of the respondents begin with honorable intentions, unforeseen changes in priorities, illnesses, or even deaths can occur over time. Such losses can skew the results (Babbie, 1989). Therefore, it is important to try to keep all participants committed until the end. This problem could surface in any research project, but it can be a particular problem in a Delphi study because, as Reiger (1986) explained, the length of time required to complete a Delphi can be anywhere from several weeks to two years. The latter was the case in this study, mostly because of my circumstances in working full-time while conducting the research. Fortunately, among those who began the study, only two people did not complete it. One of those quite literally disappeared from a public relations partnership in New Zealand.

Related to mortality is the potential detriment of insufficient motivation. Participating in a Delphi requires much more than simply filling out a questionnaire. Respondents are asked to carefully think through possibilities, consequences, and other factors surrounding the questions and to write or record their thoughts in depth. They are required to participate not just once, but two or three times. If they are not expressly

interested in the study, or do not see its relative merits, they can lose their willingness to participate. Their motivation also can wane if the study has too many rounds, or drags on too long (Woudenberg, 1991).

In this study, as mentioned earlier, there seemed to be great interest in the subject among the panelists. Most of them responded in great depth to the first instrument, and several spent considerable time adding comments to the second questionnaire, as well. The instruments contained additional clarifying questions and definitions to facilitate understanding and make it easier for the panelists to respond. Thus, motivation seemed to remain high among the participants.

An inadequate first-round instrument also has been identified as problematic. Rowe et al. (1991) criticized the "vast majority of studies" that use structured first-round instruments instead of open-ended questionnaires. The structured questionnaire does not necessarily guarantee a poor Delphi study, but Rowe et al. contended that it does limit the involvement of the panelists in constructing the parameters for study, thus negating the very purpose for including experts in the Delphi. "While this simplification is reasonable in principle," they explained, "the actual questions used [in a closed-ended instrument] are often highly suspect" (p. 241).

This study combined structure and open-endedness in the first-round instrument. As shown in chapter two, I had predetermined several propositions under which it was thought that international public relations would be effective. These structured propositions were presented to the panelists in the first round. However, the package sent to the panelists also encouraged a significant amount of open thinking. For

example, the introductory letter encouraged the panelists to candidly critique the propositions. Attached to each proposition, as well, was a series of questions that stimulated the participants to critically assess the proposition and to offer their ideas, suggestions, and rebuttals. Produced in this manner, the instrument should have overcome this limitation characterized by Rowe et al. (1991).

The factor that is connected to intercultural diversity is the potential for misunderstandings caused by differences in language and cognition. This is especially true in a project involving international respondents (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Terms that might be understood in one cultural context can take on different meanings or nuances in another culture. Also, because intercultural studies often are conducted in a more universal language like English (as this one was), the researcher has to rely on the extent to which all participants from the various countries understand that language -- and comprehension invariably ranges from excellent to poor. Therefore, great care must be exercised to preserve comprehension levels.

For this study, I recognized this potential weakness of language and tried to reduce its effect through different means. First, every participant selected except for one had a fairly good understanding of English, in addition to his or her own native language and cultural interpretations. This was important, because respondents had to understand the instruments well enough to provide comprehensible responses. For those who were not comfortable writing their responses in English, I offered the option of speaking into a tape recorder, after which I would transcribe the tape. Only one panelist chose that option -- not because of any difficulties she had understanding English, but for the sake

of convenience in responding.

In addition to addressing the potential limitations of the Delphi in general and an international study in particular, I reviewed other means for assessing the appropriateness of a Delphi study. It is well established that the criteria for evaluating qualitative research are different from those that set the standard for quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The criteria for evaluating qualitative methods are appropriate for a Delphi study, as well. They are outlined below.

#### Criteria for Evaluating a Delphi Study

As Pavlik (1987) explained, good research in an underdeveloped domain contributes to its current practice as well as to the establishment of a theoretical framework for future research. Qualitative research that explores a new field is essentially an ongoing dialogue; when one study is completed, others are encouraged to scrutinize, critique, and add to the discussion. This is how knowledge expands in a new and dynamic field.

This exploratory research process is quite different from quantitative research of the more established and operationalized constructs. Similarly, criteria for determining the effectiveness of a qualitative study are different from the criteria for evaluating quantitative research. Evaluators of quantitative research determine whether or not a study meets the criteria of validity and reliability. A study is valid if it truly measures what it is supposed to measure. It is reliable if the measurement tools used are consistent or can be replicated (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Babbie, 1989).

Babbie (1989) pointed out that a "certain tension often exists between the criteria

of reliability and validity. Often we seem to face a trade-off between the two" (p. 125). The reason for this, he claimed, is that science often demands specificity in measurements; yet this specificity robs concepts of their "richness and meaning." Experiments, for example, are highly reliable, but their validity can be questioned because the results were obtained in a laboratory rather than in a "real world" setting. By contrast, a case study can be meaningful to public relations scholars and practitioners, but the subjective nature of the case method can reduce its reliability.

The Delphi technique is probably more valid than reliable, but it attempts to address both concerns. Whereas a case study is sufficient with one or two "units of observation," the Delphi technique calls on the opinions of a large number of experts. Thus, it comes closer than a case study to reflecting the "real meaning" of validity described by Babbie (1989). This study, for example, solicits the expertise of scholars and practitioners from many nations who are experienced with at least some extent of international practice. The results of their combined expertise should be highly useful for future practice. If the study instruments were designed properly, the number of respondents should contribute to the reliability of the exploration.

In the instance of an unexplored field like international public relations, the Delphi technique also should have more validity than if a questionnaire were distributed among a random sample of practitioners with some type of international title. As indicated earlier as well as in the Excellence Study (J. Grunig, 1992b), the mere act of being placed in a certain position is no guarantee that the practitioner has learned the activity in an appropriate or useful manner.

Although I considered validity and reliability for my study, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that these criteria are not the most useful determinants of an effective qualitative study. They offered four alternative criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of a such a study. These are: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each of these criteria are discussed briefly below.

The construct of credibility means the extent to which the subject of the investigation is accurately identified and portrayed. This criterion is similar to the concept of "internal validity" in quantitative research (Sheng, 1995). It can be restated, according to Marshall and Rossman (1989), as "how truthful are the particular findings of the study?" (p. 144). If the researcher has depicted accurately and comprehensively the theoretical framework and realities of the larger processes, social groupings or patterns of interaction that were meant to be examined, then the study "cannot help but be valid" claimed Marshall and Rossman (1989, p. 45). Credibility also is established when the researcher is consistent in his or her interpretations of what the respondents really meant (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Transferability suggests the extent to which the results can be extrapolated to other situations or groups (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). This may be similar to the concept of generalizability in quantitative studies. But, Marshall and Rossman explained that transferability is generally one of the weaknesses of qualitative research. They argued that the burden of overcoming this weakness -- of successfully transferring the study to another setting -- usually rests with those who conduct followup studies, not with the original researcher. They can overcome this limitation by maintaining the



original theoretical parameters of the data. They also can triangulate the sources of data by bringing to bear multiple sources on a single point. For example, they can use multiple case studies or multiple informants.

Dependability is similar to the reliability criterion of quantitative methods. In qualitative research, adaptability to the situations being studied are indicators of a "maturing -- and successful -- inquiry" (Lincoln & Guba, 1989, p. 242). Such adjustments ensure that the research reflects the perspectives of the respondents, rather than the researcher (Agar, 1986). However, while adapting to the research situation, any changes need to be documented so that reviewers can understand those adjustments during subsequent interpretations of the research (Sheng, 1995).

Confirmability refers to whether others can confirm that the results of the study do not just reflect the biases of the researcher (Sheng, 1995). This criterion can also be explained by asking the question: "How can we be reasonably sure that the findings would be replicated if the study were conducted with the same participants in the same context?" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 45).

The Delphi technique, if conducted carefully and thoroughly, should satisfy Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four criteria for examining qualitative studies. In my study, for example, I tried to satisfy these criterion through a variety of means. These are explained as follows.

I attempted to fulfill the first criterion of credibility by conducting an exhaustive conceptualization. It incorporated a theoretical framework that encompassed theories across several domains, including global society, comparative management, cultural



anthropology, media studies, activism, and public relations. The framework included a worldview of excellent public relations that has been widely accepted in the United States and is gaining support around the world (J. Grunig, 1992a). The credibility of the international framework for my study was enhanced with its inclusion in the first book on international public relations theory (Culbertson and Chen, 1996).

The burden of transferability, as Marshall and Rossman (1989) stated, rests largely on researchers who would follow this examination with additional studies. I feel, however, that the theoretical framework from the Excellence study (J. Grunig, 1992b), combined with the additional theories for international relevance created a sound framework for this study and future studies. It will be interesting to see how future researchers capitalize on this framework.

This study generated responses from experts in many countries, which should make the framework more acceptable in an international context. Obviously, though, a much greater number of countries were not represented -- particularly countries in the developing world. Also, the practitioner respondents to the study were mostly executives of public relations agencies around the world. Only the future may show how public relations representatives in developing nations and in corporations or other large multinational interests would react to the framework and conclusions of this study.

The criterion of dependability should have been satisfied because throughout this study, I kept copies of all instruments, letters, original responses, and transcripts. Also, after creating the first round instrument, I conducted a pilot sample. The respondents to that pilot made several comments indicating that certain elements of the study were

unclear or susceptible to differing interpretations. Based on these comments, I adjusted the instrument before sending it to the panelists. Likewise, the second round instrument was developed to include verbatim responses of all representative first round responses, positive and negative. Thus, the study satisfies the need for adaptability as well as the ability for others to understand the process I used. This same procedure of utilizing respondent verbatims, including both those who agreed with and disagreed with our original propositions, should help satisfy the confirmability of the results, as well.

### **Procedures Used for this Study**

The preceding pages have indicated that the Delphi is a useful method for studying new and dynamic topics like international public relations. Now, I will outline the specific procedures followed in completing the study. First, I will describe how the participants for the panel were selected. Then I will discuss the design of the research instruments used during the two rounds and how the data were collected from these rounds. I also will describe how these instruments were analyzed and interpreted. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of ethical considerations for the study. Because the study was conducted while I was simultaneously working a full-time job, the process took more than two years to complete.

### **Selection of Delphi Respondents**

As previously explained, the quality of participants is the necessary foundation for a successful Delphi study. The most effective Delphi panelists have the requisite expertise, feel personal involvement in the issue at stake, and are motivated to fit the Delphi process into their busy schedules (Delbecq et al., 1975; Tersine & Riggs, 1976).

When the panel includes these individuals and the study is carefully and thoughtfully completed, its chances of benefitting the investigated field significantly increase (Goldschmidt, 1975). This study attempted to incorporate this "pooled expertise" by seeking panelists who have the experience and interest needed to intelligently discuss international public relations.

In Delphi research, the number of panelists is not as important as their expertise (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). In fact, the first Delphi solicited the opinions of just seven experts on the subject of atomic warfare (Pill, 1971). Delbecq et al. (1975) suggested that respondent groups in Delphi studies can range from ten to several hundred people. Tersine and Riggs (1976) agreed that Delphi groups have included as few as ten or as many as 400 people. If the group is formed simply to provide information, it typically loses its purpose of generating ideas when it exceeds thirty. For this study, I attempted to obtain between twenty and thirty respondents.

The intent of this study was to capitalize on this combined interest and experience of both scholars and practitioners. According to Pavlik (1987), public relations scholarship should be of concern to both of these groups. The Excellence Study showed that the combined work of theorists and practitioners provides theories "by which we can compare, analyze, and evaluate our experience, our organizations, and our programs" (Repper, 1992, p. 112). In the growing field of international public relations, both practitioners and scholars are increasing their stake in the practice. This study tried to incorporate the best theoretical and practical experience available to obtain data that may lead to a valuable foundation for future practice.

I felt that an equivalent balance of academics and practitioners was crucial to the study. Academics understand the theories and principles that lead to enhanced performance, but many of them have not practiced in the field enough to understand the day-to-day realities. Practitioners, on the other hand, are immersed in the daily experiences but often do not understand the theoretical principles that form the basis of effective practice. They are then reduced to the "trial by error" judgments that can be inefficient at best and costly at worst in international circumstances. Recognizing the strengths and weakness offered by either academic or practitioner data, I felt that a combination of these theoretical opinions and daily experiences would be the best way to develop useful theories for future practice.

Because I desired this combination of academic and practical respondents to offer a full spectrum of opinions, I wanted to obtain a fairly balanced pool of both groups. By achieving this balance, the data obtained from each category of experts could be compared to unearth any possible differences between the two groups. This comparison, I believed, would again lead to greater reliability in the results. Therefore, I attempted to include ten to a dozen experts from both the academic and the practical arenas.

Delbecq et al. (1975) said Delphi participants should be selected through nominations, or what Newman (1994) referred to as "snowball sampling." This sampling procedure was described above. The experts who are originally selected to help initiate the snowball process should be "likely to possess relevant information or experience concerning the objectives toward which decision makers are aiming the Delphi" (Delbecq et al., 1975, p. 88). Because of their experience, the participants should have many

contacts whom they believe also would have expertise. Thus, they are asked to provide the names of another 10 to 20 potential respondents. The names are collected and contacts are made to complete the desired respondent pool.

In using the snowball method for selecting respondents, I worked with members of my dissertation committee as well as my own contacts and acquaintances. By doing this, I believed I could obtain the names of individuals from around the globe. My contacts came from personal practical work, mostly in the Pacific Rim at that time. Drs. James and Larissa Grunig had both travelled extensively in Europe, lecturing in public relations. I also obtained potential respondents in South Africa, China, and other locations from three other scholars -- Dr. Hugh Culbertson, Dr. Melvin Sharpe, and Dr. Dennis Wilcox -- who had travelled to these places on various public relations assignments. The identification of potential respondents was informal, but the qualifications that would ensure the greatest possible validity in a Delphi were strongly considered in the process.

After all of the possible participants were identified, two lists of names were created. The first was an "A" list of 53 experts who had been nominated more than once or who otherwise seemed highly qualified to participate (prime candidates). Most of these people had practiced or taught public relations for many years and were considered as senior practitioners or academics in their own countries. Many also had experienced public relations on some type of international scale. The group represented 31 different countries. Although most of the countries represented were in the developed world, five of the six habitable continents (the exception, of course, being Antarctica) were included

among the potential respondents.

A "B" list of 28 alternative panelists (secondary candidates) was created to be used if the "A" list failed to generate enough willing respondents. Most of the names on the "B" list were from the same countries as those on the "A" list. They were placed on the "B" list because I wished to preserve the balance of countries represented on the "A" list. I did not want to have more than two or three representatives on the panel from any one country.

During the spring of 1994, members of the "A" list were informally contacted by telephone or in person to discuss the project and preliminarily assess their willingness to participate. The Grunigs assisted with the contacting by talking with some potential panelists during their travels or phone calls. In October 1994 I sent a letter to all of those on the list, explaining the project in more detail and asking them to respond as to whether they could participate. In the letter, the candidates were informed that they had been identified by peers as experts on international public relations or on public relations in their country. This was done in the hope that the peer recommendation would provide more incentive to participate. The letter also described the general purpose of the Delphi study and ascertained the extent of their interest in participating. With the informal discussions and the letter, I received good response from among the "A" list, so I decided to limit the study to those from that list who had expressed interest.

Language capacity and other difficulties resulting from cultural differences are potential problems in any research that crosses cultural boundaries (Rieger & Wong-Rieger, 1988; Adler & Doktor, 1986). Selecting a cross-cultural panel for a Delphi

study is no exception (Linstone & Turoff, 1975). Recognizing this, I worked with people who already had contacts internationally to create lists of potential participants. Panelists were asked to respond in English if they could. Because of this, capability in speaking or writing English was a factor in their ability to participate in the study. Some, of course, spoke or wrote English better than others. But most of the panelists were already known to have adequate command of the language.

To try to overcome any language barriers, I attempted two alternative approaches. The first was to offer the participants one of two methods for responding to the questions: (a) they could write their responses as best they could, and either fax or mail the responses back to me; or (b) they could record their responses on a tape recorder and send the tape back to me. As it turned out, all but one of the participants sent back their responses in written form. The one exception taped her response but for reasons of her own personal convenience rather than language difficulty.

The second approach was to add explanatory documents to the first instrument. This included a definition of some terms that may not have been readily understood, an outline of my assumptions about international public relations, and a summary of the variables in the Excellence study. Also, attached to each proposition in the instrument were additional questions that should have helped clarify the meaning behind the propositions. All of these actions should have helped the panelists understand more accurately the propositions to which they were asked to respond and thus assisted with any potential language problems.



### Collection and Analysis of the Data

After the panel was selected, I was ready to begin data collection through the Delphi iterations. The following sections discuss the process used to complete the iterations. Included in the explanation is the process for developing the instruments, communicating with the panelists, collecting the data, and analyzing the data.

The Delphi study was conducted in two rounds, or by sending out two separate instruments and having the panelists respond each time. The process lasted about 18 months, from the first mailing in October 1994 to collection of the final responses in April 1996. This is much longer than the normal Delphi study, but not necessarily an excessive time frame. According to Delbecq et al. (1975), a study of this type can last up to two years. Tersine and Riggs (1976) also explained that in long-range considerations (like a slowly growing international domain), "calendar time" is usually not relevant to an effective study.

Two main factors slowed the process. The first was my own situation. After completing comprehensive examinations for the Ph.D. program, I accepted a full-time position actually practicing international public relations. Arguably, this helped my study because I was able to meet and communicate more closely with many of the panelists about its significance (but while doing so I did not talk about the propositions so as to not bias the panelists). It also helped me to better understand some of the factors that can make a difference in international work. This helped in selecting the relevant propositions and statements for framing the instruments (again, I had to keep my personal biases from contaminating this process).



The negative of full-time employment was that it reduced the time available for the Delphi research. It also took me away from the University of Maryland and the immediate access to my advisors and committee members. Everything was slowed down -- creating the proposal for the study and getting it approved, identifying the panelists, creating and sending out the instruments, follow-up procedures, and analysis. Particularly during the period of data collection, I averaged one week out of the United States for every two weeks at home while travelling among 20 different countries.

The second factor behind the protraction of the project was the panelists. As experts who have devoted many years to public relations, they were all busy people. They typically would need up to three or four hours of solid time to thoughtfully respond to each of the instruments. Taking time from their normal routines (if there is such a thing in public relations) often was not convenient. Thus, it took more than four months to collect the responses for each round.

Delbecq et al. (1975) distinguished between two types of first-round instruments in a Delphi. The typical format has one broad question that allows the participants to lead the study into subcategories and variables. This is the open-end approach mentioned above. The alternate design can "approximate survey research, where variables are already developed and concern is only with refinement and movement toward consensus concerning the relative importance of individual variables" (p. 90). This is the closed-end format. However, as mentioned, Rowe et al. (1991) warned that too much structuring of the first instrument sabotages the intent of the Delphi by limiting the valuable forum of ideas and opinions that the experts are meant to provide.

Even though international public relations is a relatively untested field, I believed that one open-end question would be too ambiguous to begin creating theories. It would be more valuable if this study were set up to test the applicability of already established theories, i.e., the Excellence Model, across a variety of cultures. However, I also realized that international public relations is subject to a broad range of intercultural and organizational worldviews and interpretations. Because the response group represented this variety of cultures and backgrounds, I wanted to allow them the greatest opportunity for feedback. Therefore, even though the initial instrument tested established theories through a series of propositions, I chose to keep the instrument as open-end as possible.

While the initial contacts were being made, I created an instrument for the first round. The instrument incorporated the 14 propositions developed from the search of literature in public relations, comparative management, cultural anthropology, and other domains. The propositions were presented under two headings. The first section included the eight generic propositions that I believed could be universally applied throughout the world. The second grouping of six propositions were the variables specific to a given country. Also, to enhance the open-end nature of the instrument, each proposition had accompanying statements and questions to spark additional thinking and response.

#### Pilot Study to Assess the Instrument

Before mailing the instrument to the entire list of panelists, I conducted the pilot study mentioned earlier to determine whether the propositions and accompanying questions would be understood in cultures other than mine. I sent it to one

practitioner/academic in Slovenia and one practitioner in Mexico. The instrument also was reviewed by my advisor. The three individuals were asked to be critical of the format, wordings of the propositions themselves, adjacent questions, and other considerations of the study, particularly from a cross-cultural perspective.

The three individuals assisted tremendously in clarifying and strengthening the instrument. From their comments, I was able to make modifications that proved beneficial. For example, a research protocol was added to the instrument to explain that the study was normative in nature and that the respondents should view the propositions in terms of how effective public relations should be practiced. The protocol also included four preliminary questions to make sure the participants understood that I wanted detailed and open-end responses. The questions were: (a) Do you agree with the proposition? (b) If so, why? If not, why not? (c) Does the proposition hold in your country in all circumstances, or are there instances where it would not apply? (d) What adjustments, if any, must be made for the proposition to be acceptable in your country?

The pilot responses also highlighted the usefulness of two more documents. The first contained one page indicating my own assumptions about international public relations. I believed that this would give them a starting point for their thinking about the field -- whether they agreed with the text or not. The second was a three-page summary of the principles of the Excellence Study. This was included at the suggestion of the pilot participants, to offer an overview of that study to those panelists who may not have been previously exposed to the Excellence Study.

### First Round Collection and Analysis

The full document sent to all of the panelists was eight pages long. It was entitled, "Research Protocol: How to Proceed with the First Round" (see Appendix B). Attached to that document was an introductory letter, explaining where and how the study had originated and how the respondent had been selected. It also outlined the need for the panelist's full commitment if he or she were able to participate in the study, and thanked him or her in advance for participating.

In late October 1994 I sent the packet to the 53 people on the "A" list. Over the next four or five months, responses to the instrument were returned (a few came back as late as March 1995). Some were faxed to me at my office (I had offered them that alternative), while others were mailed to me. Some pursued both alternatives for responding, with concerns that either the fax or the mail would not go through. In conversations with some of the respondents, I found that this proved to be a wise choice. Some of the faxes, for instance, did not make it through. After two months, I again mailed instruments to those who had not originally responded. The Grunigs and I also were able to talk by phone or in person (we all were travelling overseas during this time) to some of the potential respondents, where we were able to remind them of the study. These efforts elicited half a dozen additional responses over the next few months.

After five months from the mailing of the packet, in the spring of 1995, I gathered the responses that had been returned. In all, 23 people, or just over 43 percent of the total "A" pool, had responded to the mailing. This rate compares favorably to the 38 percent response rate received by Sheng (1995) in her first round. After discussions

with Dr. James Grunig, we decided that this number was sufficient and that we need not send to the "B" list that had previously been prepared.

When the first-round questionnaires were returned, I launched into three stages of analysis. First, there was a transcription of all the responses into one computer file to preserve the data (the original responses also were kept to further preserve the data). Each response was then carefully analyzed to gain a holistic assessment of the opinions and rationale of the respondents, to see if they agreed with the proposition, disagreed, or were uncertain, and why.

I realized through this first-stage analysis that the interpretations of data were my own; therefore, they were subject to my own judgments and biases. For example, in determining whether a response of three to five or six paragraphs agreed or disagreed with the proposition, or was ambivalent, I was as painstaking and careful as possible. However, the process still required a subjective judgment as to whether the respondents had agreed or disagreed with the entire proposition or just part of it. Sometimes they seemed to agree with everything, sometimes with nothing, and sometimes they agreed with some parts and disagreed with others. Because of the subjective nature of the observation, I needed to reduce the impact of my personal judgments.

I tried to limit this potential for bias in the second stage of analysis. All of the data were grouped into a second computer file so that the responses to each proposition were together under that proposition's heading. Then I examined them for additional overall patterns emerging from each proposition. I also closely analyzed the grouped responses for any significant "outliers" or "holdouts" -- those who seemed to strongly

disagree with a given proposition and who expressly stated their rationale for dissent.

This process of compiling responses by proposition helped strengthen the analysis in two ways. First, analyzing the data in this way revealed more clearly the dispersion of responses on each proposition -- how many seemed to agree and how many disagreed. The anonymous nature of this second stage analysis also helped to eliminate any possible bias I would have about any of the respondents because the data could be examined without knowing which response came from what participant. For example, I could avoid the possibility of giving undue weight to a given response based on the fact it may be an acquaintance of mine. I also tried to avoid biased examination of the responses based on region, gender, or other characteristics. It was important at this point to look at the entire range of responses as free of bias as possible. The separation of responses by demographic characteristics would come in the analysis of the second round.

The third stage of the first-round analysis included sifting through the responses in each proposition, sentence by sentence, and producing verbatim declarative statements from the comments. While doing so, I also searched for patterns between statements. Where several people had given similar assertions, I selected one representative remark and marked to the side of that statement the number of respondents who had replicated it (instead of repeating the similar statements again and again). In that way, I was able to reduce each proposition to three or four dozen statements that differed in some way (and I was careful to retain the outliers as well as the mainstream opinions). This analysis generated a 40-page, single-spaced document of declarative statements for the 14 propositions. From that process, I was able to begin developing a second round

instrument that represented the entire range of feedback on each proposition.

Before creating the second round instrument in August 1995, I had the opportunity to present a paper at an international public relations research symposium in Slovenia. This presented two advantages: (a) it imposed a deadline for completing and analyzing the first round process (something that with my work schedule and penchant for procrastination was sorely needed); and (b) it provided a forum for feedback from a group of academics and practitioners interested in international public relations. This second factor is important, according to Delbecq et al. (1975). They recommended that another group of decision makers be involved in the process beside the respondents "to appraise the utility of the information obtained" (p. 85).

Through this international forum, I was able to discuss my first-round data with a group of more than 40 experts from throughout Europe (two of whom had been participants in my study). The symposium was unique in that it included both scholars and practitioners. Their feedback and observations gave me renewed confidence that the study and its initial analyses were proceeding in an appropriate direction. This helped significantly in producing the second round questionnaire.

### Second Round Collection and Analysis

With the 40 pages of declarative statements completed, it was time to develop the second round instrument. For each proposition, I selected 10 or 12 statements that best represented the broad range of opinions from the panelists. In so doing, I was careful to retain that full range of statements about the proposition. For example, included in the mix were the many statements that elicited the largest numbers of similar



responses. But I also kept those that were contrary to the majority patterns. With statements representing both the majority and outlier comments, respondents would have a second chance to agree or disagree with the full spectrum of opinions on each proposition. In essence, they could respond to each other's opinions, an important characteristic of an effective Delphi study (Rowe et. al., 1991).

When these statements were selected, I developed the second round instrument using an approach that Pill (1971) referred to as "the method of summated ratings" (p. 61). Delbecq et al. (1975) also outlined this alternative. Attached to the right of each statement were Likert scales with five points -- strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree (the summated ratings). Respondents were asked to read the statement and mark the point on the scale that most represented their opinion about that statement. Also, below each statement and scale were three lines on which the panelists could give additional comments to explain their reasoning if they so desired.

The first draft of the instrument contained 136 statements. Believing that it would take too much time and energy for the panelists to scrutinize that much material, I reduced the number of statements to 78. In the editing process, again I was careful to maintain the full range of opinions for each proposition. The items were mostly grouped according to the propositions, although there were exceptions to that grouping. Five or six statements represented each variable. The propositions themselves were not identified in the instrument, so as to avoid biasing a panelist's responses based on previous inclinations toward or against a given proposition.

It is perhaps important to note that the first- and second-round approach and



objectives were somewhat different. The first round instrument contained a variety of propositions to which specific responses were required. However, the process remained open-end to allow for the broadest possible diversity of responses without losing control over the information sought. The second round, by contrast, provided a closed-end format where ranges of opinions and feelings were the objective.

Another important difference was that in the second round, instead of responding to propositions from the researcher, the panelists were now "communicating" with each other. In other words, with few exceptions the statements were included in the exact wording of the first-round responses. (These were a few cases where the relevant first-round response came from someone with limited English language skills, whose statement was awkward or confusing as written. In these cases, some phrases were slightly altered to make the second-round instrument understandable.)

This Delphi pattern, which moves from open-end to closed-end instruments, is consistent with one format suggested by Delbecq et al. (1975). It also satisfies Agar's (1986) suggestion that qualitative data be allowed to emerge from the respondents themselves to maintain the holism and richness of that being studied. At the point when the respondents receive a second instrument, a real "discussion" process emerges among the experts in the study. This is when they can really respond to what their colleagues have collectively fed back to the researcher about the relevant questions and issues.

Assuming that the second instrument accurately reflects the collective statements of the panelists, this process can begin to accumulate the authentic opinions the experts are producing and move toward consensus. This discussion of the qualitative data from

the first round is the very element that makes such data rich (Pauly, 1991). It starts to reflect the realities that are "out there" and, in this case, begins to crystallize the debate on what exactly is going on in this emerging field of international public relations.

The second round instrument was sent to the 23 first-round participants in October 1995. With a requested deadline of November 20, the majority of respondents sent back the instrument within a month. However, six participants had not returned the instrument by the deadline. In January 1996, after the "down time" of the holidays, another letter went out asking for completion of the yet unreturned responses. Another deadline was set for February 1. Even then, some of the responses dragged out through the late spring of 1996. I placed a telephone call to each of those who still had not responded. Finally, 21 of the 23 possible responses were returned. The loss of two respondents in the second round represents a mortality rate of less than nine percent. The 91 percent second-round response rate is consistent with Bardecki's (1984) claim that Delphi study dropout rates typically decrease from one round to the next.

After 21 of the panelists returned their second instruments, it was time to start analyzing the data from that round. First, all of the responses were entered into a SPSS computer software package. Although the sample size was not appropriate for examining statistically significant differences, I felt that an analysis of the numbers would help to gain a more accurate picture of where the responses were falling on the spectrum of opinions for each proposition. If most of the responses clustered toward one extreme point or another (strongly agree or strongly disagree), it would offer some confidence that consensus was occurring on that particular variable. If the responses were highly

dispersed or were clustered toward the middle of the scale, this would imply that the statement had generated little or no consensus.

With the data entered into the computer package, I could search for patterns within the responses. In addition to simple histograms that showed the dispersion and the means for each statement, I ran some ANOVAs to explore for differences in opinions based on gender, location, and status (practitioner or scholar). Again, statistically significant differences would not be appropriate with such a small sample size, but I was seeking patterns of opinions within the demographic groups. Generally, I was examining differences or similarities possibly related to regions of the world in the opinions of the respondents; differences or similarities in the opinions between men and women respondents related to the propositions; and possible differences in viewpoints between the scholars and practitioners about global theories and practices.

In the final analysis for the second round, I examined the comments supplied by the respondents in the lines below each statement. Most of the respondents did not offer second-round comments, even when encouraged to do so. Of those who did, many of the comments simply repeated or were similar to those they had given in the first round. However, where these opinions were significantly different or added considerably to the overall analysis, I noted them for subsequent discussion in the results chapter.

#### A Word on Stopping at Two Rounds

In any Delphi process, a third round of responses may be used (Delbecq, et al., 1975). According to Sutherland (1975), the main goal of a Delphi is to reach consensus within the panel. However, consensus is not always a mandatory ingredient. Diversity

of opinions also can be valuable, particularly in a previously unexplored field, if they indicate the current state of the field and offer potential direction for the future. As Delbecq et al. (1975) and Tersine and Riggs (1976) indicated, at the end of the second round the researcher must make a decision as to whether a third round is critical to learning more about the subject under study.

This study presented principles that were thought to be normative, or ideal, conditions for international public relations. Through the two rounds, experts were able to freely react to those principles, to examine them for the circumstances peculiar to their countries and respond as to the feasibility of each principle under those circumstances. With most of the propositions, as will be seen, a fair amount of consensus was achieved. Where consensus did not occur, it indicated that the proposal under examination either would not succeed in certain conditions or simply needs further examination. Therefore, for this study, I felt that two rounds were sufficient.

### **Ethical and Practical Considerations**

Any research project must adhere to certain ethical principles to preserve the dignity and privacy of the participants. In addition, there are practical considerations that affect the integrity of the data collected. These concerns are discussed below.

#### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

One main ethical concern for participants of a study is that their involvement remains confidential. This is particularly important in a Delphi study, because knowing who other panelists are could skew their responses. If, for example, one panelist knows that another well respected expert is participating, and recognizes that expert's opinions,

it may make the first panelist more likely to agree with that well known expert.

The panelists all were assured that their responses would remain confidential throughout and after the study. So far, I am the only person who has seen or reviewed the responses from the first round. If any subsequent researchers wanted to examine the data, however, the responses are available in several forms without names being attached. The same is true for the second round. Because the statements in this instrument were based on verbatim responses from the first round, it was possible that a panelist could recognize his or her own first-round response -- but no one else would know the original source of the statement.

To some degree, anonymity is still protected because no names are mentioned with the opinions presented in this publication. Sometimes certain factors in a given country are mentioned. If only one respondent is listed from that country, then others may suspect who offered those opinions about that country. Such suspicions could prove misleading, however, because often the panelists' responses compared public relations as they understood it in an adjacent country to practices in their own country.

#### Voluntary Participation and Personal Harm

Babbie (1989) asserted that any human research is "an activity that the respondent has not requested and one that may require a significant portion of his or her time or energy [that] disrupts the subject's regular activities" (pp. 472-3). Thus, a major element of social research is that any participation should be voluntary. Participants should be instructed beforehand that any information or opinions they supply will be used for research purposes and publication. In addition, the researcher should always

protect individual responses, releasing information as aggregate data.

A more sensitive aspect of research is that subjects can be harmed by the release of embarrassing data or even information that can endanger their lives, physically or psychologically (Babbie, 1989). Renzetti and Lee (1993) called particularly sensitive research a "substantial threat" (p. 5). A researcher must be sensitive to these issues and exercise precautions so that participation by the subjects is not damaging to them.

I did not view international public relations as a particularly sensitive topic. Unlike research that requires reporting on personal behaviors or sensitive situations, this Delphi examined ambiguous variables. Panelists typically evaluated possible structures and programs and thus were responding from more impersonal positions. Rarely did they have to share situations arising from their own lives or even their own careers. When they did report such incidents, examples were voluntary. Thus I was not concerned about physical or emotional harm to subjects.

The more pertinent element for my study was that each subject was allowed to make his or her own choice about participating. To ensure this, I explained to potential panelists the purpose of the project, the amount of commitment needed on their part to complete the project, and that their participation was entirely their choice. Although I did not have them sign consent forms, I believed that their returning the questionnaires implied that they were consenting to participate. Most of the participants, in fact, went beyond the minimal requirements of the task in offering their responses. For the 30 people on the "A" list who chose not to respond, I did not exert undue pressure beyond one followup letter encouraging them to participate.

### Subject Mortality

Subject mortality is a concern that needs to be negated as much as possible in any research process (Babbie, 1989). Delbecq et al. (1975) indicated that respondents must continue with the Delphi process through each stage. To maintain their interest, the researcher should work quickly between each round of instrument mailings.

Unfortunately, I found that the mandates of my full-time job turned timeliness into an unrealistic commodity. As noted earlier, one full year passed between the first and second round mailings. Gathering the data once the mailings went out took another four or five months each time. Respondents were notified in advance to expect some time between instruments, but the process took much longer than even I anticipated.

Within this extended framework, I tried to reduce mortality as much as possible. When contacting respondents in person and through letters, I (and others in the process) explained the significant commitment that was needed. This included an explanation of the importance of remaining with the process through completion. Also, after the first round, I sent letters to each panelist to thank him or her for participating. As a result, between the first and second rounds only two people dropped out -- one apparently due to "mid-life" crisis strains. Therefore, mortality was not a great problem, despite the duration of the process. Perhaps this was because, as indicated by most of the panelists, the subject matter attracted great interest; the panelists wanted to participate because they were vitally interested in the results. Few studies ever have been done on international public relations, so any attempts to show what makes the practice effective seem to be well received.

### Influence of the Researcher

Another concern in any research project is the ability to collect the data without undue influence on the data collected (Sheng, 1995). If the researcher influences the data in any manner that may "lead" the respondents to similar opinions (a concept similar to "biasing" the questions in a survey), it will skew the results (Babbie, 1989).

The conceptualization of this project led to propositions that were intended to be critiqued by experts. Without question, the propositions carried certain normative worldviews and theories. However, in presenting these propositions to the panelists, I also included a variety of questions specifically intended to "challenge" each proposition. Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the proposition and to justify their reasoning either way. This process is consistent with Agar's (1986) encouragement to exercise "systematic doubt" before reaching any conclusions.

In this chapter, I have shown the procedures used for collecting data. I have described the Delphi method and why I chose it, how I selected and obtained the participation of the panelists, and the process for analyzing their responses. I also have examined additional ethical and practical considerations that could have affected the study, and how I dealt procedurally to minimize those concerns.

These explanations should provide the context in which the data from the two rounds were analyzed. They also should help in better understanding the findings. These analyses and findings are discussed in the following chapters.



## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter offers the analyses and findings from the Delphi process discussed in chapter three. The chapter details the collective responses of 23 participants around the world (21 in the second round) to the fourteen propositions that had been determined would comprise an effective program in international public relations. I will discuss the findings from the data gathered in the two rounds of Delphi, then analyze the implications of the data related to the practice of international public relations.

The chapter will proceed in three main sections. The first section will discuss the panelist demographics. The second will present the first- and second-round responses to each of the propositions in the study (rather than discussing first round results, then presenting the propositions all over again for a discussion of the second round). Under each proposition, I will review the qualitative responses to the first round instrument, including my interpretations of the data and their implications. Then, I will present the declarative statements and Likert scales to which the panelists responded in the second round, showing the limited numerical data from those responses and discussing the implications of those numbers. The chapter will conclude with the third section, a final analysis and summary of the results.

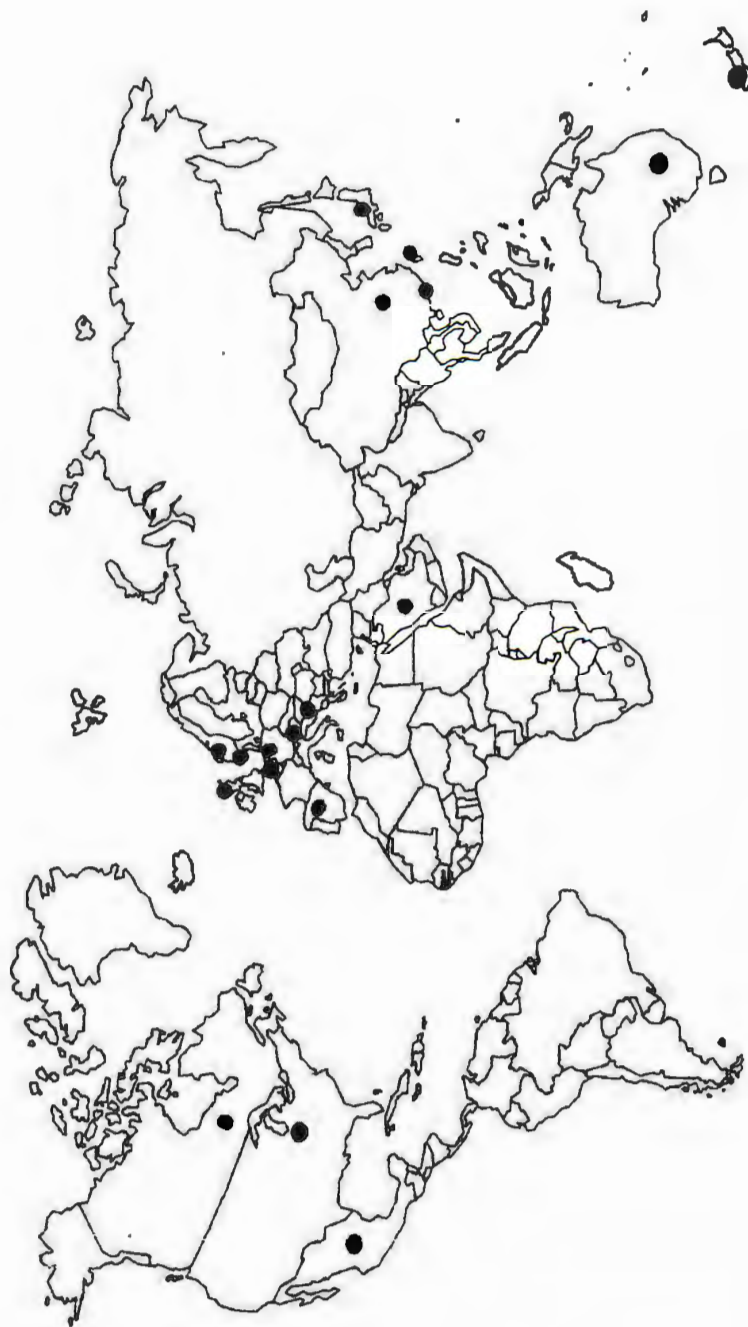
#### **Composition of the Delphi Panel**

The panel of respondents to this study was organized through a nomination procedure, as suggested by Delphi methodologists (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975). The result of the nominations was a purposive "universe" of 53 candidates. Even

though the sample was purposive (it sought identified "experts" in the field), I did not intentionally try to divide the sampling by gender, education, or even by whether they were practitioners or scholars. I wanted a relatively good sampling of both practitioners and scholars, but not necessarily an equal sampling. The only intentional grouping was a range of geographical representation from around the world.

After all of the 53 candidates were contacted to request their participation, 23 of them eventually responded to the first round instrument. This represents a 43.4 percent response rate. Two of the panelists from the first round did not complete the second round instrument. Therefore, the overall response rate for the second round fell to 39.6 percent, although that figure also represented a continuation rate of 91.3 percent from the first to the second round. I did not ask the respondents to reveal any characteristics about themselves in either instrument. Nevertheless, I knew some of their demographics based on my own understanding of the participants. These characteristics of the panelists are explained in the following paragraphs and in Table 2.

The original "A" list of 53 candidates contained practitioners and scholars from 31 countries. With the panelists who responded, the representation of countries fell to 18. These countries, and the number of respondents representing each country, were: The United States (3), Scotland (1), Australia (1), New Zealand (2 in the first round, 1 in the second round), The Netherlands (1), Germany (1 first round, 0 second round), Spain (2), Yugoslavia (1), Slovenia (1), Denmark (1), Norway (1), Mexico (1), Canada (1), Saudi Arabia (2), Japan (1), China (1), Hong Kong (1), and Taiwan (1).



**Figure 3:** Geographical dispersion of Delphi panelists, showing countries represented by at least one respondent.

A regional breakdown of these respondents shows that in the first round, five panelists were from North America, seven were from Europe (if one considers Scotland as part of Europe), two were from Scandinavia, two represented the Middle East, four were from Asia, and three were from Australia or New Zealand. After the first round, Europe fell from seven to six participants, and the Australia/New Zealand group lost one panelist. The total panelist group, then, incorporated five continents around the world.

A further demographic exploration shows that 16 of the panelists (69.6%) were men, and only seven (30.4%) were women. Both of the second round dropouts were men, however, so the second round ratio (66.7% male to 33.3% female) was slightly better than that of the first round. In both cases, however, the percentages of women in the study was slightly greater than in the listing of candidates. Of the 53 candidates who were sent first round instruments, 20 (or 37.7%) were women.

Although there was only an informal attempt to gather scholars and practitioners, the numbers between the two groups were adequately split. Twelve of the panelists were full-time academicians, nine were full-time practitioners; and two were both (but these two now spend most of their time in practice). If the two with both backgrounds are counted as practitioners, the ratio of scholars to practitioners was 12 to 11, or 52.2 percent academicians to 47.8 percent practitioners. For the second round, however, both of the dropouts were practitioners. This widened the ratio to 12 scholars (57.1%) versus nine practitioners (42.9%). Of the 12 scholars, seven (58.3%) were men and five (41.7%) were women. In the first round, nine of the practitioners (81.8%) were men, with only two (18.2%) women. This disparity was reduced to seven

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of Delphi Panelists

Number of Respondents	Round 1: 23 total		Round 2: 21 total	
<u>Continent/Region</u>	<u>Number: Percent</u>		<u>Number: Percent</u>	
North America	5	22%	5	24%
Europe	7	31%	6	29%
Scandinavia	2	8.5%	2	8.5%
Asia	4	17%	4	19%
Middle East	2	8.5%	2	8.5%
Australia/New Zealand	3	13%	2	9%
Totals:	23	100%	21	100%
<u>Gender</u>	<u>Number: Percent</u>		<u>Number: Percent</u>	
Men	16	70%	14	67%
Women	7	30%	7	33%
Totals:	23	100%	21	100%
<u>Professional Status</u>	<u>Number: Percent</u>		<u>Number: Percent</u>	
Academicians	12	52%	12	57%
Practitioners	11	48%	9	43%
Totals:	23	100%	21	100%
<u>Education (Estimated)</u>	<u>Number: Percent</u>		<u>Number: Percent</u>	
Ph.D. degrees	7	31%	6	29%
Masters degrees	10	43%	10	47%
Bachelors degrees	6	26%	5	24%
Totals:	23	100%	23	100%

men (77.8%) and two women (22.2%) in the second round.

In addition to these characteristics, I was able to make assumptions based on the selection process for the study. I had asked the individuals assisting with the nomination procedure to make sure the candidates they selected were among the most qualified and respected practitioners or scholars in a given country. Assuming that the nominators' admittedly subjective judgments were not inaccurate, all of the panelists had many years of experience in the public relations realm. Also, because many were scholars (and I also knew that several of the practitioners had at least master's degrees), I could assume that most of the panelists had advanced college degrees of some kind.

### **Results of the Delphi Data**

In this section, I will comment on the data that were received from the two rounds of the study. This includes the significant patterns, the outliers, the numerical ranges, and other vital results. It should be easier to follow the commentary if it is presented proposition by proposition, rather than discussing the first round and repeating that information in a subsequent discussion of the second round.

The discussion of each proposition follows. I first present the proposition and discuss the full range of qualitative responses that arose from it in the first round. This is followed by a chart showing the second-round statements related to each proposition and the numerical representations of responses to those statements. I show how many chose each of the Likert options, followed by the response mean for each statement. Following each chart is a discussion of what the responses indicate. Finally, I summarize the findings of both the first and second rounds at the end of each proposition.

As would be expected from a study whose participants have years of experience in the given topic, most of the panelists shared strong opinions about the material presented to them. However, most of the propositions exhibited a fair amount of consensus from the participants even in the first round, although a few elicited extensive discussion and polar extremes of thought. One potential weakness was that some of the propositions did not seem to be well understood, or at least some of the respondents suggested they were not well worded.

In the second round, with the addition of the Likert scales to the comments made in the first round, the patterns of consensus were more visible. Less than a fourth of the 78 statements presented to the panelists failed to show strong consensus. As a result, the overall data from the study provide some valuable trends and ideas about international public relations for academicians and practitioners to use in the future.

This discussion of the data begins with two fundamental items that contribute to a general understanding of international public relations. These items were in the "Research Protocol" instrument as supplemental information; nevertheless, they helped set a framework for the thinking of the panelists. The first item appeared in the introduction. It stated, "The propositions are normative, meaning that we think this is how public relations should be organized if it is to be excellent in a multinational setting." The second item came as a question attached to the first proposition. It asked, "Do you see 'excellent' public relations and 'excellent' international public relations as the same or different?" Although these items were not propositions that sought direct responses, many of the panelists apparently saw the queries as important enough to offer opinions.

Because of the number of responses to these items, and because of their fundamental nature, I thought it would be valuable to start with a discussion of these issues below.

#### Information Item #1

The first item of information stated:

**The propositions are normative, meaning we think this is how public relations should be organized to be excellent in an international setting.**

Judging from comments made by most of the respondents, there seemed to be widespread agreement that the propositions presented are currently more normative than practical. It was not that the respondents wanted the propositions to be inapplicable; rather, they saw that, under current circumstances in multinational organizations, there were too many constraints in place for the propositions to be practical today.

One respondent summarized, "I think the propositions are all ideal in an ideal world. But we do not have an ideal world." Another stated, "It is difficult to generalize about this. As a description of an ideal state I agree, but I would think that in most multinational companies, there is still a long way to go." And another: "To speak of mutual benefits is a speech easy to do but in normal activity is not applied." One respondent seemed to long for that perfected state, saying, "I think that it would be desirable, because only that kind of public relations (and international public relations) can be able to solve the future problems of the world. [But] this kind of international public relations will be possible only in the future."

Many of the comments about current management and public relations practices help to explain why the ideal is still far away. Several respondents said that for the



propositions to be realistic, public relations people must be qualified in all parts of the world. Apparently, the panelists believe this is not the case -- even in the United States, where many of the so-called modern practices of public relations were developed. A few of the panelists even said that it is impossible, and in some cases undesirable, for management to foster the egalitarian worldviews suggested in the propositions.

In light of this normative research, such statements are not alarming. The Excellence study, from which many of the propositions in this study were formulated, was largely normative, although practical application also has surfaced (J. Grunig, 1992b). Internationally, we are purposely seeking a blueprint for how public relations should be practiced, as opposed to actual practice. Also, as Rieger (1986) stated, in a complex and ambiguous setting, a Delphi study is most useful as a normative exercise.

#### Information Item #2

The second item was posed as a question:

**Do you see 'excellent' public relations and 'excellent' international public relations as the same or different?**

When this question was added to Proposition One in the first round instrument, more than half of the panelists chose to answer it. Ten of the respondents argued that public relations and international public relations are essentially the same. Others believed that they are the same in principle, but different in application.

Among those who saw excellent public relations and international public relations as the same, a similar rationale was expressed across the board. One stated that "excellent public relations in companies should be based on a philosophy of two-way

symmetrical communication.... Despite the fact that we still don't have large experience in international public relations projects, it is obvious that the same philosophy should be applied also in excellent international public relations practice." One of the reasons expressed for the similarity was "in the sense that these plans should be conceived and executed to achieve the same set of organizational goals."

Statements like these are consistent with the arguments of J. Grunig (in press), who explained that even within many countries, the circumstances and publics to which organizations must respond greatly differ. Therefore, strategic management, boundary spanning and symmetrical relationship building are foundations of excellent practice anywhere. The only elements added to international practice, he stated, are artificial borders that, as shown in recent years, can change quickly.

Some participants asserted that international public relations is essentially the same in philosophy as domestic public relations but different in implementation. One stated that the main difference is in "relation to the location of the target groups as well as the range of effects of public relations actions." Another added that international public relations "is exposed to a variety of environments so that there will be some spread in the specific way public relations philosophy is carried out." Yet another explained that international public relations is "exponentially more complex from local programs because of diverse publics, culture, especially the media." One more said: "International public relations provides greater challenges from the complications of different locations, cultures, customs, and even times which can constrain many forms of communication to very limited content and occasions."

A few respondents distinguished between domestic and international public relations more fundamentally, using the symmetrical philosophy as an example. One panelist debated whether "the two-way symmetrical model is really a suitable model to give insight into the nature of public relations." But this same person acknowledged that for international public relations, "the idea of mutual influence and mutual trust is suitable." She said that excellent international practice requires more compromise, in this case between headquarters and the host country, than is necessary in domestic settings. Another panelist agreed that "management's attitude to communication and hence the organization's structure and focus on communication probably has more importance in international than national public relations.... Strong commitment to symmetrical two-way communication is required" for an international program to be successful.

In the second round, I tested some of these assumptions with declarative statements. These statements and their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Excellence

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S1: Excellent PR and excellent international PR are essentially the same thing	6	8	1	3	2	3.65
S2: International PR is exponentially more complex than domestic PR	16	4	0	1	0	4.67
S5: PR and international PR should be same in terms of goals, different in tools and tactics	11	7	0	2	1	4.19

As the numbers indicate, opinions in the second round held consistent with the responses of the first round. Statement One showed that 14 of the 20 respondents (as was often the case, one panelist did not respond to this statement) agreed or strongly agreed that the basis of excellence is the same for domestic and international contexts of public relations. Two of the respondents strongly disagreed with this statement, largely because they agreed with the two other relevant statements here: that international public relations has the characteristic of being much more complex than domestic public relations. As shown here, 16 of the 21 respondents strongly agreed and 20 of the 21 agreed that this is the case. As noted by one of the panelists in round one, 18 of the 21 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that goals and missions should be the same, while tactics and communication tools play out differently in an international context. Therefore, to summarize, the means of 4.67 and 4.19 indicate strong agreement that the fundamentals are the same, the tools and tactics are different, and international public relations is much more complex than domestic public relations.

Distinguishing between domestic and international public relations is consistent with an article on issues management by Nigh and Cochran (1994), management professors at Penn State University. The article is important because issues management has been likened to excellent public relations (J. Grunig & Repper, 1992). Nigh and Cochran claimed that there are notable differences between domestic and international practices because: (a) the multinational faces many more actual or potential stakeholders than its domestic counterpart; (b) stakeholders can be transnational organizations, rather than just domestic ones, and must therefore be faced multinationally; (c) the reality of

managing across borders exposes a multinational to conflicting expectations among stakeholders and differing perceptions of the organization from country to country; (d) stakeholder expectations of a multinational can surface and affect the organization anywhere in the world, not just in the country where the headquarters is located; and (e) communication with stakeholders must cross cultures, where signals and symbols sent from one cultural environment are received in another. All of these factors make a multinational program much more complex than a domestic one.

Another interesting aspect of this "excellence" question is that the second-round responses of the men and the women greatly differed. The ANOVA for this question showed an F Probability of .0009. The 13 men who answered generated a mean of 4.31 -- showing strong agreement that excellent public relations and excellent international public relations are the same. The seven women, however, had a mean of 2.43. The standard deviation also was much smaller in the men's case than in the women's (indicating a narrower range of responses in the men's group). This indicates that for some reason, the women felt stronger that there are differences between international and domestic practices. Perhaps women are better at seeing the nuances from country to country, but this is just a guess. If there truly is a gender difference of opinions on this question, it would be worth further study.

Now that the opinions of the panelists on these two pieces of information have been presented and discussed, there should be a good context for the propositions that were placed before the group. Each of the propositions and their responses are discussed below. They are divided into the generic and specific sections.

## **Generic Propositions for International Public Relations**

The generic propositions were included in the Delphi to ascertain the strength and extent of opinions toward the potential for universal public relations guidelines. The propositions were developed from theories already available to the public relations field. The variables were extracted from certain fundamental, relatively universal worldviews, and may therefore suffice as solid foundations for an international program. However, because these variables had been developed largely in the United States and tested mostly in the United States and a few other similar countries, I wanted to determine how the variables would be received by a multinational panel of experts in the field.

The propositions as written and general patterns of panelist responses to these first-round propositions and to the second round statements, are discussed below.

### Research Proposition #1

The first theoretical proposition on international public relations stated:

**Excellent international public relations is based on a philosophy of two-way symmetrical communication that pervades the organization worldwide. Top managers at headquarters and senior managers in each market carry a philosophy of mutual trust, respect for others, and a need for establishing two-way mutual benefits between the organization and all publics -- internal and external -- on whom its success or failure depends.**

In the first round, the great majority of respondents seemed to support the concept of two-way symmetrical communication, both as an organizational worldview and as a way of practicing public relations with important publics. However, many couched their responses in terms of the normative, rather than the prevalent practice of the day. Of the 23 panelists, 14 clearly agreed with the proposition, while three

expressed disagreement. The remainder either were neutral or uncertain, or they spent time explaining why they could agree or disagree with either side of the proposition.

One panelist who agreed with the proposition stated that the ideal organization should not have one "dominant coalition," but several smaller, decentralized units with "heterarchical, team/project-based" groups "where power is dispersed." The respondent cited Tom Peters for this suggestion. Another responded that to truly practice the two-way symmetrical model, organizations have to go beyond mere "lip service by management. Mission and vision statements are often an empty promise," she said.

According to some, one of the reasons that symmetrical communication is important is that excellent public relations cannot be achieved without it. This particularly is the case in a transnational environment. As one participant stated, "Excellent international public relations can be achieved only through a top down-bottom up collaboration. Each employee must be as committed as the top management at the local level or even the chairman of the board. Every single employee of the organization contributes to the success or failure of the company." Another stated, "While it is logical to expect successful public relations techniques to vary from country to country, it is nevertheless wise for multinational organizations to have a common public relations strategy to which all subsidiaries adhere. A philosophy of two-way symmetrical communication is both desirable and possible, although any such strategy would almost certainly need to be adapted to suit local conditions."

Despite the support for the proposition, however, several respondents also noted that two-way symmetrical communication is difficult if not impossible to achieve in

today's business environment. One remarked, "Public relations officers say that the essence of public relations is mutual benefit and understanding ... [but] what public relations officers actually do is the dissemination of messages about decisions the 'dominant coalition' makes, or the organization of pseudo-events." Another added, "I believe two-way symmetrical communication remains an ideal. It's increasingly talked about by management, but rarely carried through to all aspects of communication." In fact, the respondent stated, "Most companies are reactionary."

A few of the panelists indicated that they would not desire an organizational culture that fostered and practiced two-way symmetrical communication. One of them asked, "Is [Proposition One] possible? No, I don't think so. Is it desirable? Well ... theoretically, yes, but in practice? No, I don't think so." The respondent explained that if an organization and its publics focus on their relationship, they may neglect the symmetrical communication needed to underlie that relationship. Although this was unstated, perhaps the panelist wondered whether an organization and its publics should really have an "equal" relationship. Another respondent argued that, "International public relations is based on anything other than this philosophy," because he viewed the practice mostly as "marketing, publicity, lobbying activity." Another one said that in her country, the concern among practitioners would be that "symmetric communication cannot benefit in terms of money."

Some of the respondents expressed discomfort with the term, "two-way symmetrical communication." One of the panelists claimed that "what [is called] 'symmetrical public relations' presupposes scientific working methods, such as



environmental scanning, well-developed planning of action, evaluation, etc., etc. In our country (and I am certain that this is the case in most of the countries), it is not very common to work this way."

Resistance to the term seemed to be particularly notable in Europe, where the term apparently has more than one connotation. For example, one European scholar said, "I'm not sure that you can describe two-way symmetrical communication in itself as a philosophy. It is underpinned by certain philosophical values which have their roots in western philosophy, and this should be acknowledged."

Actually, J. Grunig (1992b), the author who coined the term for public relations, has acknowledged that symmetrical theory was drawn from a variety of western philosophies and value systems (most of which originated in Europe). It is not the term itself that is important, according to J. Grunig, it is the philosophies and value systems on which it is based that are critical to the practice of public relations. It is highly probable that most practitioners even in the United States have never heard of the term "two-way symmetrical" communications -- but many still recognize that the principles of two-way communication and equality are important to the practice of public relations.

After reviewing the remarks from round one, several declarative statements about symmetrical communication values were incorporated into the second round instrument. These statements, and the numerical breakdown of responses, are shown in Table 4.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The reader will notice that the statements in this and subsequent charts are not numbered sequentially. In producing the instrument, I did not place the statements in order according to the propositions. Also, to conserve space in the charts, I have abbreviated term "multinational organization" with the letters, MNO.

Table 4: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #1

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S3: 2-way symmetrical communication is:						
a: possible	6	10	2	2	1	3.86
b: desirable	12	8	1	0	0	4.52
S6: Symmetrical communication cannot benefit						
organizations in terms of money	1	1	3	9	7	2.05
S9: Organizations that concentrate only on sales						
actually hurt their sales in long run	5	9	3	4	0	3.71
S26: Organizations should be more concerned with						
sales turnover than with public credibility	0	0	2	4	14	1.40
S28: Few MNOs work to make themselves part of						
local fabric or to contribute to local goals	5	11	3	0	1	3.95
S4: Most MNOs don't care about benefits of						
external publics	1	8	3	7	1	3.05

As can be clearly seen, the panelists reiterated that symmetrical communication is a normative ideal in public relations. Statement #3 gave respondents the opportunity to distinguish between the ideal (is symmetrical communication desirable) and the practical (is it possible). Not one of the panelists disagreed that symmetrical communication is desirable, and 12 strongly agreed with the statement. Apparently, the two dissenters from round one changed their minds in the second round. Thus, the qualitative consent voiced in response to the first instrument seemed to hold up and become even stronger among the entire group of respondents.

The results also indicated more support for the practical aspects of symmetrical communication than might have been predicted before the study. One of the main criticisms levelled against the two-way symmetrical model is that it is not practical in "real-world" public relations (Murphy, 1991). Thus, it was expected that the statement, "two-way symmetrical communication is possible," would yield mixed results, with leanings toward disagreement. That was not the case. Although the word "possible" elicited only half of the "strongly agree" responses as did the word "desirable", still 16 of the 21 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the possibility of symmetrical communications. Only three disagreed with the statement.

As with the question on excellence, there was a noticeable difference in opinions between women and men on the issue of symmetrical possibility. Fourteen men responded, and a mean of 4.29 was generated from their responses. None of the men disagreed that symmetrical communication is possible. The women again ranged more broadly, however, from strongly agree to strongly disagree, with all three of the overall disagreements. Their mean for this statement was an uncertain 3.0. Perhaps this means that women are more realistic than men about the limitations of symmetry (possibly because they experience the actions and consequences of inequality more than men). Combined with the question on excellence, these supposed differences in philosophical interpretations might be worth additional study in the future.

Another way to examine the practical aspects of symmetrical communication is to place the concept into "bottom-line" terminology, which is the way most American-based corporations operate. Statements #6, #9, and #26 addressed these bottom-line effects, in

different ways. Statement #6 postulated that symmetrical communication cannot help organizations be profitable. Statement #9 stated that organizations hurt themselves by ignoring symmetrical communication to focus on profit margins, and Statement #26 offered the inverse opinion that entities should be more concerned with profit margins than with credibility.

Responses to these three statements again favored the symmetrical approach. The 2.05 mean for Statement #6 clearly refuted the negative stance toward symmetrical communication; the respondents believed instead that symmetrical communication can assist profit margins. Likewise, not one respondent agreed with Statement #26, and 14 strongly disagreed, that organizations should be more concerned with sales than with credibility. The results for Statement # 9 were not as strong, but they also showed two-thirds agreement that organizations actually hurt their sales by concentrating only on sales. The responses to these statements may indicate a greater possibility for practicing symmetrical communication outside of the United States than inside the United States, from where many of the criticisms about practicality have come. Perhaps symmetrical communication is also more practical as an international effort than a domestic program, at least for American-based organizations. Certainly, more testing would be necessary to validate this assumption.

The final two statements in this group tested the opinions of the respondents about how multinational organizations actually perform. Statement #4 asserted that most multinationals do not care about fostering mutual benefits with their external publics. (Internal publics could have been added here, but the actual first-round

response from which this statement was drawn did not mention internal publics.) Statement #28 similarly declared that few multinationals attempt to become an integral part of the local community or to contribute to local goals. This is an important statement because it gets into local perceptions about how multinationals perform as well as addressing whether there is latent resistance to multinationals in host countries.

The first of the statements, #28, indicated that multinationals can do much better at integrating into their host communities. Five of the respondents strongly agreed that they do not perform well in this area, while another 11 agreed with the statement. However, it must not be for lack of trying; there was a much more even split of responses toward concern organizations have about seeking mutual benefits. The mean for this statement was 3.05, showing a spread of opinions: eight agreed that multinationals do not care, but seven disagreed. Perhaps those who disagreed with this statement concurred with the comment from the first round, that while multinationals care about seeking mutual benefits with publics, they do not exhibit that concern outside of their own home countries. With the second proposition focusing on hiring and internal communication, perhaps responses to that variable could shed more light on whether or not concern for publics is perceived to extend beyond the home country.

#### Research Proposition #2

The second proposition on international public relations stated:

**This two-way symmetrical philosophy will be reflected in the organizational culture and in internal communication styles worldwide. Management would respect all employees as important contributors to organizational success, and would implement methods that foster participation and two-way symmetrical communication among all employees throughout the**

**world. Without this pervading attitude among organizational management, an excellent international public relations program likely will not be achieved.**

The first two propositions seemed so similar in nature that many respondents had trouble distinguishing the nuances in the first round instrument (and maybe the distinction was not written clearly enough). After reading the second proposition, the respondents often gave answers like "see number one" or "this seems the same as the first statement I just read." Some panelists went into detail in answering the second proposition, but upon close scrutiny their first and second answers were almost identical.

A distinction between the two propositions certainly was intended when they were developed. The first proposition asked whether an organization's dominant coalition should foster the ideals of two-way symmetrical communication in the first place. If so, how should that worldview be activated in the organization's policies and actions, and should the philosophy be carried out worldwide? The second proposition, by comparison, was meant to ascertain whether the organization should reflect the two-way symmetrical worldview in its internal culture and management styles. Nevertheless, it is possible, based on the confusion among panelists for this study, that the distinction is too subtle to warrant separate propositions.

Despite this confusion over the direction of the first two propositions, eighteen of the respondents clearly agreed with Proposition Two, and only two disagreed. The other respondents were neutral or uncertain as to their leanings.

At least a couple of the participants, even among those who generally agreed with the proposition, seemed skeptical that the two-way symmetrical worldview can, or

should, work within a multinational organization. A representative comment was, "In reality, cultures are bureaucratic, evolving from feudal system concepts of control and management" (and this comment did not come from a traditionally feudalistic country). Another argued, "Employees that are more important to the employer will naturally qualify for a more symmetrical approach than employees who are readily substitutable. Reason: symmetrical communication absorbs time, and this resource needs to be allocated carefully. Even though desirable from an ethical point of view, a pay-off for such public relations practice is questionable in [the] case of 'unimportant' employees whose motivation might be extrinsic, anyway." One person said that top management has difficulty being honest with employees, or to share information that may be considered "too important" for all employees to know.

But most of the respondents seemed to favor the proposition. Some of those suggested that despite the similarities to Proposition One, Number Two nevertheless "follows logically from [the]first proposition." As one respondent argued, "If we have a programme (British spelling) of international public relations based on such ideals, it's difficult to imagine that such values would not affect organizational culture--though they would not necessarily dominate it." Others agreed that "excellent international public relations can be achieved only through a top-down, bottom-up collaboration." "Without 'excellent' internal public relations any 'excellent' international public relations programme has little chance of long-term success. It may well succeed in the short-term, but eventually organizational management will need to recognize they are doing the whole organization a disservice if they do not listen to and trust their employees at all levels."

One respondent, distinguishing clearly between domestic and multinational organizations, suggested that the symmetrical worldview is more important in the multinational entity. "Management's attitude to communication and hence the organization's structure and focus on communication probably has more importance in international than national public relations," the respondent said. "The likelihood of conflict or at least tension between local and international interests in such an organization means that strong commitment to symmetrical two-way communication is required. Without this commitment it would be difficult to balance potentially competing interests and hence convince stakeholders of their ability to affect decisions."

Some of the panelists pointed out that many multinational organizations foster a symmetrical culture in their home country while being highly asymmetrical in all of their host countries. In every case, respondents who said this practice occurs added that it is undesirable. One discussed the situation he has seen with some United States-based multinationals who are well known for their participative environment "at home," but in distant "developing nations" they have been charged with exploitation of workers. Another said that he has seen many multinationals who value and protect their expatriots at the expense of local employees. This "ethnoarrogant" posturing builds up tremendous hostility in host countries and undermines everything the organization is attempting to accomplish in its home country.

Presumably, the greatest reason for the discrepancy between home and host country practices is that organizations move abroad to expand sales while reducing costs. One panelist asserted that this philosophy can backfire. Using an American



multinational in his country as an example, he said: "In the United States it is known for its participative culture, innovativeness and excellent employee policies ... but local behavior is completely different. They have no commitment here and their only task is to increase sales .... I also believe that at the end this is also hurting their sales here." (The declarative statement generated from this comment was placed under Proposition One, and has already been discussed. Although this first-round comment was made while the respondent was discussing the second proposition, I felt that it was more pertinent to overall symmetrical communication philosophies than to internal communication; thus, I placed the declaration under Proposition One in the second instrument.)

From these comments, three declarative statements were generated for the second round that examined symmetrical communication inside the multinational organization. The statements and the numerical responses are included in Table 5.

Table 5: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #2

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S7: Symmetrical organization will offer employees around world respect and flexibility to do jobs	7	7	2	4	0	3.85
S8: Many MNOs treat only headquarters-hired employees well, not locally-hired staff	3	6	7	4	1	3.29
S10: Likely tension between local and global interests mandates 2-way symmetrical communication	9	9	1	1	0	4.30

The normative aspects of symmetry surfaced again in the responses to this proposition. Statement #10, particularly, shows that the dynamic characteristics of

international operations not only suggest but mandate a symmetrical communication process between home and host offices. Nine agreed strongly with the statement, while another nine agreed with the statement, producing a mean of 4.3. Statement #7 shows how this symmetrical philosophy will be operationalized: through a worldview of respect for all employees around the world and operations that are flexible enough for employees to use their own ingenuity and cultural understanding in performing their tasks. Four people disagreed with this, but the mean of 3.85 still centered toward widespread agreement.

As in Proposition One, the actual practice of multinationals was tested in Statement #8. This posited that many multinationals treat their "home grown" employees better than those in host countries. Again, opinions about these multinational behaviors were widely dispersed, with the mean hovering toward neutrality at 3.29. Nine agreed, but four disagreed. More importantly, one-third of the respondents were neutral or uncertain toward the declaration (one of the highest neutral showings for any of the statements, as will be seen).

There could be a variety of factors behind the neutral or uncertain responses of panelists on these statements. There may be an inability to answer the statement because the respondents don't know the internal workings of any specific organizations. Or, they may be unwilling to generalize from their knowledge of specific organizations, or there may be even other reasons. Regardless of the reasons, the responses lead to an inconclusive examination of how multinationals actually treat their employees, or whether headquarters staff are treated any better than host country employees. It seems,

though, that the panelists generally agree that internal communication should be conducted with symmetrical principles.

### Research Proposition #3

The third proposition on international public relations stated:

**Excellent public relations is a strategic management function working as part of and directly with senior management and the dominant coalition, worldwide. In an international program, the senior practitioner at headquarters will perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning, counseling with the dominant coalition, and setting communication strategies that support organizational goals. Senior practitioners in each country must also perform strategic roles that identify local audiences, build relationships with them, and adapt quickly to changing local conditions.**

The proposition suggested that for public relations practices to be excellent, senior practitioners need to be part of the dominant coalition both at headquarters and in the local units. This gained almost unanimous support in the first round -- only one respondent expressed opposition to it, at least in theory. However, eight respondents exhibited "yes, but" attitudes. These mostly revolved around apparent implications that fulfillment of the proposition would require a "top-down" process of management.

Twelve of the respondents agreed to the proposition without apparent reservations. One representative panel member suggested, "Public relations should be a strategic management function working as a part of and directly with senior management and the dominant coalition worldwide." The panelist then explained how the process would work: "In an international program the senior practitioner at headquarters performs the managerial roles of boundary spanning, counseling with the dominant coalition, and setting communication strategies that support organizational goals." A

second respondent agreed: "Public relations should be very close to top management to be effective. The senior practitioner at headquarters is far away from key publics and issues in other countries, and thus he [or she] depends on practitioners in other countries to provide him [or her] with information, [and to] coordinate and adapt programs to local conditions." This would be difficult if the local practitioner were removed from the local decision making unit.

Among the "yes, but" group, concerns about the "top-down" implications of the proposition predominated. One panelist asked, "Don't you think mutual influence and adaptation locally makes supranational strategies impossible?" Another said, "This sentence implies that a senior public relations manager at headquarters decides everything from headquarters. It is often impossible and often undesirable." A third suggested, "Local senior practitioners have the best knowledge of the local environment, the culture and the audience. Only with such local expertise and collaboration can excellent international public relations be achieved."

Additional concerns about the proposition were related to feasibility of implementing such a structure. One respondent, for example, said "the roles are not possible ... in countries where public opinion has not been empowered." Another pointed to staffing logistics within the organization, explaining that although the organization may have "a savvy marketing manager in the regional or international centre," locally they have "an unsophisticated sales/marketing manager" (the respondent apparently believes public relations can be run by a marketing manager, as long as that person is "savvy" rather than "unsophisticated").

It is unclear why the proposition generated the concerns about "top-down" management. As the proposition stated, the structure would have practitioners at headquarters and in the host country offices reporting to the highest levels of management and being part of the decision making groups at both levels. If the local practitioner were not allowed to be in this local dominant coalition, then a downward management cycle could still be possible. It also seems that without public relations in the headquarters management group, there is a top-down management structure anyway; only the local practitioner would then be subject to the caprice of a general manager and his or her line manager at headquarters -- neither of whom may have any experience in public relations. In this case, the local public relations specialist probably would have even less authority to help accomplish public relations goals. Perhaps, however, the traditional "not-in-my-backyard" syndrome is at work in this proposition, where the local experts are reluctant to give up any host country autonomy -- a situation that is understandable in any international context.

The one dissenting opinion came from a respondent who questioned the ability of public relations specialists to satisfy the demands of the proposition. He said, "Just to talk about strategic planning, a public relations background will hardly suffice. In other words, the public relations function, be it a pure communication function or not, needs to be enriched by a management circle including resource management, finance, personnel department, etc." This may argue for the public relations specialists being part of, but not controlling, the dominant coalition in its decisions.

From these comments, several declarative statements were produced (Table 6):

Table 6: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #3

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S11: Local adaptations for local benefits make supranational PR strategies impossible	1	1	1	13	2	2.22
S14: PR varies country to country, but wise to have common PR strategy for locals to follow	9	8	0	3	1	4.00
S13: Same strategic role played at HQ needs to be played in each country by senior practitioner	7	8	3	3	0	3.90
S15: HQ cannot and should not be responsible for problems at local level	0	4	3	9	5	2.29
S44: If HQ involves local practitioners in planning, it can gain insights about local conditions and resources and profit from global thinking	17	3	0	1	0	4.71

The declarative statements for this proposition addressed three main issues that, combined, focus on the proper balance between global and local thinking or action. The first concept centered on whether a globalized strategic umbrella is desirable and possible, or whether all strategic programming should be left to the determination of local units. The second issue was whether strategy should be produced at the local level as well as at headquarters. The final concern dealt with bringing together talent, expertise and ideas from all over the world to create more appropriate global strategy by which all units can profit.

Statements #11 and #14 addressed the incorporation of a strategic umbrella by which the units function. Statement #14 declared that such a "common strategy" is

desirable, while Statement #11 took the practical and opposing viewpoint that "local adaptations ... make supranational public relations strategies impossible." The panelists leaned to the desirability of a strategic umbrella, and argued that such an umbrella is possible. The mean for Statement #14 was 4.0, or right on the agreement category. In contrast, 13 of the panelists disagreed and two more strongly disagreed with the idea that a supranational strategy is impossible. It should be noted, however, that three of the panelists chose not to respond to this statement, which could slightly skew the results. Generally, however, it seems that the panelists supported the idea of global strategic guidelines, not as an imposition of will but as a "common strategy" for units to follow.

Another indicator of opinions about global strategy is the logistical issue of which unit should be responsible when a problem occurs in a host country. Statement #15 read that "headquarters cannot and should not be held responsible for problems that arise at the local level." Four panelists agreed with this statement, but nine disagreed and five more strongly disagreed, for a mean of 2.29. That mean shows a slight, but not convincing, leaning toward the idea that headquarters should be at least somewhat responsible when it allows local units to have problems. Most of the panelists probably recognize that in today's global communication era, it is easy for local problems to quickly transcend borders. But a further issue to be examined is how much headquarters might even contribute to local problems, either through too much of a *laissez faire* attitude toward the local units or through actual sanction of local mismanagement.

The issue of local strategy was examined in Statements #13 and #15. Statement #13 asserts that while a strategic role is played at headquarters, that same role needs to

be performed by a senior practitioner in each country. This statement is important because if public relations is to be a strategic function worldwide, each unit must have a practitioner in place who understands public relations and who has the trust of his or her senior manager to strategically carry out the public relations function. When presented to the panelists, this argument elicited general agreement: seven strongly agreed, eight agreed, and only three disagreed, for a mean of 3.9, a fairly strong indicator of support.

An interesting closer examination of Statement #13 reveals that the statement offers a more specific interpretation for the "top-down" issue raised in the proposition. Rather than addressing the issue as having involvement in the dominant coalition, however, this statement established the idea of being strategic with the public relations function. Even though the wording may be different, the concepts are closely parallel. It is difficult to have strategic public relations without being part of the decision making team, both locally and at headquarters. Where this issue generated quite a bit of uneasiness in the first round responses, Statement #13 elicited greater support and showed virtually no signs of "top-down" concerns.

The final statement, #44, addressed the need or desirability of using practitioners from throughout the organization's worldwide network to plan and execute a combination of global and local public relations. The statement said that if headquarters uses its full network of public relations expertise, it can gain insights about local conditions and profit more from the diverse thinking. This idea gained almost unanimous support from the panelists. Twenty of the 21 participants agreed with this statement, and 17 of those strongly agreed. Only one disagreed. With such strong agreement, this



idea seems to be something that multinational organizations should further pursue.

In summary of proposition three, it seems that the majority of respondents believed that public relations specialists should be in the dominant coalition, both locally and at a multinational headquarters. Some type of global umbrella for public relations missions and guidelines is not only desirable but, for the most part, possible, according to the responses. There also was strong consensus that headquarters would benefit from having a transcultural input mechanism from all of the local practitioners (assuming, of course, that those practitioners are qualified to provide input from their positions).

#### Research Proposition #4

The fourth research proposition in international public relations stated:

**Excellent international public relations is integrated, meaning that worldwide, practitioners report to the public relations department at headquarters and work under a single umbrella (as opposed to, for example, public relations in one country under marketing, in another under human resources, etc.). It is recognized that senior managers in each country are responsible for activities in that country and that the senior practitioner must work closely with that senior manager. But if something negative happens anywhere, headquarters is ultimately responsible. Public relations must be connected worldwide to build consistent programs and respond quickly to problems that arise. A senior practitioner at headquarters must supervise all communication programs, and local practitioners must be trained to carry out the same organizational philosophies, themes and goals. This requires close cooperation and communication between offices and headquarters.**

This proposition addressed the specific structuring of an international public relations program. The question revolved around whether it is most effective to have the public relations unit at each location report to local management, with no worldwide linkage between public relations practitioners and their strategies. Or, is it most effective

to override local management with a globally integrated public relations program, wherein practitioners around the world report directly to public relations at headquarters.

Or, is there some point in between these two extremes that makes some sense.

As can be seen, this proposition not only addressed the global versus local concern, but also posited that public relations units should not be dispersed under different operating units, such as marketing, manufacturing, or legal. This posture was clearly stated in the instrument, but it is not clear whether this meaning was well understood by the respondents as they made their first round comments and subsequent responses to the second round instrument.

In the first round, the proposition aroused a much greater variety of opinions than I had anticipated. Although almost half of the respondents (11 total) seemed to agree with the proposition, seven argued that global integration of public relations is not a good idea. These seven dissenters represented the greatest amount of disagreement expressed toward any of the propositions. Even among those who supposedly leaned in a given direction, however, there seemed to be much internal hedging.

The majority of respondents acknowledged that, in theory, integration of public relations programs around the world would be valuable. However, when it came to thinking about practical implementation of such a program, there was widespread debate. For example, eight of the 11 who agreed with the proposition also said that integration is not possible today. Their reasoning involved two main constraints: budgeting and local management philosophies. One respondent stated that the public relations function is usually funded according to local management priorities, thus giving headquarters public

relations managers little or no control over local activities. Another stated that local public relations often is controlled by general managers who do not want involvement from headquarters public relations staffers. "Many top [local] managers consider themselves an expert in all fields and would surely like to ... place the public relations department/person directly under his management," the respondent explained.

A few participants correlated current practical realities with staffing and expertise considerations. One said that local public relations often is headed by marketing people who don't understand public relations. Like the local manager, these people often resist headquarters involvement in public relations. Another stated that public relations professionals in the United States, where many multinationals are headquartered, "are not prepared for the responsibility [and] still think locally and nationally," not internationally. Another explained, "In some multinational organizations, the senior practitioners are not very flexible in many activities, because of the absence of a cross-cultural attitude."

A few of the respondents who agreed with the normative ideals in the proposition were also more optimistic about its implementation. They stated that integration is not only desirable, but possible in today's business environment. One commented, "The proposition as outlined is indeed possible and would be welcomed. It would benefit the organization and ... its public relations function." Another added: "Integrated public relations is definitely the most sensible and appropriate organizational structure."

Like the earlier proposition about reporting to the dominant coalition, the disagreements to this proposition seemed partially connected to the normal inclinations

toward protecting local territories. In this case, respondents seemed to want to preserve their local autonomy from the often overpowering influences of "big brother" at headquarters. Some argued that the local general manager is ultimately responsible for all operations in her or his country -- that headquarters, including the public relations department, cannot and should not assume such responsibility. Others seemed worried that public relations driven from headquarters would somehow infringe upon the rights and strategies of the local units. As one stated, "I cannot see how top-driven, 'consistent' programs can work. Again, this seems like the big boys' (U.S.) view of the world."

More than one respondent offered a middle ground. A representative suggestion was: "Why not splitting public relations in a centralized and a decentralized part: centrally, the company had to make sure that their mission statement, their basic ideas about relationships to publics, are fulfilled in the various countries. Decentrally, local public relations practitioners, who have an intimate knowledge about specific problems, would have some leeway to design public relations practice in compliance with the mission statement." Another respondent made a similar suggestion: "It is possible that [a] senior practitioner at headquarters supervises all communication programs worldwide, and that local practitioners get well trained to carry out the same organizational philosophy, themes, and goals. Of course, this requires close cooperation and communication between offices and headquarters."

These viewpoints are consistent with certain academic writings on the structuring of international public relations. While some authors call for global thinking similar to

global marketing programs, and others claim that the severe differences in local customs preclude any global management, at least two experts supported the value of a middle ground similar to the views of the above respondents.

Epley (1992) cited founder and long-time chief executive officer of Burson-Marsteller, Harold Burson, as saying that "the successful international practitioner is one who can serve a corporate headquarters by conceiving worldwide strategies for the global market, and then pick and supervise indigenous talent to implement their strategies on their home ground" (p. 112). He therefore envisioned a "two-tier structure" of centralization, to coordinate consistent policies and messages, and regionalized implementation with adaptations to local language, culture, and politics.

Traverse-Healy (1991), a senior practitioner in Europe, agreed with the two-tiered concept and outlined distinctions between central guidance and local implementation in a multinational organization.

To see how these comments held up under further scrutiny, several declarative statements were produced and presented to the panelists. Most of the statements, of course, were directly connected to the proposition on integrating public relations. Three of them, however, covered the role of public relations agencies in this international process. Questions about the roles of agencies had been added to the proposition in the first round instrument sent to the panelists. Respondents were asked to examine that role and determine its usefulness in programming for a multinational organization. The statements on public relations integration and on the role of public relations firms, as well as the numerical responses to these statements, are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #4

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S16: PR should be connected worldwide and operate under single umbrella	9	9	0	3	0	4.14
S17: MNO cultures are so different that it is not possible to have integrated PR program	2	9	3	3	2	3.32
S21: Top managers should not relinquish local decisions to PR people, at HQ or locally	1	5	1	10	3	2.55
S22: Many top managers do not understand what PR is about, aside from news releases or charity	7	10	2	2	0	4.05
S23: Why not split PR into centralized and decentralized parts?	8	7	1	1	1	4.11
S43: HQ needs to run the show when conflict has broken out of local boundaries and threatens organizational interests on a wider scale	2	10	3	4	1	3.40
S18: Multinational PR program should be run inside MNO, not handed over to outside PR firm	2	4	8	6	1	3.00
S19: Cheaper to hire local PR firm than to hire inside PR staff person	2	0	13	5	1	2.86
S20: It is desirable to pick best PR agency in each market, rather than one global agency	5	9	2	4	1	3.62

In some ways, this set of statements mirrored those from Proposition Three by examining the tensions between global and local programming. More specifically, they looked at the concept of integrating public relations worldwide, with all public relations

people working together as a group of units, versus giving all local control over public relations to the local general manager. The latter philosophy is not unusual in multinationals, where the feeling often exists that the local general manager knows the country best, and should therefore be responsible for all local activities, including public relations. With this philosophy, however, organizations risk having general managers who know little or nothing about public relations being able to supersede real public relations needs, both locally and globally.

The results of round two seemed to confirm the uncertainties and indecision from round one related to integration. Statements #16 and #17 examined the general philosophy of integration, and produced tenuous results. Statement #16 echoed the proposition that public relations should be connected worldwide, under one umbrella. A strong mean of 4.14 was generated by nine agreements and nine strong agreements; only three disagreed. However, the opposing pole, that multinational cultures are so diverse that such integration is not possible, generated conflicting data. Although the mean of 3.32 was not definitive in either direction, the overall leanings were in support of the statement -- 11 in the agree category, only five in the disagree category.

It appears that the results of these two statements are in conflict. A closer examination of the statements, however, may help clear up the discrepancy. Statement #16 was normative -- public relations should be interconnected around the world. Respondents were not asked whether it is possible to have an integrated program. But Statement #17 did address the pragmatic issue, stating that the diversity of multinational cultures renders it impossible to integrate public relations. And while the normative



statement elicited strong agreement, results on the pragmatic statement were not so convincing. Thus, it may be possible (although not easy) to approach the ideal of having an integrated program, if this analysis of the experts is accurate.

Statements #21 and #22 looked at how local general managers fit into the public relations process in a multinational. Statement #21 asserted that top managers should not relinquish control over public relations, either to public relations managers at headquarters or to their own local staff. Statement #22, on the other hand, said that even if the general manager were responsible for all local activities, often he or she does not understand what public relations is supposed to accomplish. Seventeen of the respondents agreed that managers do not understand public relations; it should not be surprising, therefore, that 13 of the panelists apparently believed that a general manager should relinquish some control to those who do understand it.

Interestingly, as in some of the earlier statements, there was a discernible difference between men and women on the issue of managers. The men's mean was 3.79, compared to the women's mean of 4.57. This difference generated a not significant probability of .063. What was interesting here, however, was the narrow dispersion of scores in the women's responses. Every woman in the sample selected either strongly agreed or agreed, meaning there was great concurrence among this group that managers do not understand public relations. Perhaps, again, this is because of the experience most women have of dealing with male managers who may be expressing understanding of public relations, but who, in the minds of the female practitioners, don't communicate that understanding. Whatever the reasons, once again the gender differences would



indicate the need for future research. But, regardless of the potential gender difference, the overall mean of 2.55 on Statement #22 supports only tentative conclusions.

One of the first-round responses mentioned above fostered the statement that offered a compromise between global and local managerial interests. Statement #23 said, "Why not split public relations into a centralized and decentralized part; centrally, the organization could make sure the mission statements and their basic philosophies about relationships to publics are fulfilled in the various countries, and locally practitioners who have an intimate knowledge about specific problems would have leeway to design public relations practice in compliance with the mission statements." (A comparison of this statement to the original comment cited on page 33 shows one example of how the wording was changed slightly from the original response for better grammatical flow in the statement.)

This compromise seemed suitable to most of the respondents. Fifteen agreed that dividing public relations programming between central and local levels is a good idea, while only two disagreed. Perhaps the key lies in what the statement proposed: mission statements and basic philosophies on the global level, combined with latitude to perform according to cultural needs in the local units.

Statement #43 provided more insight into the balance between global and local managerial interests. It was similar to Statement #15 under Proposition Three, which declared that headquarters cannot and should not be responsible for local actions (and 14 disagreed with that statement). Statement #43 suggested that when conflict has broken out of local boundaries and threatens larger organizational interests, headquarters needs

to take charge of the situation. Twelve agreed with this, while five disagreed. The mean of 3.4 generated by these responses is not definitive, but again it suggests that headquarters should not completely relinquish public relations goals to local interests.

To summarize the statements on integration, it seems that consensus on the proposition was tentative. Most respondents believed that integration is desirable and possible, but there were significant outliers. When actual practice was examined, most panelists expressed discomfort with the role of local general managers or other local officers in public relations due to their limited understanding of its purpose. They acknowledged that headquarters must be involved when issues transcend boundaries. The responses indicate that while there are natural desires to preserve local autonomy, pragmatic considerations often mandate the need for more centralized involvement. The remaining question would be, if headquarters should intervene when an issue crosses boundaries, exactly when does its obligation begin -- before or after the issue crosses borders? Can headquarters relinquish all responsibility to local units, then hope to intercede successfully when a crisis occurs? These and other questions need more study.

The final three statements examined the roles of public relations agencies, and their relationships with multinational organizations. Statement #18 postulated that multinational public relations should be conducted inside the organization, rather than being controlled by an outside agency. Responses to this statement were not at all definitive; six agreed (two strongly), seven disagreed (one strongly), and eight were neutral. A closer demographic breakdown of respondents shows that of the seven who disagreed, five work for or have worked for public relations agencies. By contrast, only

one of those who agreed works for a multinational organization. Also, the ANOVA indicated a difference of opinions between scholars and practitioners. The scholars were much more likely to agree that multinationals should not turn over their public relations to outside agencies (the mean for scholars was 3.55, for practitioners 2.4). Perhaps this is because the scholars look more at the normative aspects of the statement, while the practitioners -- in this case, mostly agency people -- supported the practical nature of their own businesses. Nevertheless, the overall results of this statement certainly were highly skewed by the various representations of the panelists.

Statement #19 addressed operating expenses, asserting that it is cheaper to hire a local public relations firm than an inside staff person. Judging from the 13 neutral responses, it is apparent that few of the respondents had the background to examine such an issue. Among those who claimed some knowledge, five disagreed with the statement. However, the mean of 2.86 is meaningless for assessing this variable.

Statement #20 suggested that hiring local firms is desirable to selecting one global agency. That statement again intersects with the local/global balance, but this time it addresses vendors, rather than balancing needs within the multinational. Fourteen panelists agreed that a local firm is better, while five stated that the global entity is better. Unasked questions that could affect success would be, "who is selecting the firm, and what capabilities do they have to make such a choice?" If a local firm is best, does the local general manager or other local staff members adequately understand how to select agencies? Is someone at headquarters capable? This whole area of agency service and its value is an untapped exploratory field that needs more examination.

### Research Proposition #5

The fifth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**An excellent public relations program is not subordinated to marketing, legal, or other organizational departments. In international settings, particularly, public relations often is subsumed into marketing and relegated to product publicity roles. When this happens or public relations is placed under another function, the organization loses its ability to identify and build relationships with all of its critical publics (as opposed to just customers). By remaining separate from other functions and building long-term relationships with all stakeholders, public relations can help the organization make money and keep from losing it to costly lawsuits, legislation, et cetera.**

Proposition Five generated strong consensus among the participants in the first round. Nineteen of the 23 panelists agreed that public relations should not be placed under marketing or any other function. Only two disagreed. Almost every one of the 19 concurring panelists expressed strong opinions that when public relations is subsumed under marketing, real damage can be done to the organization as well as to the public relations function. But when the functions are separated, the organization can benefit.

One person adamantly declared, "The public relations function should not in any way be identified with marketing. It ought to be identified with higher values and wider ambitions than ordinary, every-day profitability." Another claimed that it is "not only possible but also essential to practice public relations that way. The potential results of separating include independent public relations goals and programs and budget, better relations with various publics, including consumers and government and media, long-term benefits to the organization, more successful and less costly marketing efforts, and [it would be] excluding the drawbacks of not having strong public relations programs."



The trend to position public relations under marketing or another function concerned the panelists because organizations then focus on consumer audiences. This eliminates the ability to scan the multifaceted environment for major threats. As one respondent said, "The first problem for any organization is to find their critical publics .... But in our country it is not very common to search for critical publics." Most entities, the panelist explained, search for targets and markets instead of publics.

Subsuming public relations under marketing or another function also takes the public relations function out of position to provide important counseling to senior managers on matters of public consequence. In this reduced role, as one respondent said, public relations "is often an afterthought" and thus becomes "a waste of time." "The potential results of such a negative situation," said a second panelist, "are that the organization wastes potential opportunities of building positive relationships with all its local publics, and gaining intelligence about groups, trends, [and] opportunities." Another said that this "at the end hurts sales" -- the very opposite effect from what organizations hope to achieve by placing public relations under marketing.

A closer examination of responses on Proposition Five revealed, however, that more than half of the 19 supportive responses were considerably normative in their thinking, rather than seeing this as a currently practical situation. A "yes, but" attitude surfaced among many of the panelists: Yes, the functions should be separate, but realistically this is not happening and may not happen for a long time in many organizations. Only seven of the 19 concurring participants gave any indication that separating the functions would ever be possible.

One panelist represented the views of many in stating, "Public relations should be a separate function. I do not agree that this is possible because public relations culture, even in large ... multinational organizations, has not yet reached a standard of total excellence." Another proposed that throughout the world, the emphasis on markets and consumers is much greater than interest in public needs or expectations. As many respondents thus explained, public relations often is conducted from marketing perspectives and through marketing budgets. A third stated that changing the status quo "will take a long time and require a great deal of education of top management."

However, one panelist claimed that some multinationals already are separating marketing and public relations, either to contribute to national goals that are separate from headquarters goals or because they recognize threats and opportunities for the organization from outside the limited consumer publics. A respondent from Europe claimed that "European and Asian companies are better in understanding the plurality of publics, while [a] majority of United States corporations ... oversimplify everything into marketing." Another respondent agreed that public relations "should be a separate function," but also noted that the function should always work "closely with the marketing, legal and other departments."

There were only a few counterarguments. One panelist said that public relations practitioners are not prepared to perform different roles in an organization. He asked, "Is it feasible to have a bunch of public relations practitioners being specialists in everything from customer relations to staff and government relations?" Then he added, "You cannot expect public relations loners to give good advice ... without having some



sort of marketing background." Another suggested that "in some cases, such as within a law firm, it might be appropriate for public relations to be subordinate to senior lawyers. I have less of a problem with this than I do with marketing." Finally, one respondent, although in favor of the separation, noted that in her country, "almost all of the practitioners I spoke to believed in public relations as part of marketing." This situation probably exists in far more countries than that one.

These comments elicited only three statements that apply directly to Proposition Four. However, the statements clearly show how the proposition was received by the panelists. The statements and their numerical responses are included in Table 8.

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Table 8: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #5

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S24: PR should be separate from marketing, working independently but closely with marketing, etc.	13	7	1	0	0	4.57
S25: Not feasible to separate PR from marketing	1	6	1	6	7	2.43
S27: It might be appropriate to subordinate PR to senior lawyers	0	1	2	3	15	1.48

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The results to these three statements confirm the qualitative opinions in round one. They showed strong support for separating public relations from other organizational functions. Two of the statements examined the connection between public relations and marketing, the function most commonly superimposed over public relations. Statement #24 suggested that the two functions should be separate but work closely together with other allied functions -- the normative ideal addressed in the

proposition. Thirteen respondents strongly agreed to this proposal, and seven agreed. No one disagreed, creating a highly supportive mean of 4.57. Statement #25 inversely argued that it is not feasible to separate the two functions. Seven agreed with that argument, but 13 disagreed (seven of them strongly disagreed). The mean of 2.43 is not conclusive, but the statements together indicate that the panelists generally believed the two fields should be separated and, for the most part, can be separated.

The final statement addressed the possibility of subordinating public relations to the legal function. Age-old tensions between the two fields obviously surfaced here, as 15 of the 21 panelists strongly disagreed with the statement, which apparently reflected the one outlying panelist of the first round. The strong reaction is not surprising -- although legal and public relations specialists must work together in an organization, subordinating public relations to those who are trained to withhold information seems counterproductive to these panelists.

#### Research Proposition #6

The sixth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**Senior practitioners all over the world will be qualified for their positions. They will be trained in public relations, not marketing or another field. They will understand the importance of having public relations integrated worldwide, as well as the importance of advising the senior managers and the dominant coalition. They will be qualified to perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning and counseling, and will value and foster the use of two-way symmetrical communication. However, there would be variations in necessary qualifications directly related to the given culture.**

Proposition Six addressed education and qualifications of practitioners. Rather than specifying what type of training practitioners should receive, the proposition listed



specific responsibilities for which practitioners should be qualified. These included the ability to sit on management counsels and advise senior management; to conduct environmental scanning; and to organize and integrate functions. Then, in the first round, several questions were asked about the feasibility and cultural appropriateness of the proposition and of these functional abilities. The panelists also were asked what type of education would be appropriate to fulfill these functions.

First round responses varied greatly. Ten respondents openly supported the proposition, but a few of those remarked that it is not feasible in their countries. Among those who agreed that training is needed to practice effectively, there was a range of opinions about what form that training would take. Three or four disagreed with the proposition entirely, claiming either that the status quo is fine or that real training public relations comes from experience alone. The data also suggested that almost half of the respondents were neutral or unsure of their opinions toward the proposition.

Many who agreed with the proposition contended that public relations training needs to improve regardless of the country. One respondent explained that, "Public relations practitioners should definitely be academically trained in order to understand the need for theoretical reflection of communication problems." A second panelist said, "A public relations practitioner should master the philosophy underlying the practice as well as its practical implementation in order to be able to advance the general standard of the profession." Another agreed that "senior practitioners all over the world should be qualified for the positions and should be trained within unique and standardized public relations educational programs at [an] international level."

Seven panelists stated that practitioners are not qualified to perform their roles as proposed. One expressed that few in any country are qualified to administer the overall guidance and communication functions needed at a multinational headquarters. She said, "too few senior practitioners follow a career path related to public relations, and where they do, it seems to reduce their chances of being included in the dominant coalition." Others stated that practitioners are still underqualified for practicing even locally in most countries -- including the United States, where public relations education is abundant.

Many respondents viewed traditional routes into public relations as hampering the practice. Some discussed the "ex-journalist" syndrome, where the emphasis is placed on writing techniques rather than strategic management and decision making (a couple insisted that this problem is particularly prevalent in the United States). In certain countries, practitioners have worked their way into the positions through "personal connections and relationships," with little or no formal training in public relations. Often, the practitioners "themselves do not think they need these knowledge and skills."

As for what type of education would be valuable for practitioners in the multinational, both at the global and local levels, there was wide debate among the panelists. Suggestions ranged from technical functions of communications, to practical schooling in business management and economics, to grounding in the more ethereal social sciences. Some called for highly theoretical training, while others said more technical training in the practice of communication, research, and other functions is needed. One person said, "Though an expert in public relations, the practitioner still needs to have good business sense so that all the work can ultimately be accounted for to



the success of the organization." Another added, "I believe a practitioner must be a broad-gauged social scientist with highly developed communication and planning skills."

Some respondents addressed the issue of at what educational level practitioners should receive training to be qualified in international public relations programs. A few suggested that public relations ought to be taught at the graduate level, after a broader undergraduate foundation has been established. One panelist, however, argued that such graduate training ought to go beyond an MBA program that has only one course in public relations. Such a business school arrangement, the panelist explained, is insufficient academic training for a career in international public relations.

While these reactions stress the need for advanced qualifications in virtually every country, there was little discussion about distinguishing education for domestic and international programs. The few who addressed the issue argued that there are different needs for training domestic and international practitioners. One respondent asked for qualifications to include "foreign language, an international attitude and a desire to work in other countries," along with a knowledge of the history, culture, and sociopolitical-economic environment of the country where the practitioner would work. Another emphasized, "You must speak the language, you must know the culture." A third respondent explained that in the international arena, "A practitioner must be a broad-gauged social scientist with highly developed communication and planning skills."

The issue of international public relations education has begun to attract attention from a variety of scholars (Culbertson, 1996). It carries a broad spectrum of concerns that are likely to elicit considerable discussion. Thus, it should be natural that the first-

round responses were diverse enough to generate several declarative statements.

Admittedly, even this number of statements does not begin to cover this significant

subject. The statements and their numerical responses are shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #6

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S29: The basic PR skills do not vary from one culture to the next	2	10	3	4	2	3.29
S12: When talking about strategic planning, a PR background will hardly suffice	3	4	6	6	1	3.10
S30: All practitioners in international program should be academically trained with international standards of PR education and other fields	10	7	0	2	0	4.32
S31: Most PR practitioners in local units are not well trained for the job	2	7	8	3	0	3.40
S33: Ideal qualifications for PR education and training would be:						
a. undergraduate education that includes principles of comm., PR techniques, etc.	10	8	0	1	1	4.25
b. post-graduate degree that includes strategic planning, management, sociology, etc.	10	6	3	1	0	4.25
c. Clear understanding of local politics, media, culture, language, etc.	14	6	0	0	0	4.70
d. Comprehensive education on international issues, cultures, and perspectives	8	9	2	1	0	4.20



The first statement in the group, #29, raised the question of whether a more or less universal set of skills is feasible (or desirable) for international public relations. It stated that basic public relations skills do not vary from one culture to the next. Ten of the respondents agreed with the statement, and two strongly agreed. However, four also disagreed and two strongly disagreed. The mean of 3.29 is not conclusive, one direction or another. This could have been predicted, since it is the local cultural factors that create differences in public relations implementation. So, even if some of the strategies are the same worldwide (the basic public relations skills?), implementation skills could differ immensely. Therefore, Statement #29 showed poor consensus on this issue.

Statements #12 and #31 offer interesting fodder for public relations purists about basic qualifications of practitioners. Statement #12 addressed the strategic element, whether carried out at headquarters or locally. The statement postulated that "when talking about strategic planning (supposedly the core of excellent public relations), a public relations background will hardly suffice." The results to this were more interesting than the statement itself: seven disagreed, but seven also agreed, generating a "neutral" mean of 3.1. The question still must be raised here, exactly what background is assumed here that "will hardly suffice"? This regenerates the core problem in public relations (even in the United States): Exactly what training best prepares people to practice strategic public relations? And, are public relations people really qualified to perform strategic roles (even domestically, not to mention in international contexts)?

Statement #31 looked at prerequisites for practitioners specifically in local offices. It said, "Most public relations practitioners in local units are not well trained for

the job." This statement elicited more agreement than #12: Nine agreed, and only three disagreed (although eight were neutral). Although inconclusive, these results indicate that local training needs to be improved. It is highly possible that if local practitioners are hired by general managers who, as mentioned before, do not understand public relations, the practitioners could indeed be underqualified. It also is understood that many countries are just beginning to have quality training programs in public relations. This, too, could be a contributing factor. But also it is possible, again, that there is not great agreement on what exactly is entailed in adequate local training.

Statement #30 examined the possibility of universal standards for public relations education that could be used for training around the world. Ten of the respondents strongly agreed that there should be some type of academic training based on broadly accepted international standards. Seven more agreed, and only two disagreed. The mean of 4.32 lies strongly in the agreement category. Therefore, if international standards are appropriate and desirable, and if there are basic skills of public relations that do not vary from one culture to the next (although that was not conclusive), then the question remains: what would those standards be?

Statement #33 does not address standards, but does examine basic ideal qualifications for practitioners. The statement, as can be seen, was divided into several categories of qualifications to which the panelists responded. Eighteen of the panelists agreed (mean of 4.25) that an undergraduate education including courses in the principles of communication, research, organizational management, public relations techniques, etcetera, would be desirable. Sixteen more agreed (with one disagreement,



for another 4.25 mean) that a post-graduate degree should include courses in strategic planning, management, sociology, and other social science and managerial courses.

A comprehensive education on international issues, cultures and perspectives was seen as desirable by 17 of the respondents, for a mean of 4.2 (on this issue, every academic respondent agreed, for a generated scholarly mean of 4.55, compared to a mean of 3.78 for the practitioners). But the most support came for a background that did not specify academic training: a clear understanding of local politics, media, culture, language, and other local factors. Fourteen of the respondents strongly supported that proposition, and another six agreed with it, for a mean of 4.7.

Even with all of these statements and the numerical support that they elicited, this still offers just a skeletal overview of attitudes toward education. It may be that basic skills for international public relations are universal, and that universal standards for public relations education are desired. It also may be that public relations practitioners, at headquarters and particularly at the local levels, are not fully qualified to perform their tasks in a multinational program.

Several basic questions on training and qualifications still are left unanswered. These include: (a) Is it possible to have an international standard for public relations education that particularly addresses basic skills? (b) If so, what would that standard entail? (c) Are the standards and skills for global strategists different for those in local positions? and (d) Are public relations education programs sufficient for teaching those standards and skills? These and many more questions could be asked in future studies.

### Research Proposition #7

The seventh research proposition on international public relations stated:

**In an excellent multinational organization, hiring and promotional practices would foster diversity by offering equal opportunities to women and "minorities" (those who typically are not accepted in the cultural mainstream) in every country. Particularly, the organization's philosophy would be to recruit and promote individuals who are empathic to others and who have ingrained the two-way symmetrical values of respect, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise.**

This proposition was included with suspicions that it could be controversial in a world with divergent views on human rights. Often referred to as "the melting pot," the United States traditionally has attempted to accommodate people from various cultures. Although not free of problems, the United States in many ways is unique in this cultural assimilation. People from many cultures view gender issues and equal opportunity differently than do Americans. Nevertheless, things are changing around the world as both of these issues are brought to the forefront by media and activist groups. Therefore, it was important to include the proposition as a possible generic variable.

The majority of respondents in round one -- 13 in total -- agreed with the ideals on hiring equity. And yet, most of those who agreed added caveats or reservations to their comments. Comments included: "I personally agree. But I find that reality is tied to the existing cultural practices." Or, "I agree, on the whole. But again, it depends on the culture of the country in question .... The general principle must be one of 'When in Rome ....., ' coupled with a reformist tendency towards the promotion of human rights." Other comments were, "I agree, because of logical and normative reasons," and, "These organizational values are possible in the future in my country, but may not [be] for now.



A lot of racial and sexual discrimination still takes place in the work place."

Five panel members supported the proposition, yet expressed an ideal of hiring the most qualified (some with this position were women). One panelist explained, "There should certainly be equal opportunity for all. The best person should get the job whatever their sex, religion, or physical situation. I would be opposed to a policy of filling 'quotas.'" Another said, "Before hiring minorities, depending on sex or on race, the important thing is to hire people who are qualified in public relations practices in every country." A third concurred: "The ideal of integrating minorities should not interfere with the development of competence, expertise, and professionalism."

The proposition appeared to at least three panelists as an imposition of western (specifically United States) cultural values on their own traditions. Dissension arose mostly from those whose cultures exercise strong, inherent restraints against employing women or minorities. The most adamant negative response to this proposition came from a country strongly influenced by the Muslim religion. This respondent said, "Multinational organizations should not hire women unless they are supposed to deal with the 'women' public directly. In fact, they are not allowed to hire women for jobs where interpersonal communication with men is required and where men can do the job."

From Japan, where cultural constraints come more from male dominance than from religious ideology, and where everyone who is not full-blooded Japanese raised in Japan is considered a foreigner, a panelist said that women are "still 'minorities' in the business world." Well educated women there are hired by prestigious multinational organizations "which are not as chauvinistic as Japanese counterparts." (Ironically, this

male Japanese respondent supported the proposition.)

Even a participant from the United States viewed this proposition as imposing American cultural values upon other countries with differing cultural influences. But he extended the discussion to more fundamental roots than the hiring of minorities.

"American values are resented and viewed as undesirable in many cases, with considerable justification," he said. "Countries look at United States unemployment rates, divorce rates, drug use, exposure of corruption in the media and politics, lack of cultural support for public health care, numbers of people in United States prisons, etc. The result is that the values we honor are not seen as values but as reasons for decay."

The range of responses for this proposition was narrower than I had anticipated; only four statements were generated from the first-round discussion. Still, the responses elicited valuable data. They are shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #7

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S34: In equality hiring, the MNO must be responsive to culture of each country (when in Rome...)	4	10	1	5	0	3.65
S35: Do not see MNOs bucking local cultural practices where discrimination is the norm	2	5	7	4	0	3.28
S36: Only criterion for hiring should be, is this person the best one for the position?	6	11	1	1	0	4.16
S37: Agree with need for representative diversity in PR departments or firms	4	11	3	1	0	3.95

Three of the statements related to Proposition Seven (#34, #36, and #37) addressed the normative state of hiring and retention of international public relations employees. The other statement (#35) examined the more pragmatic view of what multinationals would probably do under current circumstances. Results for the statements, like those in round one, indicated broad ranges of opinions.

Statement #37 proposed the need for representative diversity in public relations units. Fifteen of the panelists agreed with the statement (four of them strongly), and only one disagreed, for a mean of 3.95. Yet, when statements were presented that placed other values over representative diversity, the panelists agreed with those statements, as well. Seventeen of the panelists agreed (six strongly) with the statement, "the only criterion for hiring should be, is this person the best one for the position?" That mean of 4.16 represented even stronger agreement than the mean for representative diversity. The mean of 3.65 was not nearly as supportive for another statement that multinationals must be responsive to local cultures in hiring (the "when in Rome" syndrome). Nevertheless, 14 of the 20 who responded agreed with that statement. It may be that ideally, the panelists would approve of representative diversity, but when it actually came to the hiring process, they would support either doing things in the typical way for the given country or merely hiring the "best person for the position." The latter choice, however, begs the question of what criteria are used to determine the "best person".

The practical view, indicating what multinationals would actually do in a hiring situation, was represented by Statement #35. It purported, "I do not see multinational organizations bucking local cultural practices where discrimination is the norm." This



statement was similar to the "when in Rome" statement, only it included the actual choice of discrimination if that were the local tradition. The results for that statement were the most mixed of all, with the mean of 3.28 sliding toward the neutral position. Therefore, it may be that the panelists would prefer keeping with local traditions unless those traditions included obvious practices of discrimination.

Because the statements dealt with equality, I examined the responses by gender to determine whether men and women differed significantly in their opinions. Strangely, the means were almost the same across all four statements related to this proposition. The only real difference, which an ANOVA did not show as significant, came on Statement #34, about "when in Rome." The female respondents displayed a greater tendency to disagree, with a mean of 3.43, compared to the male mean of 3.85. Three of the four panelists who disagreed with the statement were women. Although the women's mean still edged slightly toward agreement, the tendency for lesser agreement than the men probably comes because women are more often recipients of discrimination when hiring decisions are left to local managers operating under local mores.

The other surprising result came on Statement #37, on the need for representative diversity. The men from countries where diversity in hiring would seem to be the least likely (Saudi Arabia, Japan, China) actually generated the most supportive mean of all the respondent groups -- 4.25 compared to the total mean of 3.95. Perhaps this comes from men who have had exposure to western values and see their country hiring practices as needing change.

### Research Proposition #8

The eighth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**Because the organization faces a turbulent, dynamic environment internationally, the public relations program is structured to be flexible and adaptable to that environment, worldwide.**

In round one, flexibility and adaptation were seen by most of the respondents as a valuable asset for international public relations, but often only if the adaptation is at the local level. The proposition received support from 16 of the respondents, but six of those suggested that this flexibility would work only if it were attached to local units. Three of the respondents expressed opposition to the proposition.

Among those who agreed with the proposition, there were comments like:

"[Flexibility] is the foundation of the very idea of symmetry, that the top management of the corporation should also adjust to the real world, and change in accordance with the results of the two-way communication process." The respondent suggested "open-mindedness, research, commitment to professionalism, courage to speak up, etc.," as the keys to a flexible program. Another panelist suggested, "If the strategies are based on a qualitative high-standing research, then the public relations programs should not only be adaptable to the environment in each country, but also flexible enough to react in an appropriate way, if something is changing very quick."

One person expressed support for the proposition, but said, "I do not see a lot of movement here internationally." The respondent seemed confident, however, that change will eventually occur. "The pressures of global opinion will cause the change, and I see evidence of this continually in my travels," he said. "American organizations



have not yet experienced a lot of public opinion pressure from social groups outside the United States," he added, but asserted that this pressure will come when these "external" social groups influence "internal" social groups to apply it within the United States.

As mentioned, several supported flexibility only if implemented in the local countries. One panelist cautioned, "Flexible and adaptable means local not headquarters control. That is, local initiative is required to work with forces in the local turbulent environment to head off issues or crisis. Only local bodies can develop symmetrical, win-win relationships with local groups/activists/governments. Headquarters can't." Another wrote, "A decentralized structure that pays attention to local circumstances will promote the necessary flexibility." Yet another stated, "A successful public relations program ... can be adaptable if it leaves details to local practitioners and if it allows them to create, plan, and execute their own special mini-projects/programs/campaigns."

As with other propositions, a few suggested a balance of programming between headquarters and local units. One person explained, "Strong headquarters leadership is essential, but it should be supported by [a] strong regional structure which is very well-informed and in close interactive relationships with local offices." Another said, "In an international context, [a] multicultural approach is necessary as well as cooperation with local experts, public relations practitioners, and public relations consultancies."

One participant outlined a possible delineation of roles. The panelist said, "The multinational organization should provide local public relations management a thorough briefing on facts, goals, resources, and the backbone of their strategic ideas about the public relations program, and let the local practitioner offer their ideas about local and

international programs. Headquarters would then gain insight about local conditions, resources and possibilities and would profit from the input of global-minded proposals. Headquarters could then allocate better its global financial resources to public relations."

Five declarative statements related to flexibility were produced from first-round comments. These statements and their numerical responses are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #8

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S38: Successful PR should be highly adaptable to several environments	9	11	0	0	0	4.45
S41: It is more important for MNOs to be flexible than for domestic organizations	7	5	5	3	1	3.67
S42: Flexibility means PR must be based on research and environmental scanning	11	9	1	0	0	4.48
S39: PR agencies give MNOs greater flexibility	2	7	7	2	2	3.25
S40: Multinational PR firms may be as unresponsive to local cultures as the client MNOs	6	9	0	3	3	3.57

These statements explored three different aspects of adaptability. Statements #38 and #41 addressed the question of whether adaptability is important in today's society, particularly in the dynamic international environment. Statement #42 suggested that, assuming flexibility is necessary, it must be based on environmental scanning methods. Finally, two of the statements, #39 and #40, again addressed the role of public relations agencies regarding the ability to adapt.



Overall, the panelists supported the concept of adaptability. Nine strongly agreed that flexibility is crucial in today's world. Eleven more agreed that successful public relations adapts to several environments, creating a strong agreement mean of 4.45 for Statement #38. No one disagreed with the concept.

Results were less definitive, however, when respondents were asked to compare the need for flexibility between multinationals and domestic organizations. Twelve agreed that multinationals must be more flexible, but four disagreed with Statement #41. The mean of 3.67 leans toward agreement, but not strongly. Interestingly, though, the means between men and women were significantly different on this statement. The men's mean was 4.21, showing that they strongly agreed that multinationals must be more flexible than domestic organizations. The women's mean, by contrast, was 2.57, which leans toward slight disagreement.

This is particularly interesting in light of the opposite gender reaction to the statement about excellent domestic and international public relations. Why would women strongly believe excellent public relations is different in domestic and international settings, yet feel that it is no more important for multinationals than for domestics to be flexible? Why would men see little or no difference between the two realms of public relations, yet acknowledge the need for greater flexibility in the multinationals? It would seem that there should be a correlation there, but exactly the opposite was shown in the results. That dichotomy mandates additional research.

When asked about whether flexibility necessitates research and scanning, the panelists were supportive. Eleven strongly agreed that research is an indispensable



component of adaptability. Nine more agreed, and none of the panelists disagreed. This again created a strong agreement mean of 4.48. This indicates that to have the ability to quickly adjust to environmental changes, public relations people do need to remain abreast of their publics through constant scanning programs.

The final exploration centered on whether public relations agencies help or hinder an organization in its adjustments. As in issues about agencies raised earlier, the agencies did not score well. There was only slight agreement (a 3.25 mean) that agencies help multinationals be more responsive. But 15 of the panelists also agreed that multinational public relations firms are no more flexible than their clients. Six panelists believed otherwise. This does not indicate disfavor toward agencies in general, but rather a preference for local agencies. That seems like a natural inclination, but does not resolve the need for scanning publics and situations that are supranational in nature.

### **Specific Propositions for International Public Relations**

When the study was conceptualized, the need for testing the specific propositions was different from that of the generic propositions. The generic propositions came from theories unique to public relations, but because those theories had been tested largely in the United States or other single countries, I wanted to subject them to multinational experts in many countries at the same time. Therefore, in this study, the generic propositions always were accompanied by queries that could motivate the respondent to think through about the proposition in a universal setting as well as in their own country. In other words, I wanted them to respond to the question, "How will do these generic propositions truly play out in a multinational environment?"

The specific variables, by contrast, assimilated theories from outside as well as within the public relations field. Culture, language, development, and political systems already were believed to influence organizational practices in the multinational realm. Those variables, along with activism and media influences, now would be examined in this study for their specific effect on public relations in different countries. Some of the specific variables had been tested in individual countries (activism in Taiwan, for example -- see Huang, 1990), but I wanted the feedback of a multinational group as to their relevance in international public relations. So, these propositions asked respondents to delve into whether the variable truly does affect the practice of public relations in their countries. If so, how does it affect the practice? And, does it affect the practice differently for multinational organizations than for domestic organizations?

Based on the responses, the specific variables do seem to affect local public relations. The variables all generated virtually unanimous agreement, and there seemed to be less dissent here than for the generic variables. Nevertheless, the propositions generated insightful comments and discussion. This discussion is included below.

#### Research Proposition #9

The ninth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**A nation's level of development will affect the practice of public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will adjust to the particular nation's level of development and develop effective programs of communication to respond to that environment.**

Although 16 respondents agreed with this proposition in the first round (versus two who clearly disagreed and five who were neutral), responses were tempered by



significant confusion over the term, "level of development." One panelist asked, "development in whose eyes?" Another said that development is defined in different ways by different people, and that it "will tend to vary with the environment." One respondent argued that Gross National Product (GNP) formulas used to measure development are misleading and inappropriate. He argued that in the northern United States, harsh winters raise the costs of keeping warm; "thus, a thousand dollars is less of a value in northern Minnesota than in sunny Arizona." He also stated that there may be more similarities in development between New Delhi, India, and New York City than between New Delhi and its surrounding country.

Generally, however, panelists agreed that development affects local public relations. As one stated, "Academics and practitioners need to take this very seriously." According to the panel, development determines literacy rates, the extent and quality of communication resources (numbers of newspapers, frequency and reach of television, radios, and computers), quality of education, and other resources. One person said, "The development that is necessary is democracy, open record laws, free news media, advancements in communication abilities, recognition on the part of media of [their] investigative responsibilities, the ability of the public to influence the operation of the social system through government channels," and other factors. Another wrote, "Public relations deals with the public and the public is part of the development level/process. The state of transportation, health, education, average income, to name a few need to be considered when practicing public relations in any part of the world. They affect types of programs, services, communication tools, and communication messages."

Four of the panelists said that level of development not only affects the practice of public relations, but also can be correlated directly to the evolutionary status of the public relations field in the country. A representative comment was, "The more developed a nation, the more developed the organizations that operate within that country. The more developed the organizations, the more developed the dominant coalitions' corporate strategies. The more developed the corporate strategies, the more likely there is recognition of the importance of public relations." Another suggested, "In too many developing countries, the heritage of colonialism and entrenched elites created by it contribute to knowledge, resource, and power gaps which inhibit flexibility needed to achieve excellent public relations in environments which ... tend to be turbulent."

Two of the respondents who agreed with the proposition asserted that lower levels of development would actually be an advantage for the practice of public relations. One stated that, "A nation's low level of development allows you to develop your own communications environment, it gives you more freedom to do this, as opposed to adapting to one that is already structured." The other added, "Populations of the more developed countries tend to be more cynical and less inclined to believe what they hear through the rumourmill or, for that matter, from a public relations programme."

Of the two respondents who disagreed, one argued that public relations "will presumably not be greatly affected by 'level of development', "because the local expert will 'translate' message content into a language compatible with the local culture and acceptable to its inhabitants." The other viewed the notion as "culturally imperialist." He said, "Most multinationals are after all trying to introduce western consumer culture,

which may actually work against "development" for that nation. The true answer may be that public relations needs to take into account all conditions within that country and develop responsive programmes which benefit the organization and the publics."

Six declarative assertions surfaced from round one about the impact of development. These centered on what exactly level of development means, and on whether the correlation between development and public relations is positive or negative. The statements and their numerical responses are listed in Table 12.

Table 12: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #9

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S45: GNP is slippery concept; if development means GNP per capita, it doesn't affect PR practice	2	4	7	6	0	3.10
S46: Development does not affect PR because local PR component will adjust to local situation	2	8	5	5	1	3.24
S47: Low development gives freedom to develop own communication environment	1	5	5	7	3	2.71
S48: Low development affects avenues and content of communication, publics, education, etc.	8	12	0	0	0	4.40
S49: Most MNOs are trying to introduce Western culture, which may work against development	4	6	2	8	0	3.30
S50: In many developing nations, entrenched elites contribute to gaps in knowledge, power, etc., that inhibit flexibility needed for excellent PR	3	7	6	3	1	3.40



The first round analysis has shown that adequately defining level of development was one of the main problems with this proposition. Statement #45 addressed this problem, arguing that the traditional economic marker, Gross National Product, is a "slippery concept." It challenged the traditional economic view, adding that "if development means Gross National Product per capita, then it does not affect public relations practice." This statement elicited mixed opinions: in addition to seven neutrals or uncertain, two of the respondents strongly agreed, four agreed, but six disagreed, for a "slippery" mean of 3.1.

The responses to Statement #45 perhaps represented a microcosm of society, which is undergoing a debate about Gross National Product as an indicator for development. The GNP has become politicized because it is linked to power and resources. Environmental groups argue that diminishing natural resources on the earth have economic value that is ignored in GNP calculations because it is immeasurable. Yet, others recognize that the index still has some valid correlation to the economic status of nations. Perhaps those panelists who disagreed with this statement are among those who believe that GNP does adequately indicate development levels, and that those countries low on the index have roadblocks to effective communication processes.

Three statements examined the relationship between low development and public relations practice. Statement #47 highlighted the optimistic stance that "low development gives freedom to develop your own communication environment," unencumbered by past communication traditions (or, in the case of the United States and other countries, journalistic roots). However, this statement was not well received by

the panelists: six supported it, five were neutral or undecided, and 10 disagreed (three strongly). The mean of 2.71 correlates with that of the previous statement. Apparently the panelists again believe that communication freedoms are difficult to acquire or to logistically assimilate into a poorly developed country.

The other two statements offered reasons why low development may negatively affect public relations. Statement #48 provided a logical follow-up to #45 and #47; it gave the panelists the chance to openly state their opinions on whether "Low development affects avenues and content of communication, public relations, education, etcetera." Although it was not specified that these things are negatively affected by low development, the panelists most likely recognized the implication. Eight strongly agreed, 12 agreed, and no one disagreed or was neutral. The mean of 4.4 again strongly shows that the panelists believe low development levels have a negative effect on communication channels and capabilities.

Statement #50 correlated low development to entrenched power elites and traditions. It argued that when these exist, the concomitant gaps in knowledge and power inhibit the flexibility needed for excellent public relations. There was not strong agreement to this statement, but the mean of 3.4 leaned slightly toward support. However, there was a tremendous disparity in means between the scholars and the practitioners on this statement. The practitioner mean was 2.56, while the mean for scholars was 4.1 (and none of the scholars disagreed). Thus, the scholars leaned strongly toward agreement, but the practitioners slightly disagreed. The F probability between these groups was a significant .0004.



Statement #46 associated the issue of adaptation to level of development. It argued that, regardless of the level of development, an effective local public relations component will adjust to the situation. Ten respondents agreed to this statement, but six disagreed, again creating a "soft" mean of 3.24. However, the results may indicate the possibility of an excellent local component of public relations regardless of the host country's economic situation.

The final statement for discussion in this grouping, #49, addressed the concern that still exists among many scholars in developing nations: that most multinationals are based in the "western nations," and are therefore vehicles for introducing western cultural values into the developing world. The statement asserted that these values brought in from outside can actually harm the developing countries. The argument received mixed support -- four strong agreements, six agreements, and eight who disagreed, for an inconclusive mean of 3.3.

A summary examination of these combined statements, then, shows only moderate support for the proposition that level of development affects local public relations. The most solid support came for the argument that low levels of development negatively affect local practice because they inhibit some of the infrastructures and capabilities needed for a solid program. The scholar group, at least, also believed that the entrenched traditions and elite groupings can aggravate these problems for the regular citizens of the country. There was limited support for the argument that multinationals contribute to local problems by bringing western philosophies into nations that may not want or be prepared to receive these value systems. Panelist response also



indicated that multinational public relations should be able to offset any of these problems by adjusting at the local level. However, the results of these statements allow only limited confidence in development as a local factor for public relations.

#### Research Proposition #10

The tenth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**The political system of a given society will influence public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will respond to and build relationships with whatever political entity it faces.**

The tenth proposition on how much the structure and philosophies of local government affect the way public relations is practiced. In round one, the respondents generally agreed that political systems are one of the most important factors behind what practitioners can do in a given country. Exactly how the practice was affected by differing political situations, however, fostered a wide variety of opinions.

Eighteen of the 23 respondents to the first round clearly agreed that politics affects public relations. A few of those offered specific examples as to how this happens. One representative listing includes: "(a) possible control, censorship or 'supervision' of the media; (b) links of the financial and entrepreneurial communities with government and political parties; (c) lobbying, politics linked to specific groups of influence; (d) politics linked to religion; (e) unstable politics that affect media results as a consequence of media space; (f) the link between the economy of the country and its political situation may hinder/foster pre-existing public relations programmes; and (g) when the public relations programme includes decisions taken by deferring political parties (British spellings)."

Several of the panel members argued that public relations cannot exist in totalitarian regimes. One said, "In political systems without freedom of speech and other related political freedoms, there is no room for public relations." Another concurred: "Clearly, symmetric public relations requires empowerment of all groups and strata of society. And that empowerment is difficult to achieve at best in totalitarian societies with huge resource and power gaps." A third said, "Certainly, it is difficult to believe the public relations industry is able to flourish in countries like Iraq, Iran, Somalia, or North Korea." One respondent, however, took a swipe at public relations in democratic societies, as well. He said, "I definitely don't agree with that old truism that public relations helps democracy; quite the reverse in many cases."

Lobbying was shown as one example of government influence that can work either for or against organizations, depending on the country. In one country, the government fosters lobbying as the main role of public relations, "because no other approach is successful in influencing the government structure." Other states ban or strongly inhibit the practice. Even in a democratic country like Japan, for instance, "open lobbying is almost impossible because the political system is so murky, bureaucrats are so powerful and hard to deal with for an organization unless you have strong political connections. Industry associations which are supposed to represent your company's interest are created and controlled by the government. We don't have grass roots lobbying because citizens and interest groups are far from powerful and hardly participate in politics."

Many respondents acknowledged the ethical dilemmas that face multinational



organizations in certain totalitarian countries. Those who broached the subject had differing opinions on what organizations should do in these circumstances. Some said multinationals should not support or build relationships with "oppressive dictators" because it would violate "higher ethical and moral standards" that should be universal. Others asserted that organizations should build relationships with regimes of all types, for the very purpose of raising every government to a "universal" moral standard.

Of those who believed organizations should shun oppressive governments, one commented, "International 'excellent' public relations, which is based on a symmetrical philosophy, cannot build relationships with every political structure in any country, because this would be an inherent discrepancy between the philosophy and the real communication structures in such countries." Another said the public relations field should not condone relationships with despotic governments. "The ... profession should learn from the medical profession," the respondent explained, "and not build relationships with political, commercial, or other types of systems which may at some point contribute to hampering professional performance."

A variety of comments were presented by the panelists who said that organizations should build relationships with all types of governments. One wrote, "I don't think there are political systems where public relations cannot build relationships with the government. The point here is how and by what means. And this point justifies the need for local adaptation of public relations programs." Two others explained similar philosophies behind building relationships: "The formula is to be as apolitical as possible while maintaining an image of support for the democratic process and society's right to

participate, regardless of what party is governing at the time," said one. The other added, "Proper public relations should always position the organization as a neutral business entity, but in good relations with whoever political entity one faces."

A couple of the participants offered more balanced perspectives on this ethical dilemma, showing the advantages and disadvantages of either approach. One explained, "In one hand, I think public relations should not build relationships with whatever political entities it faces regardless of its characteristics. In the other hand, public relations should exploit any means to help organizations achieve their goals, including building relationships with any political entity it faces." Another deliberated, "It is a matter of ethics whether a corporation should or should not adapt to the rules of any government. Clearly, a profit-oriented corporation may adjust to any rules, just to earn money, risking at the same time to be condemned by world public opinion for cooperating with 'corrupt' regimes, or a government violating human rights .... Top management is also exposing its ethical standards by cooperating with, and possibly supporting, corrupt dictators, famous for torturing their own people." This panelist suggested the United Nations Charter of Human Rights or the annual report from Amnesty International as possibly "helpful documents" in this connection.

Five declarative statements on the political factor were generated from this first round discussion. The statements addressed the question of whether it is possible to conduct public relations in some countries, as well as the ethical ramifications of building relationships with despotic governments. These statements and their numerical responses are included in Table 13.

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Table 13: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #10

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S51: PR should exploit any means for organization to achieve its goals, including building relationship with any political entity	4	2	3	6	5	2.70
S52: PR should not tie in with shifting political systems; rather, it should expose violations of widely accepted standards of ethical behavior	1	9	5	3	1	3.32
S53: To be successful, it is necessary to adapt to the political system of a given society	0	13	1	6	0	3.35
S54: In political systems without freedom of speech and other freedoms, there is no room for PR	1	7	1	9	2	2.80
S55: Political systems have more effect on multinational PR than cultural factors	2	3	3	6	3	2.71

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Two of the statements in this grouping, #54 and #55, discussed the specific impacts of political systems on international public relations. Statement #54 asserted that where there is no freedom of speech or other freedoms, public relations is not possible. As shown, opinions on this were mixed. One of the panelists strongly agreed and seven agreed; however, nine disagreed and two strongly disagreed. The mean of 2.8 leans toward disagreement, but is inconclusive. This shows that some of the panelists believe public relations is strongly subject to political systems, while others apparently believe public relations can operate regardless of what type of political system is in place.

Statement #55 declared that political systems have a greater impact on



multinational public relations than cultural factors. The majority of respondents (nine) disagreed with this statement (only five agreed, three were neutral, and four more chose not to answer the scale). The potential problem with a statement like this is the old "chicken and egg" dilemma. Does the culture of a given society determine its political system, or does the political system eventually create a culture? While this was probably factored into the responses, some of the recent (and rapid) changes in political systems around the world might indicate that politics are much less stable than culture.

The first three statements discussed how public relations should respond to political environments. This is an important consideration due to ethical dilemmas that arise when dealing with political systems that suppress human rights. Statements #51 and #53 broached the necessity for adaptation, but with entirely different approaches.

Statement #53 discussed adapting to whatever system is entrenched, while Statement #51 proposed that public relations "exploit any means" to help organizations achieve their goals (including building relationships with current political entities). On the surface, these two concepts may seem identical. If they were interpreted as such, the responses to these statements should have been similar. In reality, however, the opinions were quite different. Thirteen respondents agreed to Statement #53 about adaptation, and six disagreed, for a mean of 3.35 (not a strong indicator, but leaning toward agreement). By contrast, 11 panelists disagreed that public relations should exploit any means to achieve goals. Only six agreed, but four of those six strongly agreed. Nevertheless, the mean for Statement #51 was 2.7, which leaned toward disagreement. Perhaps the difference in these responses evidenced a negative reaction to

the word "exploit." But it also could mean that panelists believe it is necessary to adapt to any system in order to implement a public relations program; but it is not necessary to build relationships with political entities that are seen as unethical or exploitive.

Adaptation for political systems was further tested with Statement #52. Using a converse approach to #51, the statement contended that public relations should not ally itself to shifting political systems. Rather, it should be a vehicle for exposing political violations of universal standards for human rights. Ten of the respondents agreed with this statement, and four disagreed, for a mean of 3.32. Again, this is not a strong indicator, but it does lean toward agreement with the statement. This tends to support the overall disagreement panelists had to the exploitation of any means to achieve goals.

In summary, it seems that the panelists were divided about whether certain political systems can preclude public relations activity. The responses could have been tempered by the notion that political winds are shifting so dramatically today, there is confusion about what those changing politics mean for public relations. In the past, systems were examined in their relatively stable state -- in other words, the question was how can public relations function in a stable totalitarian state. Certainly, additional studies now are needed that examine public relations in rapidly shifting systems. Regardless of which political system is in place in a given country today, however, the panelists seemed to believe that public relations must adapt to these local political environments in order to be effective. Public relations should not, however, adapt to the point of sanctioning and building relationships with diabolical political entities.



### Research Proposition #11

The eleventh research proposition on international public relations stated:

**An excellent international public relations program will respond to varying indicators of cultural differences within and between each country. Cultural indicators (specific ways of doing things that help distinguish a given culture from other cultures), and the way an organization deals with them, become very important to the success or failure of the organization in each country.**

Predictably, the results of both rounds clearly depicted culture as an important variable affecting public relations. In the first round, not one of the 23 respondents debated against culture as an influence on international practice. On the contrary, most of the panelists used terms like, "Yes, absolutely," or "I strongly agree," to indicate their feelings about this proposition. One even said, "Indeed, it would be arrogant not to understand that different cultures may require different methods of implementing a particular public relations strategy." From the collective strength of the responses one might conclude that culture is the most important local variable. One panelist, though, argued that "political systems are more important."

What remains to be explored is why is culture a factor, and how does it affect public relations in the multinational organization? Several respondents offered suggestions on how culture affects public relations. Others supplied insights on how multinationals can organize to effectively address this factor.

There seem to be myriads of cultural indicators that have an impact on the practice of public relations. Some factors listed by a group member were "body language, customs, color, image, symbols, language, etc., [that] differ from country to

country." Another panelist listed "language, religion, general public political awareness, level of political activeness, and public awareness of rights, responsibilities, and limits." A third specified "communication style and competence." One more included "language, culture, sense of time, corporate structure, environment, and gender roles." "Values, norms, tastes, and especially visual experiences and message-structures are different in different countries," said yet another.

Several panelists discussed what multinational organizations should do to accommodate the cultural variable. "Most people are very sensitive to anything affecting their value systems," said one panelist. This means a multinational entity must be careful when it enters a host country, to ensure that it does not offend local citizens and that it is seen as concerned about the country. Another respondent indicated, "Awareness of cultural differences seems crucial if people from different cultures are to work together, respect each other, and take each other into account adequately. Unity can coexist with diversity, but such unity requires much effort and study." This may require public relations people who interpret cultural differences and build bridges. Another respondent claimed, "An excellent program can fall flat or be totally counterproductive without 'cultural interpreters.'"

At least eight responded that adjustments for cultural factors must be made locally rather than at headquarters. Although many of those eight panelists argued that it is only the local level where adjustments can or should be made, one countered that "adjustment should be made at headquarters as well." Another added that although culture affects the practice locally, "the close cooperation of mother and host country



communication managers is necessary, nevertheless," to avoid the risk of miscommunication.

One panelist provided a specific example about how miscommunication could take place when operating across cultures. The participant discussed the fact that many Asians have lived outside of their countries and "received education from a western culture." Though they may have learned how to be more "out-spoken and open to criticism," they, like their fellow citizens, are "still very passive and avoid confrontation." The panelist added that multinationals must recognize that Asians "seldom open up and 'lay everything on the table,'" and must understand how to work within these cultural differences if they are to be successful. The best possibility for success comes in "compromise with a soft approach, any tough arm policy will not work."

Another example, offered by different panelists, was about the Maori culture in New Zealand. One of them said that the Maori "have a unique culture (with important internal differences), and programmes rarely if ever take account of this." The other said many western practices "would be insulting to the Maori peoples." Evidences of Maori cultural traits are "preference for consensual meetings, verbal discussion ... a lot of networking ... and the understanding of tribal affiliations and sensitivities."

Because the Maori are a small part of the New Zealand population and are slowly disappearing, this may seem to many outsiders like an insignificant factor in New Zealand operations. However, despite their decreasing numbers, the Maori still have great influence in some parts of New Zealand. Therefore, one of the respondents stressed the unseen importance of relationship building even if no apparent benefits can be seen. She

said, "There may be a time where it becomes important -- especially if [the] Maori gain control over natural resources as promised in the Treaty of Waitangi."

From these first-round comments about the cultural variable, five declarative statements were produced for the second round instrument. These statements and their numerical responses are shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #11

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S56: PR must adjust to local cultures	9	11	0	0	0	4.45
S57: HQ must understand and have empathy for local cultures to ensure that decisions do not insult local populations or harm the organization	15	4	0	0	0	4.79
S58: MNOs should identify with national interest and be seen as benefitting community; providing products and employment are not enough	12	6	1	1	0	4.45
S59: In different regions in my country, there are strong differences in cultures, regionalist feelings, and economic differences	5	6	4	4	1	3.50
S60: Adjustment for cultures is difficult at HQ level	3	13	3	2	0	3.81

As in the first round, the panelists showed strong support for the cultural variable in their responses to these statements. The first three statements entertained the concept of adjusting to local cultural values. The consensus generated from the first three statements in this grouping clearly indicates that understanding and working with local cultural factors should be a strong priority for multinationals. The other statements



addressed the possibility of adjusting for culture at headquarters and the idea that culture does not necessarily equate to national boundaries

Statement #56 repeated the wording of the eleventh proposition, that public relations must adjust to local cultures. This received unanimous consent, with nine strongly agreeing and another 11 agreeing to the statement. There were no disagreeing responses, and the mean of 4.45 definitely indicates strong agreement.

Statement #57 generated an even stronger mean of 4.79, as 15 respondents strongly agreed that multinationals must have empathy with local cultures. The panelists also agreed with the reason for this empathy, so as to avoid costly public relations errors in the local operations. Statement #58 addressed the same issue, but it emphasized how multinationals are perceived in regard to benefitting local communities. Again, a strong agreement mean of 4.45 was generated, with only one disagreement. Therefore, it seems that multinationals must not only understand and show an interest in local communities, but they must also benefit them in some tangible way other than providing products and employment. Often, in fact, provision of products is seen as taking money back to the home country, rather than benefitting the local citizens. That means that local public relations must generate additional, benevolent activities to show the multinational's concern for the host country. But more importantly, local practitioners also must make sure that the organization's decisions are sound and responsible for local publics.

Statement #60 offered reaction to exactly how multinationals should respond to local cultural factors -- whether responsibility for this empathic response rests at headquarters or at the local level. Not surprisingly, considering the natural tendency

toward local loyalties discussed earlier, 16 of the panelists agreed that it is difficult for headquarters to adjust to local factors. Two disagreed with the statement, but the mean of 3.81 still strongly encourages local, not global, adjustment.

The final statement in this grouping, #59, addressed the concept of cultural boundaries. Hofstede (1980) and many other scholars have used national boundaries to identify cultural groupings, implying that national and cultural boundaries are equivalent. Adler (1991), however, indicated that such an equivalency gives a false perspective on cultures. Statement #59 echoed Adler's philosophy, asserting that cultural differences and their accompanying regionalist feelings and economic variations can occur within countries as well as between countries.

The reaction to this statement resulted in great dispersion across the scale: Five strongly agreed, six agreed, four disagreed, and one strongly disagreed. Four more were neutral and one chose not to respond. These results would indicate that some countries have strong regional differences, while others are fairly homogeneous across the country. Additional analysis of the respondents showed countries such as The Netherlands, Denmark, Australia, and Taiwan among those who disagreed. The latter three are relatively uniform in cultural composition, if one discounts the aboriginal tribes in Australia and Taiwan. Likewise, The Netherlands, while highly cosmopolitan country-wide, does not seem to have pockets of indigenous cultural groupings. So it is understandable that representatives from these countries would disagree with the statement. It would be interesting, however, to present this statement to wider samplings of people in each of these countries. Almost certainly there would be



differences of opinion in every case.

In summary, culture received virtually unanimous support as a variable affecting local public relations. There also was great support for the idea that the local level is where cultural adjustments must occur, that such adjustment is difficult, if not impossible, at headquarters. There also was some agreement for culture being related to individual groupings within countries, rather than being tied to country borders.

#### Research Proposition #12

The twelfth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**Because language nuances vary from place to place, an excellent international public relations program will place people in each country who understand those nuances and can deal with them most effectively (as opposed to transplanting expatriots, for example).**

Language joined culture in being seen as an obvious factor in local public relations. In fact, in the first round, several of the panelists listed aspects of culture that affect public relations; three of those listings highlighted language. The question to be further explored is whether language stands as its own variable, or whether culture and language are so intimately connected that they should be one combined variable.

Meanwhile, in this study, the respondents supplied interesting insights on language.

In the first round, some panelists explained the importance of understanding nuances of words and meanings that often are hidden from cultural "outsiders." One stated, "It is very difficult to learn a foreign language so perfectly that all nuances can be understood and responded to -- a language is so much more than mere words." Another added, "It is not the same to be an expatriot who knows the language as to be someone



local who has lived there their whole life, who knows the culture, who knows the people, and who speaks the language not only in words but in culture as well."

One memorable example of a language failure was when a multinational corporation headquartered in the United States attempted to place an advertisement in Denmark. According to the panelist who submitted the example, the advertisement asked, "Why does one man look at a waffle iron and think about breakfast, and another see a waffle iron and think about running shoes?" Instead of coming across as clever, the advertisement made no sense to the people of Denmark. They do enjoy a delicious waffle occasionally, but not for breakfast.

The potential for "language" failure is not limited to different root languages, either. Language abuses can occur even in countries where the same language supposedly is spoken. It may be, however, that where the base language is the same, the miscue becomes a cultural failure rather than a language failure.

As an illustration of this problem, one respondent discussed another advertisement that supposedly was adapted for New Zealand, but actually was a mere replay of an Australian advertisement. This offended the people of New Zealand because it perpetuated stereotypes that New Zealand is just an extension of Australian culture. In reality, the two cultures have extreme differences. Although the advertisements in New Zealand and in Denmark above arguably reflected communication techniques rather than strategic public relations, their connection to language differences in cross-cultural public relations should be clear.

The proposition also fostered interesting first-round comments on how

multinational entities should organize to accommodate the language barriers of cross-cultural public relations. Many of the panelists argued that host-country public relations should be directed by a local who: (1) understands the language nuances and local mores; (2) has status among local peers/subordinates because he or she is a native; and (3) can monitor the environment and its pertinent activities "in accordance with local values." One person used this philosophy to comment, "This is why United States student ambitions to seek international jobs in public relations will be limited."

Even though the majority of panelists supported the idea of local practitioners supervising local programs, some stressed the need for training. They could not condone setting a local practitioner loose to run public relations according to his or her own whims, or those of the general manager. One respondent stated that the local person who hired to conduct public relations should first receive adequate training at headquarters to fully comprehend the organizational vision and culture. With this understanding, the practitioner can then implement the program in accordance to those global objectives and themes.

Not everyone agreed that a local should always be in command. Some also expressed the value of expatriates in local offices, if those expatriates are sensitive to local needs and work in conjunction with the local staff. One responded that "when expatriates are in a local office they may work as supervisors or consultants." A few proposed that a local and an expatriate work in reciprocal leadership roles. As one said, "No outsider can compete with a well-trained native. What they can do is provide strategic planning ability and overall management guidance." Another suggested that the



"expert from headquarters" could be an "ad-hoc communication link to headquarters," an advisor to the local staff, and a "translator of the meaning of the message content" emanating from headquarters missions and objectives.

Organizations must be careful, though, when an "outsider" from headquarters is on the local staff. One panelist warned, "There is a risk that the headquarters expert could be viewed as a 'spy' from headquarters, trying to control the bureau" (the panelist apparently liked news bureaus). This could lead to a competence rivalry with the local chief, in which the latter probably would emerge as the winner due to his [or her] language and cultural skills." No matter who would win such a battle, the strife and suspicion caused by such conflict would not be good for the productivity of the office.

Some respondents argued for the importance of having local staff members work at headquarters for a period of time. One way to accomplish this would be to rotate assignments for practitioners from around the world. One person offered the "best solution" for international staffing -- a "local chief ... who has served for quite some time at headquarters, returning to his [or her] native country as a formal representative of the corporation as such, receiving the message content from headquarters and transforming it into a form which is optimally tailored to its home audiences."

From these comments, six statements were produced. Three of those concerned the nuances of language as a local factor, and the other three addressed the staffing considerations in a multinational to account for that language factor. The statements and their numerical responses are included in Table 15.

Table 15: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #12

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S32: Effective PR means you must speak the language, you must know the culture	7	10	1	2	0	4.10
S61: Understanding language nuances is important element for building relationships with publics	9	11	0	1	0	4.33
S62: Range of language differences even between countries that supposedly speak the same language is deceptively high	5	9	5	1	0	3.90
S63: A HQ expert in local office could function as:						
a. An ad-hoc communication link to HQ	5	11	2	3	0	3.86
b. A macro-level advisor to department head or general manager	5	14	1	1	0	4.09
c. A translator of meanings of message content from HQ	3	12	3	3	0	3.71
d. A trainer about organizational culture and mission	3	14	1	2	0	3.90
e. An expert in international field of PR	2	12	1	5	1	3.43
S64: The use of expatriates in local offices and locals at HQ facilitates more multicultural feedback	4	11	3	1	0	3.95
S65: Locals at HQ play an important role because an MNOs host cultures need to be interpreted to home culture just as in opposite direction	8	13	0	0	0	4.38

Two of the statements in this group addressed the idea that language is a factor in local public relations. Both statements received strong support. Statement #61 repeated the proposition that understanding language nuances is critical to building local relationships. Twenty respondents agreed and only one disagreed. Statement #62 posited that the nuances of language cross even into countries that supposedly speak the same root language, like Australia and England. This also engendered strong agreement -- 14 marked the agree or strongly agree categories, while one disagreed, for a mean of 3.9. This indicates that even though the same language is spoken in different countries, natives in the office offer the best chance for communication with local publics.

Statement #32 addressed the interconnection of language and culture, and the importance of understanding both. Seven panelists strongly agreed with this statement and 10 more agreed, but two disagreed. Still, the mean of 4.1 trends clearly toward agreement. For this statement, there was a strong difference in the means between practitioners and scholars. The practitioners' mean of 3.56 leaned only slightly toward agreement to the statement. The scholars, on the other hand, showed clear support with a mean of 4.55. Every scholar either agreed or strongly agreed. Perhaps they were focusing on the intent of the statement, that language and culture clearly are important local factors. Practitioners, though, may have been acknowledging that culture and language are both important, but that additional factors also are crucial for success.

Because of the wording of Statement #32, the general agreement shown by the panelists also may indicate that knowledge of root language is not enough. Some scholars have explained that communicating in a second language often fails to pick up



the subtleties stemming from idioms, slang, nonverbal cues, and the like. The case can be similar when the root language is the same but different cultural interpretations are added to the equation (again, as in English speakers from Australia or the United States). Therefore, to build local relationships, it would be important in either case to have local public relations directed by natives who can properly interpret the subtle cues.

Statements #64 and #65 asked the panelists to analyze whether a balance of global and local needs is important in multinational staffing. Statement #64 declared, "the use of expatriates in local offices and locals at headquarters facilitates more multicultural feedback." Fifteen of the panelists agreed with the statement and one disagreed. Three were neutral, and another two did not answer the statement. The relatively strong agreement mean of 3.95 indicates that panelists believe there is a place for transferring personnel between headquarters and host countries to align the needs of the local offices with the global imperatives. Transferring locals to headquarters, the main theme of Statement #65, is particularly appealing to the panelists; all 21 agreed that locals at headquarters can be cultural interpreters for global decisions.

The final statement in this group, #63, proposed different methods for utilizing expatriate staff members from headquarters to most effectively balance local performance with global needs. The suggestion that elicited the greatest support was that the expatriate could function as a macro-level advisor on public relations to the local department head or general manager. Nineteen agreed with this proposal, and only one disagreed. Other categories that received general agreement were: (1) the expatriate could help train local staff about the organizational culture and mission, 3.9 agreement

mean; (2) the expatriate could function as an ad-hoc communication link to headquarters, 3.86 agreement mean; and (3) the expatriate could translate meanings of the message content from headquarters, 3.71 agreement mean.

The category in Statement #63 that received the least agreement was that the expatriate could be an expert in the field of international public relations. Two strongly agreed with this and 12 agreed. However, five disagreed and one more strongly disagreed. Perhaps this is because there is still so little understanding of international public relations that the dissenters believe there are no real experts. It could also be that expertise in international public relations may be perceived to involve expertise on local cultural factors, where in reality no person from headquarters can fully understand local factors unless they are from the country in question. Whatever the case, the response to this category shows the need for more examinations of exactly what expertise an international public relations expert would have -- if such a person can even exist.

This discussion about staffing parallels the views of Kanter (1995), who traced the evolution of multinational organizations into global entities. This occurs, she said, by utilizing the "best and brightest" talent from around the world. Global organizations are staffed by "cosmopolitans" who are "familiar with many places and aware of distinctively local characteristics but see beyond the interests of any one place because they are linked to a wider world" (p. 60). She added that cosmopolitan entities make places more similar "not by reducing choices to a single one-size-fits-all, but by increasing the range and variety available everywhere" (p. 61). Thus, an organization that competes successfully in the global environment would have multinational leadership at



headquarters and highly diverse, local and regional staffs.

### Research Proposition #13

The thirteenth research proposition on international public relations stated:

**The potential for activism (defined as action--which could include letters, complaints, boycotts, strikes, or even bomb threats--by a pressure group against an organization in an attempt to make the organization change behaviors) makes the international environment particularly turbulent, but the extent and type of activism may vary from society to society. Thus excellent international public relations will contain a component in each country that can scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and build programs to deal with them. The means for accomplishing this may vary from country to country and even within countries.**

This proposition about activism received generally mixed reviews and opinions in both rounds. In the first round the proposition received general support, with only two of the respondents showing anything other than overall agreement. Nevertheless, the proposal generated some interesting comments because it appears that the definition of activism is broadly interpreted. There also seems to be a disparity in the amount of activism from one country to another.

It was clear from the responses in the first round that activism can take many forms, from non-violent, democratic processes to highly violent behaviors. Examples mentioned were letters, complaints, boycotts, strikes, riots, "small talks," civil rights movements, speeches, "whistleblowing," trade unions, national referenda, consumer movements, campaigns, demonstrations, blocking the movement and usage of bulldozers, news releases, dialogue, and even "attempts on the life of a manager."

Another action unique to a given country was "slow-driving activity," where a "group of car owners will drive very slowly on a specific route on a certain day, usually Sunday."

Also mentioned was "sabotage," based on the possibility of "an internal public disenchanted with what they might see as a non-sympathetic foreign management."

A few panelists encouraged the distinction of non-violent and violent activism, as related to public relations practices around the world. Two of the respondents agreed that "non-violent activism is part of the normal democratic process," but that "violent activism is defined as criminal," where "communication in most cases may not be the right tool." For the former, non-violent actions, "efficient public relations strategies" could be effective. One respondent said, "Activists are gradually realizing that they can operate most effectively with symmetric strategies which show respect for their foes. Such strategies lead to dialogue, rather than to confrontation." In the criminal cases, however, said these and other panelists, responses should be "left to the police to investigate and prosecute," or otherwise turned over to the government.

One of the panelists had concerns about the term "deal with them," that was used in the first instrument to illustrate how organizations can relate to activist groups. The respondent interpreted the term as meaning that organizations would resort to violent actions. "If you pursue symmetrical communication, I don't see how you can regard activist groups in this hostile way," she said.

Another panelist asked the pertinent question about the definition of activism: "What exactly is a pressure group and what is the organization?" This suggests that even activist groups today are often legitimate, and even multinational, organizations in their own right -- and other, mainstream organizations often can be pressure groups (even corporations have been known to exert pressure on other corporations). Also,



organizations can be pressured by their own employee groups, if they are seen by the staff members as being unfair, unflexible, or otherwise in need of forced change.

Although most of the panelists addressed activism in general, mostly domestic terms, some saw specific differences in activism generated in an international context. First, there is a growing number of global activist organizations, "such as Greenpeace and Amnesty International." An increasing number of activist campaigns also are carried out far from the borders of the headquarters or source of the activist group. One example of this distant, international activism was Greenpeace's "Rainbow Warrior bombing," carried out far from its Amsterdam headquarters in the waters of the South Pacific to protest nuclear testing. These campaigns can have far-reaching consequences. One panelist explained, "activism emerges locally but can spread worldwide in its results. Therefore, multinational corporations are typically exposed to much more activism."

Multinationals also receive pressures within host countries because of cultural or political misunderstandings. One respondent said, "Everywhere, multinationals tend to be seen as unfamiliar, unreliable, and different from domestic organizations and could easily be a target of activists, especially nationalist or racist groups." One incident illustrated by the panelist was when a McDonald's restaurant in Scandinavia "was almost destroyed by political activists, claiming that McDonald's is one local representative of an international industrial-financial conspiracy" (although the respondent also claimed, "It is doubtful how public relations could have prevented this from happening).

Whether the pressure from activists is violent or non-violent, the activities should be a concern to multinationals. As one respondent explained, "All of these actions have

various effects upon organizations, varying from warning to serious threatening."

Another said that "these activities do help promote negative public opinion about the organizations involved, erasing years of public relations work done to help promote the organization's image amongst the public."

Three respondents took an optimistic view that activism can be positive, both for society and for organizations that respond to activist pressures. One said, "activism is not a problem, only an indication that opposing viewpoints require accommodation and power needs to be shared." Another stated, "If approached in a respectful, receptive way, [activism] can be a plus rather than a minus in insuring long-term organizational adjustment and change." A third related activism to the growth of public relations: "Activism was behind the evolution of public relations, and it is still one important reason for its continuation. Without [activism], we may not need public relations, and the level of activism can be a good predictor of the level of public relations efforts needed."

For multinationals to effectively respond to activist pressures, a local approach is important, according to the panelists. One respondent said that it starts with compliance to local laws and regulations. Another explained, "An excellent international public relations program will have a local component in each market that can scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and build local programs to deal with them." She added, "We are dealing with having the sensitivity to hire someone local who knows the country well and the culture, who will be sensitive to local issues." A third respondent stated, "It's important ... to have local eyes and ears in terms of issues. Local people are better able to understand what may happen and how. Also, it's better



for activists to be able to talk to locals rather than overseas representatives."

Seven declarative statements about the effect of activism and the need for local adaptation were generated from these first round comments. The statements and their numerical responses are shown in Table 16.

Table 16: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #13

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S66: Activists in my country give business and government organizations much pressure	3	8	4	4	2	3.29
S67: Adaptation is the best way to avoid activist problems; on a local level you can adapt, but on a global level this is impossible	3	8	3	6	0	3.40
S68: Domestic organizations are usually more prone than MNOs to respond favorably to activism	1	11	3	3	2	3.30
S69: Activism emerges locally but can spread worldwide; thus, MNOs are exposed to more activism than domestic organizations	3	7	4	4	2	3.25
S70: Activism is not a problem for PR, but an opportunity	5	8	7	1	0	3.81
S71: The level of activism can be a good predictor of the level of PR needed	5	10	3	2	0	3.90
S72: An excellent international PR program will have a component in each market to scan for activists and build relationships with them	9	11	0	1	0	4.33

Statement #66 raised the issue most relevant to this proposition: Does activism exist in the panelists' countries? It received a mixed response. Three strongly agreed and eight agreed; four disagreed and two strongly disagreed. Four were neutral. The mean of 3.29 is too centered to be conclusive. This is predictable, because activism is often correlated with factors such as the power of the government, the extent of democracy, and the cultural mores that either foster or discourage dissent. As a result, many countries today still do not contend with activism as a social force.

A closer look at the responses shows that many are predictable based on the country from which they came. The responses do correlate somewhat with some of the factors just mentioned. For instance, panel members from the United States, Canada, Australia, and The Netherlands all agreed with Statement #66. And, indeed, activism is a well documented social force in all of those nations. Activism also was reported in Taiwan, Slovenia, and Yugoslavia. This shows that activism is slowly becoming a force in countries that were once authoritarian but are emerging into democratic states. Also, predictably, respondents from China and Japan, which have strong political or cultural constraints against activism, disagreed.

However, a few of the responses were surprising. New Zealand, Scotland, and Mexico were reported as having minimal activist pressures. Yet, in the first round, two of the respondents specifically referred to the activism of the Maori in New Zealand. Also, I know of multinational organizations that have received significant activist pressure in Scotland. Prolonged activism against the government by indigenous cultures in southern Mexico also has been documented, although it may be true that multinational



organizations there do not normally feel those pressures.

Statement #68 declared that, at least in countries where activism exists, domestic organizations are more likely than multinationals to be the recipients of activism. This statement also tended toward agreement, with 12 agreeing as opposed to five disagreements and three neutrals. However, the mean of 3.3 still represents too little consensus to be too confident about what the panelists believe.

Responses to this statement could be linked to observation. It could be that in most countries domestic organizations receive more activist pressure than multinationals. But perhaps those who agreed are more likely to notice the activities and perils of their local organizations and recognize only the highly visible cases involving multinationals. That could make it seem as though the domestics are more susceptible to local activist pressures. Despite the results for this statement, however, there are several documented cases (some mentioned in the first chapter) where multinationals received considerable pressures from local activists. Because of the inconclusiveness of the responses and the documented evidence contrary to the statement, this issue requires more study.

The critical question for this study is whether activism is an important factor for multinationals to consider, even if some of their facilities are in countries that currently exhibit little activism. Statement #69 asserts that activism can emerge in certain localities but can spread beyond borders. The idea is that even if domestic organizations receive more pressure than multinationals in some countries, ultimately the pressures could be of greater concern to the multinational. Again, however, this statement generated an inconclusive mean of 3.25 -- 10 agreed, but six also disagreed.



Another statement that engendered inconclusive responses was #67, which discussed how a multinational organization best responds to activist pressure. The statement read that adaptation is the best way to adjust to pressure and that this occurs locally. "On a global level, this is impossible," it added. With 11 agreeing and six disagreeing to this declaration, the mean was 3.4. However, there was a significant difference between the men's and the women's mean; the mean for men was 3.85, while the women leaned toward disagreement with a mean of 2.57. This correlates with Statement #41, which proposed that it is more important for multinationals than it is for domestic organizations to be flexible. Interestingly, on that statement the men agreed and the women tended to disagree.

A closer examination of Statement #67, however, shows that the results may not mean much. There is a clear "double meaning" that may have hindered the results. Were the panelists responding to the phrase, "adaptation is the best way to avoid activist problems," "on a local level you can adapt," or "on a global level this is impossible." For more conclusive results, the statement should have been rewritten to reflect a more understandable declaration.

Two of the last statements in the grouping attempted to uncover the correlation between activism and public relations discussed in the first round. Statement #70 declared that activism is not a problem for public relations, but an opportunity. Statement #71 explained that activism is a good predictor of the level of public relations needed (with "level" admittedly being a nebulous term). These statements elicited more clear support than the previous statements. Thirteen of the panelists agreed that activism

is an opportunity for public relations. Only one disagreed, although seven more were neutral or undecided. However, the overall mean of 3.81 still clearly leans toward agreement. Likewise, 15 panelists agreed that activism predicts the amount of public relations needed, while only two disagreed, for an even stronger mean of 3.9. These statements, combined, indicate that effective local public relations can make a difference in responding early to activist groups.

The final statement, #72, repeated Proposition Thirteen, that an excellent international program will have a local component to scan for activists and build relationships with them. This statement provided a good summary to what has, to this point, been largely inconclusive. However, the responses to this statement render clear and strong support. Nine panelists strongly agreed, while another 11 agreed. Only one panelist disagreed with the statement, for a highly conclusive mean of 4.33.

In summary of Proposition Thirteen, some of the panelists recognize that activist powers are growing. Others still view activism as insignificant. This probably is related mostly to where they reside and the amount of activism they see in their own country. However, several statements were generated about activism, and it does seem to be a growing force. Interestingly, many of the panelists see this force not as a problem, but as an opportunity -- no doubt because excellent public relations practitioners will identify who those activists are and begin to build relationships with them.

The factor that was recognized but is still largely unanswered is that of international activism, or activism that crosses borders. Although this was addressed in Statement #69, the results were inconclusive. Panelists leaned toward recognizing it as a



factor, but many still seemed unconvinced. As mentioned, little research has been done on the growing phenomenon of international activism (as opposed to activism that begins and ends entirely within one country). It would be a fruitful topic for future work.

#### Research Proposition #14

The final research proposition on international public relations stated:

**The mass media differ from country to country, with differing degrees of government control and of specialization and localization. Also, because of distance between host countries and organizational headquarters, media coverage can influence the way people think about multinationals. An effective local component of an excellent international public relations program will build relationships with local media and with publics who may have received unrealistic pictures about the multinational organization.**

Of all the propositions, this final one seemed to generate the least amount of substantive, useful information in the first round. Most of the respondents discussed the importance of media to public relations. Some even resorted to the traditional equating of public relations to publicity. But there was little discussion on the impact of media coverage on multinational organizations, or what multinationals specifically should do with media in local countries to enhance an effective public relations program.

Despite the relative lack of substantive information, there seemed to be great consensus on this proposition in the first-round discussion. Only one panelist voiced any noticeable disagreement. One of the respondents who agreed with the proposition said, "It is vital to keep the local media fully informed about the organization and its objectives. Should something negative occur within the organization, the media should already be aware of the many positive things the organization has or is doing. This could assist in reducing the effect of unfavorable situations." Another respondent explained,

"Public relations officers see the press as their most important public. I noticed, however, that most of them see the press as a 'pipeline' to their target publics, the contacts they want to reach; and see them as objects to manipulate, because they want to give a certain picture of the news -- or give no picture at all."

As with the other specific propositions, the respondents suggested that multinationals wanting good relationships with local media must know the local "angles." "The organizations in international activities ... must have on account what happens with the agenda setting in the different countries," was how one panelist explained this philosophy. Another put it more practically: "The media [in this country] are more interested in what multinationals are doing here and rarely bother about what they are doing overseas .... They very rarely make an international connection." One respondent explained that "multinationals are not given as much coverage as local organizations," especially if the multinationals are not listed on the local stock exchange.

Building local relationships still can be necessary, particularly for United States-based multinationals which may suffer a greater than normal share of inaccurate perceptions. As one panelist noted, "Media here [and in most countries] present a much more international picture than seen by most citizens in the United States, so there is a high level of awareness of international happenings." This is important for multinationals because if they are in the news spotlight anywhere in the world, it can be observed in other countries. This leads to local perceptions about multinationals that can be inaccurate at best, damaging at worst. As the same respondent said, the international coverage people generally receive tends to be "probably more crisis than longer-term



orientated." Thus, relationship building with media can potentially help to offset these inaccurate perceptions and impending crises.

Building relationships with the local media can take a variety of forms, as the respondents suggested. There are many wrong ways to do it, usually when attempted without local counsel. As one respondent said, even "prestigious American companies" are sending "English-language" press releases to countries where the majority of the journalists do not understand the language. These releases, when sent, "naturally went straight to the wastebasket." A panelist in an English-speaking country quoted another practitioner there as admitting, "At times we've had to ring local journalists and say, 'Look, for a while you will get some unusable crap from us. The company is just settling into [this country] situation. We'll let you know when the real stuff comes through.'"

Several of the respondents concurred that natives must be used to make sure relationships with media remain positive. Local practitioners will build these relationships because it is to their own advantage as well as that of the multinational. "I think the local units will first of all take care of their own 'image' and try to establish relationships with journalists for their own sake," said one panelist. "As long as they are doing it well, journalists will not give unrealistic pictures of that multinational." "Doing it well" implies activities like "contact from work or through other business associates and media contacts, constant contact via phone, attending various functions organized by the publications, organized media luncheons or just friendly lunches/dinners."

Despite the lack of comments specifically into Proposition Fourteen, six declarative statements were generated. These are shown in Table 17.

Table 17: Round 2 Statements and Means Related to Proposition #14

	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	M
S73: Global village is a reality in the media; news about parent MNOs often reaches local media, whether positive or negative	8	11	1	1	0	4.24
S74: Local people understand the power of the media and are more likely to use media to make their complaints known	8	9	3	1	0	4.14
S75: PR officers in my country see the press as their most important public	9	8	1	3	0	4.10
S76: A local component of a MNO should build relationships with local media	13	8	0	0	0	4.62
S77: Generally, coverage of MNOs in my country is not worse than the coverage of domestic organizations	5	8	0	7	0	3.55
S78: Mass media in different countries vary because of:						
a. The economic support base that allows for technological adjustments	3	9	5	1	1	3.63
b. The extent of their dependency on govt.	11	6	1	2	0	4.30
c. The extent of their dependency on advertising	4	12	0	3	1	3.75
d. The recognition within the media of their own professional responsibilities	4	9	4	3	0	3.70

Statement #78 offered differing reasons for why the media vary from country to country. All of the reasons received support. Eleven of the panelists strongly agreed, six



more agreed, and just two disagreed that media differ in the extent to which they depend on the government (for a mean of 4.3). Slightly lesser support was generated over the extent to which media depend on advertising (a mean of 3.75), the recognition of media staff members that they have professional responsibilities (mean of 3.7), and the fact that an economic support base allows for technological adjustments (mean of 3.63). So, if the responses are accurate, the media will differ from country to country based on their dependencies on public or private interests, professional responsibilities, and revenues that allow for technologies, in that order.

Statements #73 and #77 addressed the amount and type of media coverage multinational organizations receive in their host countries. Statement #73, referring to McLuhan's (1964) "global village" concept, said that "news about parent multinationals often reaches local media, whether positive or negative." Nineteen respondents agreed (nine strongly agreed), and only one disagreed, for a solid mean of 4.24. Respondents were not asked to distinguish how much coverage was carried about multinationals or whether the coverage is positive or negative. The latter was broached in Statement #77, which posited that coverage of multinationals is no worse than that of domestic entities. This statement generated mixed results: 13 agreements (five of them strong) to seven disagreements, for an inconclusive mean of 3.55.

In further analysis to determine whether the specific country may be a factor, the results are inconclusive. Respondents in New Zealand, Canada, Denmark, Norway, China, Taiwan, The Netherlands, and Slovenia -- a diverse listing of countries -- agreed that coverage is generally no worse for multinationals than for domestic organizations.

Those in Hong Kong, Australia, Mexico, Japan, and Yugoslavia believed that multinationals do receive worse coverage. However, results from those countries where more than one responded (the United States, Spain, and Saudi Arabia) were highly disturbing. In every case, one respondent agreed and one disagreed with the statement. In fact, for the United States and Spain, one disagreed while the other strongly agreed. These results tend to cast doubt on the reliability of the statement itself.

Statements #74 and #75 examined how much local public relations people understand and use local media. Both generated strong agreement. Statement #74 postulated that locals understand media and are more likely to use them (although it is not clear what "more likely" refers to -- more likely to use media than other communication vehicles, or more likely than multinational organizations to use media). Seventeen agreed, with an equal split between agreement and strong agreement. Only one disagreed, for an overall mean of 4.14. Statement #75 went one step further, viewing the media as the most important of all publics for local practitioners. This statement also generated mostly agreement, with a mean of 4.1.

Statement #76 largely summarized Proposition Fourteen, that an (excellent) local component of a multinational will build relationships with local media. Like many previous statements, this represented normative assumptions. As an ideal, the statement fared well: 13 respondents strongly agreed, eight agreed, and no one disagreed or was neutral. The mean of 4.62 places it squarely in the strongly agree realm. This indicates that the panelists believe the media are important, and because they are important it is crucial for local practitioners to build solid relationships with them.



## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research process leading up to this study has represented a lengthy immersion into the exciting arena of international public relations. While in two different graduate programs, I began a search for available literature on international public relations. Finding very little there, I expanded the investigation by delving into anything that had international implications: cultural anthropology, comparative management, sociology, international relations, and other allied fields. What was learned there was then added to the available theories on public relations, which created a potential foundation for a full-scale examination of international practice.

#### Conceptualization Summary

That preliminary research process uncovered three main points. The first was that international public relations was new and unknown enough to have thus far attracted relatively minimal interest among researchers in the public relations field. Second, what few articles had been written in a search for theoretical understanding concentrated mostly on how public relations is practiced in one country compared to other countries (what Culbertson, 1996, called "comparative research").

The final, related, discovery was that virtually nothing had been written on public relations in the multinational organization. A few articles had conjectured on the types and structures of international public relations agencies, but nothing had surfaced on the client side. It was as if no one thought that would be important. Managers in multinational organizations apparently thought of public relations in one of three ways.

Either they had no public relations program, they conducted it under the auspices of marketing and saw no need to understand public relations in its own right, or if they saw the need, they just turned it over to the international agencies -- no doubt at great expense and while relinquishing all internal control over the process.

With this thinking, no one seemed interested in asking questions about whether public relations was needed in a multinational organization. And, even if common sense indicates that such a function would serve a purpose, nobody was asking the obvious follow-up questions such as what would a multinational public relations program look like, how would it be organized, where would it be positioned or who would direct it, and similar types of basic inquiries. When I started my investigations 10 years ago, there was almost no research in this area. Today, aside from a few of these issues raised by Traverse-Healy, Botan (1992), and Epley (1992), as well as the research track pursued by me and my committee members at the University of Maryland (J. Grunig, 1992a; L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Vercic, 1997; Vercic, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996; Wakefield, 1996), the drought of research on public relations in the multinational entity continues.

My preliminary research also revealed that within public relations and some associated fields were existing theoretical domains that, if appropriately mined, would offer a promising foundation for theory building in international public relations. The theories addressed two critical areas. One useful path of research came from the public relations theories that had been compiled into the Excellence Study described in the first and second chapters. The other critical area was a debate among the few who were discussing international public relations about whether it must be practiced locally or was



conducive to some global possibilities. Theories available to shed instruction on this debate existed mostly outside of public relations.

Experiences with the global vs. local dichotomy clearly show that neither approach works well exclusively. Headquarters often pays dearly for relinquishing control over its local units. Host offices operating without oversight have scrimped on safety standards, human rights, and other critical behaviors. This can result in manufacturing plant explosions or dangerous chemical leaks, "sweat shops," and more abuses that create irreversible public relations nightmares (Epley, 1992; Fombrun, 1996; Maddox, 1993; Manu, 1996; Vogl & Sinclair, 1996). Completely localized thinking also places multinationals into reactionary positions when problems cross individual country borders (Manu, 1996). Globalized thinking, on the other hand, reflects an "ethnoarrogance" that fosters dissension within the multinational's diverse work force, poor productivity, and products or services that do not fit local needs or desires. A worst-case scenerio of exclusive globalization was the Parker Pen debacle, where the entire business was destroyed by inappropriate global mandates (Maddox, 1993).

From development management processes, Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989) offered a resolution to the global/local paradox with their theory of structured flexibility. The theory stressed that international management need not be an either/or situation; rather, a proper balance of both views is the most effective approach. The authors suggested that certain principles and practices must be universally retained in any multinational organization, while others must be adapted to meet local needs. They referred to this balance as the generic (globally universal) and specific (locally appropriate) variable set.

In 1991, in the written portion of my comprehensive examinations, I suggested that the Brinkerhoff-Ingle theory could be incorporated into public relations as the necessary foundation for balancing international practice. During the oral examination that followed, Dr. Marcus Ingle (one of the authors of the theory), Dr. James Grunig, and Dr. Larissa Grunig all concurred that this foundation would be worthy of future study. The generic/specific applications of international public relations have since been proposed in articles by J. Grunig (1992a), Vercic et al. (1996), and L. Grunig et al. (1997). At the same time, the applications have been the basis for this study since 1992.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Excellence theories in public relations were compiled and tested in over 300 organizations. The theories emphasized strategic public relations that helps organizations make and carry out decisions with stakeholder implications, rather than communication tasks that satisfy the whims of managers who do not understand the value of effective public relations. The senior practitioner in an effective public relations program was seen as part of the dominant coalition, scanning the environment to identify publics who could support the organization or be potential threats to its long-term success. Senior management would support public relations in fostering two-way communication that builds relationships based on respect for internal and external publics and a desire to balance mutual interests (J. Grunig, 1992b).

Because the Excellence theory was based on fundamental principles of relationship building and was regarded as effective in a wide variety of organizations, the theory was set forth as the generic foundation for international public relations (Vercic et al., 1996). This left two important elements to be completed. The first was to examine



the applicability of this generic concept of Excellence in a wide span of countries. The second was to determine what variables would comprise the specific applications (by virtue of having some influence on local practices), and to examine those variables along with the generic variables in a broadly international environment.

A variety of theories from public relations and other research domains supplied potential specific variables. The conceptualization for this study suggested that level of development, the political environment, cultural and language factors, the potential for activism, and the media all were specific influences on public relations in host countries. (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Vercic, 1997; Botan, 1992). Constructs like activism and media coverage also had the capability of influencing the practice across country borders, while cultural and language variables could influence the practice within countries.

With the generic and specific variables having been identified in this manner, they now were ready for testing in a multi-country environment. The variables were developed into fourteen propositions that were viewed as the necessary elements for an effective program in international public relations. These propositions then were incorporated into a qualitative instrument that could engender open-end reactions from a diverse group of people.

A Delphi study was the method chosen to research the variables because it can gather the collective wisdom of experts in a broad sampling of countries without having to bring them together. The intent was to obtain feedback from the experts on the appropriateness of the generic variables in their respective countries -- to determine whether each given variable would apply in their cultural context, or if not, what factors

exist to make it inappropriate. The study also intended to ascertain the influence of each of the specific variables -- what effect, if any, the variable would have on how public relations was practiced from country to country and whether that influence would affect multinational organizations any differently than domestic entities.

After selecting the potential participants through a snowball sampling procedure (Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975), I sent the first instrument to the group. The study was conducted in two rounds. The first round generated 23 responses from 18 countries, and the second round fostered 21 responses from the same 18 countries. The results to the collected data were reported in depth in the fourth chapter.

Numerous significant conclusions and recommendations can be extrapolated from this study. These will be presented below. First, I will outline the conclusions that arose from the results of the two rounds. Then, I will discuss recommendations for creating an effective international public relations program. In addition to the conclusions and recommendations the study has generated, there are implications for future research. As in any investigation, this study also had some limitations. These research implications and limitations will be presented, then I will add some final observations to conclude the dissertation.

### **Summary of the Results**

The major purpose of this study was to establish a normative framework to direct future practices of public relations in multinational organizations. As mentioned in previous chapters, this normative characteristic means that the study was intended to prescribe the ideals of public relations practice to achieve ultimate effectiveness in the



international realm (J. Grunig, 1992a; Vercic et al., 1996). The fundamental theories on which this study was based were normative (J. Grunig, 1992a), as were the propositions generated from those theories. Also, the experts who participated were asked to examine the propositions with that normative viewpoint in mind.

The Delphi panelists agreed that the study is primarily normative. Most of them commented that the propositions might work in the "ideal world," but the practical considerations of today make it difficult to incorporate them into real-life situations. Some seemed to believe that the ideal state is far in the future or that it will never come; others, however, commented that the public relations field is gradually moving closer to that ideal that will allow for the propositions to be feasible.

But the study also unearthed solid practical implications. Examples of conformity to the Excellence principles had already been found in the international realm before this study was completed (J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, & Lyra, 1995). In this study, as well, panelists offered several examples of the principles of effectiveness embodied in this study. This is consistent with the writings of Kant (1974) and others who have suggested that there is nothing so practical as a good theory.

The other fundamental issue this study addressed was whether international public relations is different from public relations in domestic contexts. The obvious difference possibly could be illustrated with one question: Exactly which domestic context is one asking about? The fact that public relations practices differ somewhat from each domestic environment to the next shows the growing complexity of international public relations. It is this myriad cultural, political, and economic

situations, language problems, the large variety of media, the increasing numbers and international clout of non-government organizations and activist groups, and additional variables or issues that can arise when conducting international public relations that makes the field "exponentially complex," as one of the panelists summarized.

Yet, despite these interesting nuances in the practice around the world, the great majority of the Delphi panelists still viewed the fundamentals of public relations in similar fashion, regardless of their country of origin. Thus, it should be safe to assume that international public relations is much more complex than domestic public relations, tempered by a recognition that some fundamentals generally are globally accepted.

So, with the basically normative nature of the study in place, and with the separation of international public relations into certain universal basics combined with differences in local application, the conclusions to the fourteen propositions now can be presented. Remember that the first eight represent universal principles, while the last six address specific influences on host country public relations. The propositions and their summarized responses are as follows.<sup>8</sup>

**Proposition # 1: Excellent international public relations is based on the philosophy of two-way symmetrical communication that pervades the organization worldwide....**

This proposition was supported almost unanimously as a normative condition.

Two-way symmetrical communication is seen as a strongly desirable worldview. It is

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Because this is a summary, the propositions repeated here are not all written in their entirety; where ellipses appear in the propositions as presented below, the complete wording may be seen where each of the propositions is listed in chapters two and four.



particularly important that multinational organizations carry this philosophy throughout the world, rather than just in their home countries. However, multinationals today seem to fall far short of this ideal, according to the panelists; they are viewed as caring only about sales rather than the creation of mutual benefits with their publics. This worldview is seen as eventually hurting sales, instead of building long-term profits.

**Proposition #2: This two-way symmetrical philosophy will be reflected in the organizational culture and in internal communication styles worldwide. Management would respect all employees as important contributors to organizational success, and would implement methods that foster participation and two-way communication among all employees throughout the world ....**

This proposition also generated support, although not as unanimously as the first one. That may be because the wording of this construct engendered misunderstandings about how it differed from the previous proposition. Nevertheless, there was sentiment that the probability of tension between global and local interests would be high in a multinational, with perceptions in many such organizations that headquarters personnel are treated better than local staff. It was thus conceded that in the international context there must be two-way communication, fostered by mutual respect and trust, in order to break down some of the natural barriers that exist between home and host offices.

**Proposition #3: Excellent public relations is a strategic management function working as part of and directly with senior management and the dominant coalition, worldwide. In an international program, the senior practitioner at headquarters will perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning, counseling with the dominant coalition, and setting communication strategies that support organizational goals. Senior practitioners in each country must also perform strategic roles that identify local audiences, build relationships with them, and adapt quickly to changing local conditions.**

There was strong agreement to this proposition, at least in theory, as long as the wording is not construed as a "top-down" imposition of management. A common, supranational strategy was seen as both possible and wise, and the importance of local public relations strategists working in tandem with general managers was also viewed favorably. The panelists acknowledged that multinational headquarters can suffer from local programs gone awry and therefore have some responsibility to ensure that those local programs remain sound. They also saw the importance of using the multinational diversity of host country expertise in planning and implementing global programs.

**Proposition #4: Excellent international public relations is integrated, meaning that worldwide, practitioners report to the public relations department at headquarters and work under a single umbrella (as opposed to, for example, public relations in one country under marketing, in another under human resources, etc.) .... Public relations must be connected worldwide to build consistent programs and respond quickly to problems that arise. A senior practitioner at headquarters must supervise all communication programs ....**

Agreement with the proposition was largely normative. The majority of the respondents saw it as a valuable organizational ideal but mostly impractical in today's business environment. However, most panelists disagreed with the complete control that local general managers typically are allowed to have over host country public relations. The respondents believed that most of these managers do not understand the purposes and activities of public relations, thus perpetuating the same problem that hinders domestic public relations efforts. The panelists widely acknowledged that headquarters should solve problems when the conflict has surpassed local boundaries, but there was no indication as to whether headquarters should be involved in preventing the problems in the first place. There was additional logistical discussion about directing public



relations from inside the multinational organization vs. using a public relations agency; but the discussion was inconclusive.

**Proposition #5: An excellent international public relations program is not subordinated to marketing, legal, or other organizational departments .... By remaining separate from other functions and building long-term relationships with all stakeholders, public relations can help the organization make money and keep it from losing it to costly lawsuits, legislation, etc.**

There was complete consensus on this proposition as a normative ideal, and consensus on the practical desirability of the proposition, as well. Only one person seemed interested in subordinating public relations to any function, and that was the legal department. Most of the panelists also suggested that, although an autonomous public relations unit is not frequently seen in today's business environment, it is possible to achieve such departmental autonomy without much change in the organization.

**Proposition #6: Senior practitioners all over the world will be qualified for their positions. They will be trained in public relations, not marketing or another field. They will understand the importance of having public relations integrated worldwide, as well as the importance of advising the senior managers and the dominant coalition. They will be qualified to perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning and counseling, and will value and foster the use of two-way symmetrical communication. However, there would be variations in necessary qualifications directly related to the given culture.**

The proposition attracted almost unanimous agreement that public relations people all over the world should be well trained for their positions. The respondents mostly agreed that this training should encompass certain "international standards of public relations education." The panelists seemed to concur that most practitioners are poorly trained, for local domestic positions as well as for international responsibilities.

However, the responses varied significantly on what international standards

should entail, or what basic qualifications were necessary for a practitioner to be considered fully trained. Most of the panelists seemed to think that undergraduate education should be accompanied by post-graduate training. All agreed that thorough understanding of the local language, customs, media, and other factors was important for local positions, and education on international issues, cultures and perspectives would assist international practitioners. Beyond that, the data were inconclusive as to what skills are necessary for effective practice, or how the knowledge would be obtained.

**Proposition #7: In an excellent multinational organization, hiring and promotional practices would foster diversity by offering equal opportunities to women and "minorities" (those who typically are not accepted in the cultural mainstream) in every country. Particularly, the organization's philosophy would be to recruit and promote individuals who are empathic to others and who have ingrained the two-way symmetrical values of respect, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise.**

The majority of panelists agreed with the principle behind this proposition, that diversity is a positive quality in responding to multicultural publics. However, the panelists strongly concurred that multinational organizations should consider local cultural practices in the hiring and placement of employees. Ultimately, despite the need for balancing diversity with local mores, the statement receiving the strongest support from the panelists was, "the only criterion for hiring should be, is this the best person for the position?" These results held up across demographics of gender and nationality.

As discussed in Chapter 2, however, some management scholars (i.e., Adler, 1993) argued that multinational organizations are best equipped to break down some of the prevailing employment discrimination in host countries and to foster diversity for positive purposes. Because of those arguments, this proposition needs additional study.



**Proposition #8: Because the organization faces a turbulent, dynamic environment internationally, the public relations program is structured to be flexible and adaptable to that environment, worldwide.**

This proposition on flexibility received unanimous consent. Exactly how that flexibility should be exhibited, though, generated a multitude of opinions. Because of the increased turbulence in the international context, flexibility seems to be more important in the multinational than in domestic organizations. There was consensus that good research and environmental scanning will allow flexibility to occur, and most panelists indicated that organizational adaptability will be successful only if carried out at the local level rather than on a global basis.

**Proposition #9: A nation's level of development will affect the practice of public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will adjust to the particular nation's level of development and develop an effective program of communication to respond to that environment.**

Level of development generally was seen as an influence on public relations in the multinational, despite some disagreement as to exactly what is meant by the term. There also was a perceived correlation between development and the practice of public relations; the less developed a nation, the more constraints exist to inhibit effective practice. The panelists commonly believed that an effective local component of a multinational public relations effort will adjust to the local situation. However, the results of this last assumption were not definitive.

**Proposition #10: The political system of a given society will influence public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will respond to and build relationships with whatever political entity it faces.**

Political systems also seem to influence international public relations, but exactly how they affect the practice was unclear from the results of this study. For example, opinions were divided on whether public relations could exist under a totalitarian regime; half believed this would be impossible, while the other half postulated that public relations could exist even in these circumstances. The panelists agreed that public relations typically must adapt to the political situation, but only to a certain point. When it came to building relations with despotic governments, opinions were split. Some felt it necessary to respond to such governments, to expose them to economic and other pressures that would eventually force them to change. Others argued that public relations should set a global example by refusing to work with any regimes of this type.

**Proposition #11: An excellent international public relations program will respond to varying indicators of cultural differences within and between each country....**

Culture arguably is the most important influence on the practice of public relations in multinational organizations. The study generated unanimous concurrence that public relations must adapt to cultural factors, and virtually unanimous consent that this adaptation must occur in host country offices rather than headquarters. The panelists strongly agreed that multinationals must show empathy to local cultures and promote substantive activities that benefit the local communities. The only variance in opinions was centered on whether cultural differences occur within countries and not just between countries. The answer to that depends on the country in question.

**Proposition #12: Because language nuances vary from place to place, an excellent international public relations program will place people in each country who understand those nuances and can deal with them most effectively....**



Language may be described best as the most visible evidence of culture.

Although language is strongly interconnected with culture, it can be supported as a separate specific variable because it is such an important influence in its own right.

According to the panelists, the language issue is best handled by natives who understand all of the nuances and cultural interpretations, rather than by expatriates who understand language "from an outside perspective." Expatriates can be useful in local offices, however, if they function as equals rather than supervisors, and are perceived as "macro-level advisors" on organizational missions and goals. Similarly, host country public relations experts can serve at headquarters by offering multicultural perspectives on decisions with important international consequences.

**Proposition #13: The potential for activism makes the international environment particularly turbulent, but the extent and type of activism may vary from society to society. Thus excellent international public relations will contain a component in each country that can scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and build programs to deal with them. The means for accomplishing this may vary from country to country and even within countries.**

Activism was supported as a factor in international public relations, but it elicited less consensus than the other variables. Activism is powerful in some countries, not so prevalent in others, depending largely on cultural and political factors. The growing influence of transnational activism was broadly, but not unanimously, acknowledged. Those who recognized this factor perceived that headquarters should help identify and respond to activist pressures. The panelists were virtually unanimous, however, on the need for strong local public relations that scans for potential activist pressures and builds relationships with interest groups. Where such programs are in place, activism can be an

opportunity rather than a problem for multinationals, according to the panelists.

**Proposition #14:** ... **An effective local component of an excellent international public relations program will build relationships with local media and with publics who may have received unrealistic pictures about the multinational organization.**

The mass media exert strong local influences. The statement, "a local component of a multinational organization should build relationships with local media" generated unanimous consent among the panel; in fact, the majority viewed the media as the most important local public. There also was strong agreement on the potential impact of transnational media. The panel mostly concurred that media reach is global and that multinational entities receive widespread coverage, but opinions were divided as to whether multinationals receive better or worse coverage than domestic organizations.

### **Theoretical Conclusions**

It appears that the variables proposed for an effective international public relations program are supported in a broad base of countries. All of the propositions set before the panel received general agreement, and many of them elicited unanimous consent of the participants. Therefore, the conclusion that the variables can work in an international setting seems reliable. However, the inference also carries several assumptions: that the study was conducted effectively; that the panel members adequately represent the views of experts practicing in a variety of countries; that the propositions placed before the panel did not affect their answers in any biased way; and that the data from the panelists were interpreted accurately and objectively.

The variables of Excellence in public relations already had been supported as sound fundamental principles for effective public relations (J. Grunig, 1992b). Now,



after withstanding scrutiny in a broad cross-section of countries, the eight propositions extracted from the Excellence study seem to hold up as a universal foundation for multinational public relations. The basic principles of trust, respect, and compromise with publics contained in the model of two-way symmetrical public relations seem to be confirmed as universally accepted principles. There also is support for the proper positioning of public relations within the dominant coalition and for integrating the public relations function to maximize effectiveness in the multinational. Representative diversity seems to be accepted in most countries, as well as the need for proper training and qualifications of public relations officers on both local and international scales.

The six specific variables proposed as potential influences on local public relations also elicited support from the diverse section of countries. The somewhat novel element is that some of the specific variables -- activism and the role of the media, for example -- have the potential for influence beyond individual country borders, and must therefore be considered in global programming. Other variables, like culture, language, and development, require different local approaches not only from country to country, but within countries, as well.

### **Model of Multinational Public Relations Excellence**

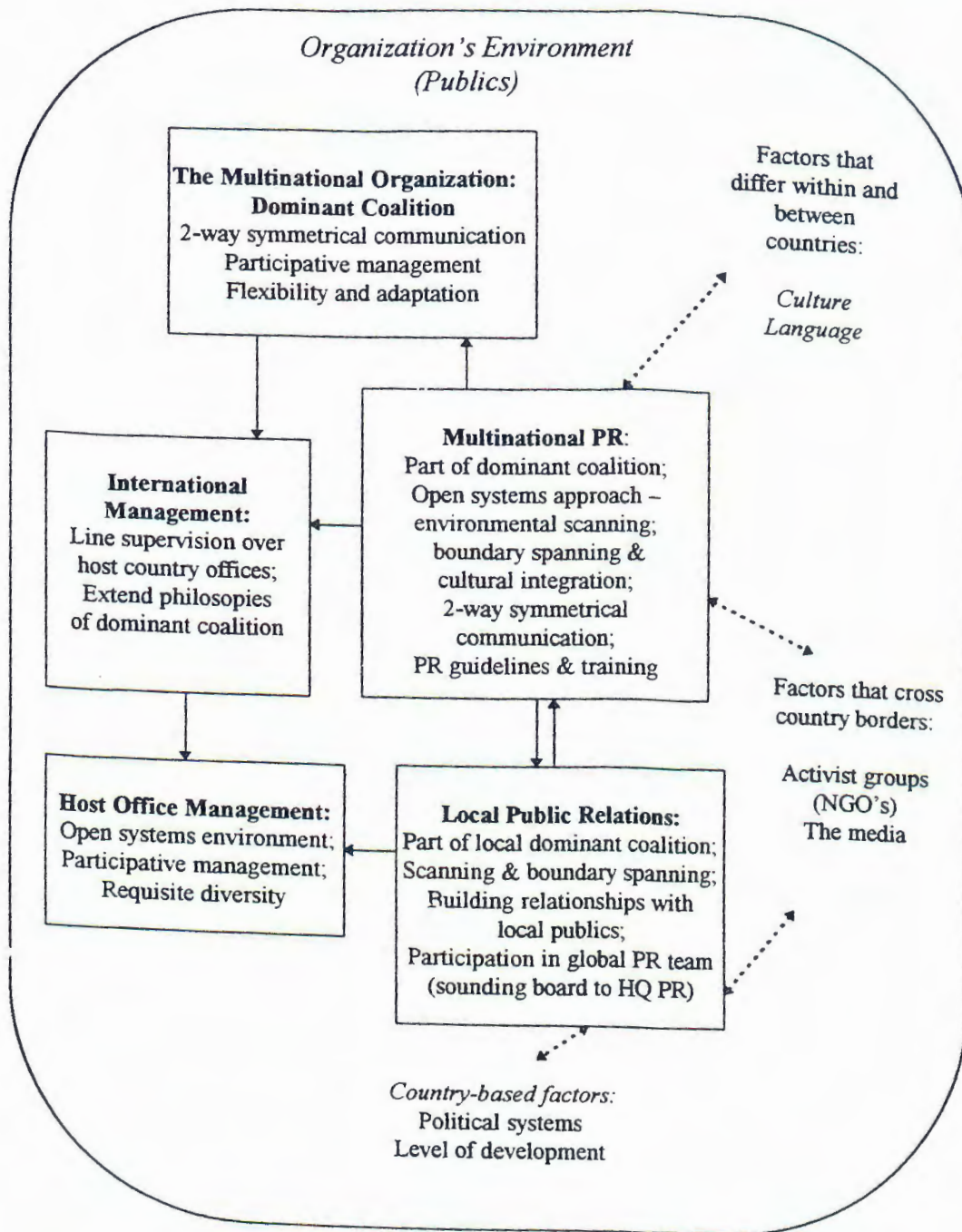
As mentioned in Chapter 3, one of the advantages of qualitative research is that it allows for conclusions to emerge from the data, rather than starting with highly structured hypotheses and testing those hypotheses through laboratory experiments or other means (Babbie, 1989). One of the purposes of this study was to propose some principles, let them undergo the scrutiny of a variety of experts, and see if this process

could generate a theoretical framework for international public relations. With the apparent confirmation of the fourteen propositions in this study, it is possible to propose a Model of Multinational Public Relations Excellence. This model is shown in Figure 4.

The model describes, as simply as possible, the environment and interactions that should be considered for effective public relations programming in the multinational organization. It incorporates the structured flexibility approach of Brinkerhoff and Ingle (1989), recognizing that effective management responds to the internal and external contingencies that prevail in the international arena (Negandhi, 1983). It also attempts to highlight the necessary balance between global imperatives and local adaptations (Botan, 1992; Epley, 1992; Traverse-Healy, 1991).

The contingencies in this model are reduced to those variables specifically discussed in this study. Certainly many other contingencies could be included, but the model is meant to illustrate the results of this study in a comprehensible way. Within the organization's enacted environment (depicted in the large, rounded square), political systems and level of development are seen as influences that can change from one country to the next. Culture and language can be different within countries as well as between countries (although culture also can be seen as the overriding influence, both internally and externally, in international organizations). Activism and media systems are the variables that can influence practices within borders, but also can transcend borders and precipitate global programming and preparedness. All of these variables are potential factors in the organization, so the multinational must be prepared to respond to these environmental factors at any given time.





**Figure 4:** Model of multinational public relations excellence, indicating factors affecting excellence and the organization and flow of public relations management within the multinational organization.

Within the top square that depicts the multinational organization are the primary characteristics and philosophies that foster effective public relations. These worldviews typically are established by the dominant coalition at headquarters, so this square represents headquarters, or the home country office. Because virtually everything begins with the dominant coalition, that is listed at the top of the square. The "symmetrical" values such as two-way communication, participation, and flexibility appear just below the dominant coalition, to represent the fundamental worldviews needed for effective public relations to occur. These are organizational worldviews, not those of the public relations department -- although the two often are intertwined.

The boxes on the left side under the multinational square represent the line management structure that emanates from headquarters to the host country offices. Each of those offices is headed by a senior executive. Whether that person is called general manager, vice president, or something else does not matter. The point is that this is the person given responsibility over the activities in that particular office.

The host country executives should be responsible for extending the "open-systems" environment and symmetrical philosophies of the dominant coalition at headquarters. Also included in this "open" posture is what a senior international consultant and colleague of mine, Barbara Burns, calls "dual responsibility" over public relations. In other words, the local executive must oversee public relations activities, but should not be solely responsible for these activities. Instead, the responsibility should be shared with a local public relations officer who also reports back to headquarters -- and thus a headquarters public relations unit also can maintain some responsibility over local

public relations, shared with the senior executive from the host country office.

To the right of the boxes indicating line management are those that represent the integrated public relations organization. The international unit is directed by a senior public relations practitioner at headquarters, who is an integral part of the dominant coalition and ensures that all public relations goals, strategies, and activities are aligned with the mission and goals of the multinational organization. This suggests that local strategies and activities might appear different from those of headquarters, based on the local variables for carrying out such programs. However, all of those activities are intended to support the mission of the organization, rather than conflict with that mission as often happens when local units are left alone in their planning and activities.

Most large multinationals probably would have regional offices, as well. Although not depicted in this model, the structure for such regional units would look the same as that of the local units. A public relations officer in the regional unit would cooperate closely with the regional executive and likely would serve as an advisor to host country public relations personnel. However, the regional public relations officer's main reporting relationship would be to the public relations unit at headquarters, in order to maintain consistency in identity and reputation throughout the organization.

The intent of this model was not to be all-inclusive; other researchers no doubt would think of additional items to add to it. Rather, the model was intended to show as simply as possible the normative conclusions of this study, and to highlight the ideal manner for organizing a public relations program in a multinational entity. As mentioned in the eighth proposition, flexibility is a critical component of international public



relations. Therefore, circumstances could arise that would necessitate adaptations to the model. Some organizations, for example, may not allow for an integrated public relations program, choosing instead to have public relations officers report directly to their local unit managers. In this case, the public relations professionals must work within the selected structure to ensure consistent public relations. However, in circumstances like these, the ideal programming of international public relations begins to break down, and the organization opens itself up to future public relations problems.

### **Recommendations for Practice within the Multinational**

This study attempted to emulate the Excellence Study in providing not only a theoretical framework but also practical recommendations on how organizations can operate an effective public relations program. As one who has attempted to conduct public relations in a multinational organization, I realized quickly that there were few written suggestions to guide international practitioners in organizing such a program. The next few pages attempt to overcome this dearth of information by offering some guidelines for practice based on the theoretical constructs of this study.

The recommendations will address the balance of central and local activities first. Following that discussion will be more suggestions for effective multinational public relations, based on the conceptualizations to the study and its resulting data.

### **Balancing Global and Local Public Relations**

Early in this study, I presented the need for balancing global imperatives of a multinational entity with local actions that respond directly to its publics. The following question was raised: If there were a balance of programming at the global and the local



levels, what type of activities would be performed centrally and what would be done in host countries? Perhaps the data obtained from the Delphi study could now suggest some answers to this question.

At headquarters, the public relations activities would be centered on aligning overall public relations strategies with organizational missions and goals. The headquarters unit also would establish training and oversight mechanisms to ensure that these goals were accomplished throughout the multinational structure. Central activities thus might include the following:

- \* Work with senior management to establish a pervading organizational philosophy of two-way communication that fosters mutual respect of, and mutual benefits with, internal and external publics.
- \* Working with senior management to ensure that managers and employees throughout the world are allowed to participate in decisions and activities that positively affect the reputation and long-term success of the organization.
- \* Ensuring that public relations is integrated worldwide, coordinating common goals of preserving and supporting the organizational reputation.
- \* Establishing programs wherein public relations cooperates closely with, but does not work under, allied departments such as marketing, organizational development, legal, or manufacturing, as well as cooperating with local unit managers.
- \* Ensuring that public relations managers are included in the dominant coalitions of each organizational unit, scanning the unit's environment for potential problems and opportunities so that decisions with public relations implications may be made proactively rather than reactively.
- \* Establishing and implementing training programs so that public relations practitioners throughout the world can understand organizational missions, public relations goals, and common public relations themes and activities.

- \* Fostering two-way communication within the integrated public relations unit, so that ideas and problems can be shared among the practitioners and all multicultural perspectives can be included in the decision-making processes.
- \* Establishing and coordinating training programs for departmental and local unit managers so that they can understand the importance of preserving reputation through two-way symmetrical communication, respect for publics, and relationship building with those publics.
- \* Helping to enact the philosophy of representative diversity, so that the organization can fully understand and communicate with the varying cultures represented within the international group of employees and external publics.
- \* Establishing broad guidelines on public relations activities such as research and identification of publics, social responsibility, philanthropy, relationship-building, media relations, issues management, and crisis communication.
- \* Establishing monitoring and accountability programs to ensure minimal adherence to the guidelines and standards just proposed.
- \* Ensuring that these guidelines and standards are flexible enough to allow for needed local adaptations and to foster an environment of respect, negotiation and compromise when exceptions to these guidelines are appropriate.

Public relations officers in host countries also would be responsible for setting strategies that satisfy local needs. But these strategies would need to be aligned with global strategies, to ensure worldwide consistency in the identity and reputation of the organization. For the most part, the local practitioner would develop and carry out public relations tasks that help the organization achieve its goals within the local environment. A listing of the local functions therefore would include:

- \* Setting up public relations programs that are appropriate to the particular country's level of development, respond to its political situation, and are conducive to the local cultural mores.
- \* Establishing local scanning and research mechanisms that identify publics and potential publics and that monitor issues that may arise from some of these activist organizations.



- \* Developing and implementing programs that foster two-way communication with the various publics in the organization's environment, such as media, government officials, industry leaders, chambers of commerce, non-government organizations and other interest groups, and that, as much as possible, seek mutual benefits with those publics.
- \* Ensuring that any communication messages emanating from headquarters are adapted into appropriate local languages and cultural sensitivities.
- \* Working with the headquarters public relations unit to establish feedback and mechanisms for sharing ideas between the local office, headquarters, and other host country offices.
- \* Advising the local senior manager on decisions he or she makes that have public relations implications.
- \* Assisting with the training necessary for the local senior executive to understand the goals and missions of public relations in the organization.
- \* Establishing programs that help local publics understand the mission and goals of the organization and that reduce possible skepticisms or hostilities directed toward the multinational.
- \* Helping the headquarters public relations unit on a reciprocal basis to understand the needs, desires, skepticisms or hostilities of local publics, so as to make decisions that will assist the local unit in providing appropriate products and services to the local marketplace.

#### Additional Practical Implications

Along with offering greater understanding of the varying roles of headquarters and local public relations units, the conceptualization and data from the study brought out additional implications for multinational public relations. These are listed below:

1. Better training for public relations practitioners throughout the world is the essential core to this entire framework of effectiveness.

The panelists joined scholars who have previously written on this subject to suggest that practitioners currently are underqualified to perform effectively in the

complex international arena (Fitzpatrick & Whillock, 1993; Pratt & Ogbondah, 1996). Without qualified practitioners, the remainder of the conclusions and recommendations for this study become irrelevant from a practical standpoint -- multinational organizations could not hope for effective public relations, at least in the near future. Normatively, the recommendation still holds.

2. The training for international specialists in a multinational should be different from that obtained by local practitioners.

Although the panelists could not agree on what type of training is needed, it may be presumed that the training would differ significantly between those who practice at the local level and those in the international arena. Local practitioners would need to possess some of the fundamental qualifications pointed out in the sixth proposition: an understanding of basic principles of research, strategic planning, and other core elements of the field. They also should fully comprehend the nuances of language, culture, politics, and media systems in their particular countries. In addition, they would have to be well versed in the implementation tactics of the country in which they practice -- whatever tactics prevail. In other words, they must certainly be natives.

International communicators would need highly specialized skills to successfully operate in a global environment. They would be interacting in a variety of cultures and unfamiliar situations, and mediating between diverse cultural perspectives, breaking down stereotypes, and building cultural bridges (Kanter, 1995; Maddox, 1993). These character traits are parallel to the "third-culture" mentality proposed by several intercultural scholars (Casmir, 1993; Ellingsworth, 1977; Featherstone, 1990), but they



also offer the unique talents of boundary spanning, sensitivity to publics, and other characteristics that are essential for the public relations practitioner.

Additional logistical skills needed to practice public relations internationally, as proposed in one of the statements for Proposition Six, would include strategic planning on a global scale, cross-cultural management, research design, implementation, and analysis and similar expertise most likely learned at the post-graduate level. More critical expertise would be a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of international issues, perspectives, and cultures. (John Reed, a preeminent international practitioner, has commented to me that the most important training for an international specialist is cultural anthropology.) Additional experience in the various functions of public relations, such as public affairs, issues and crisis management, community relations, investor relations, and media relations also would be important.

Despite this need for comprehensive training, Vogl and Sinclair (1996) argued: "Very few top [public relations] executives at the largest U.S. multinationals are able to demonstrate knowledge and experience with regard to global issues ... and strategies" (p. 169). Many senior public relations executives in multinational organizations rarely travel abroad to strengthen their public relations networks, and even less frequently engage in face-to-face discussions with senior management in the host countries about building public relations expertise. Therefore, the expertise Vogl and Sinclair (and other experts in the field) believe is specifically necessary for international public relations specialists will become increasingly demanded at progressive multinational organizations.



3. To set the proper environment for effective public relations, the multinational should be moving toward the "transnational" stage of evolutionary development suggested by Adler (1997), or the similar "cosmopolitan" approach proposed by Kanter (1995).

Adler (1997) illustrated the maturation of an organization as an evolution through four phases: domestic, multidomestic, multinational, and transnational or global. The multidomestic approach emphasizes cultural factors to the point that each local unit is given complete autonomy to run its operations according to the needs of the local market. This perhaps reflects not so much a sensitivity to cultures, but rather a complete ignorance and fear of international processes that results from being new to the global mix. In the multinational phase, cultural factors decline in importance and are replaced by a global, "one least-cost" way of marketing products. In other words, economies of scale produce highly globalized, "one-size-fits-all" thinking.

The earlier phases of evolution certainly would have an effect on how public relations is practiced in the multinational organization. In the multidomestic phase, where the local unit has complete autonomy, the organization would leave all operational decisions to the local unit manager. Whether this person would even hire a public relations manager would depend on his or her perception of the relative importance of the function. The person hired, and the tasks required, also would depend on the senior manager's understanding. If he or she saw it as unimportant, then no public relations would exist; if she or he viewed it as a support for marketing, then it most likely would become a tactical role, with a poorly qualified person in the position. In the multinational phase, with pricing being the overriding factor, any public relations staff

undoubtedly would be relegated to marketing support with little concern even for local market audience needs, much less the potential impact of dissatisfied local publics.

This evolution as described thus sheds some light on the global vs. local debate discussed earlier in this dissertation. Those on the local side of the equation would line up with the multidomestic phase. Culture becomes extremely important, and thus so does meeting local cultural needs. But the organization would lose control over anything that can transcend boundaries, including some public relations issues. The global side of the argument allies with the multinational phase and coincides with those who believe global advertising and marketing campaigns can be successful. In this phase, both the global publics and the possible transnational publics are completely ignored, unless they are seen as willing to buy globally homogeneous products.

The final evolutionary stage suggested by Adler (1997), the transnational phase, seems to offer the best prospect for melding appropriate intercultural management techniques with effective public relations as defined in this study. This approach combines the best globalized thinking with the acknowledgement that culture needs are different and highly sensitive. Adler illustrated it this way:

Successful global firms competing under transnational dynamics need to understand their potential clients' needs, no matter where in the world the clients live. They then need to quickly translate these worldwide client needs into products and services, produce those products and services on a timely and least-cost basis, and then deliver them to clients in a culturally acceptable fashion for each of the national and ethnic communities involved (p. 9).



Kanter (1995) also recognized the value of the transnational worldview, although she referred to organizations that adopt this philosophy as "cosmopolitans." She suggested that only a few entities are progressive enough to effectively implement this mindset today. Those that do so hire the brightest and most talented people around the world and use their ideas to effect multicultural perspectives for all of their decisions. Thus, the thinking is globalized, but it arises from a variety of cultural perspectives -- as opposed to the one, home-country cultural mindset that dominates decisions in most organizations. For example, one can walk into the headquarters of many multinational entities today and see a management team that looks awfully home-grown. But a transnational organization would have a highly diverse, and even multinational, team of individuals sitting in managerial chairs at headquarters.

Harris and Moran (1991) explained transnational development as the movement from an ethnocentric to a geocentric approach to management. Maddox (1993) claimed that ethnocentric postures still dominate most multinationals today. In the more advanced geocentric approach, however, the transnational becomes "an increasingly complex, interdependent organization" that constantly seeks a "collaborative approach between and among headquarters/subsidiaries." The organization "uses standards for evaluation and control that are both universal and local," and "international and local executives [are] rewarded for reaching both local and worldwide objectives" (p. 15).

The transnational organization carries several opportunities for public relations. First, management in this structure acknowledges cultural diversity; thus, it would be more likely to develop mechanisms for scanning the opinions and attitudes of that

eclectic cultural environment. Second, the transnational tends to balance its global mission and goals with local implementation. As a result, its management would be more likely to recognize the importance of two-way communication between home and host units and their publics. This would necessitate more global teamwork between public relations staff members around the world, which should foster a group of practitioners who are well versed in the processes that are considered more effective for public relations (Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, 1995).

The final advantage for public relations in the transnational is related to the cross-cultural nature of the management team that would be in place. Although this factor generally is seen as a positive by comparative management experts (Kanter, 1995), the integration of such a highly diverse team would require skilled communication to build the necessary cultural bridges that help such an organization succeed (Maddox, 1993). This brings up the next recommendation, as follows.

4. Within the cosmopolitan organization, public relations practitioners should be prepared to perform the crucial function of "cultural interpreter/integrator."

The need for cultural integrators in multinational organizations was proposed by Maddox (1993), and later by Kanter (1995). The reason should be apparent in the nature of the transnational organization as just described. When an entity pulls together staff members from all over the world and uses their combined expertise for decision making that will be broadly accepted, it is emphasizing diversity in its ultimate form. And the fundamental meaning of diversity is "difference" (Robbins, 1996, p. 44). Many organizations, however, view these normal human variations as a stigma to be curtailed



as much as possible. In fact, managers who recognize cultural differences in their organizations often are labelled as "prejudiced, racist, sexist, ethnocentric, and unprofessional" (Adler, 1997, p. 98). More often than not, the label describes the labeller more than the one being stereotyped.

In the successful global entity, cultural differences are not something to be stifled, but celebrated and unfettered (Banks, 1995; Kanter, 1995). Cosmopolitan managers understand that cultural differences either can undermine intended goals or foster mutual growth and cooperation. Harris and Moran (1991) alluded to the latter result as the development of "cultural synergy." They explained that cultural synergy is separate parts functioning together to create a greater whole and to achieve a common goal .... [Synergy] emphasizes similarities and common concerns, integrating differences to enrich human activities and systems. By combining the best in varied cultures and seeking the widest input, multiple effects and complex solutions can result (p. 11).

However, this synergy is difficult to achieve even in the most cosmopolitan organizations. Adler (1997) cited an executive who said, "I have been involved in many situations over the years, but I can't think of one made easier because it involved more than one culture." Another added, "I can think of no situation ... where managing ordinary business became easier or more effective because it involved people from more than one culture" (p. 99). In fact, some scholars noted that intercultural interactions often emphasize differences rather than similarities between participants and engender misunderstandings, more prejudice, and less cooperation than existed before the



interactions occurred (Adler & Doktor, 1986). This makes cultural integration in an organization particularly daunting. But, in the transnational entity that stakes its success on such interactions, this process becomes all-important.

Maddox (1993) and Kanter (1995) both have proposed a new function in multinational organizations, called the cultural integrator. The integration role was conceived for domestic organizations by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) three decades ago, but it has become more important as entities have gone international. Maddox explained:

The increasingly dynamic nature of organizations and the many foreign environments in which they operate has created a situation so complex that even highly capable general and functional managers must be given specialized functional help in dealing with the cultural issues that impinge on their decisions (p. 38).

So, if cultural integrators are needed in multinational organizations, what type of individual would assume these roles? Of course, neither of the proponents of the cultural integrator role had public relations in mind. Kanter (1995) apparently was thinking generally of individuals who possess the cosmopolitan mindset, who promote the global over the local but still understand the need to balance local interests. Maddox (1993) also valued the "third-culture" mentality but emphasized those who have "necessary levels of cultural awareness" (p. 51).

Even if Kanter (1995) and Maddox (1993) were not thinking about public relations, strong parallels to their arguments already have surfaced within the research

domain embodied in the Excellence study and in the propositions to this study. In a study conducted among public relations practitioners in Greece, Lyra found evidence of the cultural integrator role in their activities. Lyra's study is reported in an article by J. Grunig, L. Grunig, Sriramesh, Huang, and Lyra (1995).

Kanter referred to the integrator role as "the most potent mechanism" in the multinational organization "to build relationships that reduce tensions" (p. 80). Maddox said these integrators "must ensure that all decisions and actions of the [entity] in and affecting foreign societies are compatible with those societies' cultures" (p. 38). He also positioned communication as one of the most important skills for this role, except that "the cultural integrator's communication job is made more difficult ... by virtue of being engaged in cross-cultural communicating on multicultural issues" (p.90).

Building relationships is the core process of public relations, as discussed in the first two chapters. Communication also has been equated to public relations (J. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Sriramesh & White, 1992). And Maddox' assertion about ensuring cultural compatibilities is wholly consistent with the critical public relations tasks of environmental scanning proposed by the Excellence scholars (White & Dozier, 1992). Another important element in strategic public relations is boundary spanning, the task of mediating between the organization and its publics (White & Dozier, 1992). This role would be similar to the cultural integrator, in that the person needs to be sensitive to local issues and publics (by communicating with local public relations resources), convey their needs and concerns to management, and ensure that managers around the world break down multicultural communication barriers both internally and externally.



5. Integration of the public relations function in the multinational requires the values of interaction implied in the two-way symmetrical model.

The paradigm of interactive public relations was proposed by Banks (1995) in his book, Multicultural Public Relations. He argued that the traditional, tactical form of public relations arises from a management worldview that one-way communication is sufficient -- that the organization does not need to monitor activities of publics or listen to them to build mutual understanding. This worldview also tends to construct publics as "the enemy," with whom the organization does not wish to communicate until it has to do so. The combination of this enemy mentality and one-way communication philosophy places organizations into situations where they are surprised by what their publics do to create issues and problems. This is a "reactive" mode to issues and publics.

To counter the reactive mentality of traditional public relations, scholars in the field and in issues management have called for "proactive" public relations. The proactive stance is an attempt to find publics long before the publics begin to pressure an organization, and to persuade them to see things from the perspective of the organization. This view is far better than the reactive position, because supposedly it gives organizations more control over their publics (Banks, 1995). The proactive view also is supported by the Excellence scholars, who advocate the value of scanning for issues and opinions so that the organization can identify and respond to publics who foster those issues in their earliest stages. Through these proactive strategies, the organization can avoid or reduce the effects of problems and maintain its profit margins (J. Grunig, 1992b). L. Grunig (1992b) stated that "proactive programs ... are vital in the

1990s, largely as a result of the environmental, consumer, and feminist movements of the last several decades" (p. 506).

Post and Kelley (1988) argued that neither reactive nor proactive public relations build beneficial relationships with publics. As noted in chapter two, one reason is that publics are gaining more influence and now are able to contend with organizations on equally powerful footing. Therefore, organizations must recognize their interdependence with these publics. Rather than being reactive or proactive (stances that would be considered asymmetrical), the more successful organizations will be "interactive" with their publics. Post and Kelley (1988) explained, "a responsive organization will tend, over time, toward an interactive approach toward the stakeholders in its ... environment. That is, dialogue becomes the key to an interactive approach" (p. 347). Banks (1995) later argued that interactive public relations is the essential foundation for relationships between organizations and their publics.

This interactive approach fuses together the managerial and relational aspects of public relations and is consistent with the values of two-way symmetrical communication embodied in the Excellence model. Like their proactive counterparts, interactive public relations managers must scan their environment frequently to identify publics and potential publics, and to monitor the evolution of issues. They still must be responsible for all communication programs with both internal and external audiences. But instead of doing this for defensive purposes that turn out reactionary in the long run, they are emphasizing relationships with their publics. These relationships are based on interdependence and respect for the rights and values of their publics, not on conflict or

control. Also, as Wilson (1996) illustrated, publics are not selected on their current influence or interactions with organizations -- rather, any and all publics are viewed as having inherent worth (as in the case of the Maori of New Zealand mentioned by one of the panelists in this study).

The international arena offers great potential for bringing the interactive paradigm to the forefront of public relations. As noted several times, the myriad dynamics of the international environment tend to intensify the potential problems and opportunities of relationship building. Bringing together the diverse cultural groupings within a multinational structure requires delicate balancing of headquarters-based and host country opinions. Although the expenses and time constraints of travel render face-to-face communication in the multinational more difficult than any other organizational setting, such internal communication is much more important in this structure (Adler, 1997). Also, with the growing power of non-government organizations and other activist groups that transcend national borders, symmetrical communication moves from a normative ideal to a practical imperative in the global environment.

The panelists clearly agreed that highly interactive, two-way communication is critical if the multinational is to be effective. Top-down, authoritarian philosophies are doomed to fail because they ignore the realities of local needs and opinions. At best, asymmetrical management will lead to internal disloyalties, decaying productivity, and external resentment in the host countries. At worst, this worldview will be a catalyst for internal rebellions, activist pressures, government intervention, and, ultimately, evaporation of the local markets as the problems that arise there overwhelm the



traditional pursuits of the multinational.

An effective public relations program should foster highly sensitive cooperation between local practitioners and those at headquarters. Host country practitioners in many ways become the eyes and ears of the multinational, reporting through the ranks about potential issues that are arising within and outside of the organization. This reporting arrangement will occur, however, only if senior executives in the local offices and at headquarters foster it through visible support. It will be effective only if there is mutual trust between the practitioners in host countries and at headquarters.

If this scenario works well in the multinational, it becomes possible for public relations to utilize the best and brightest multicultural talents from all over the world in a highly interactive scanning and planning process. They will have the freedom to frequently communicate, and they will gain the desire to do so because they speak the same language of public relations. The ideal situation for ensuring this state would be to transfer all public relations people back and forth between local offices and headquarters (or regional offices, if such exist). This mode of transferring multicultural personnel was suggested by Kanter (1995) as basic to the success of the cosmopolitan organization.

6. Multinational public relations should be directed from inside the organization, instead of relinquishing all control to outside public relations agencies.

The use of outside resources was discussed in second-round statements for the fourth and eighth propositions, and the results were inconclusive. The conceptualization phase, however, indicated that the organization loses control of public relations when all strategies and activities are completely turned over to the global agencies or agency

networks. As Repper (1992) explained after many years of working with agencies, "Calling in outside experts and consultants [to perform public relations] helped to establish credibility with management but seldom ensured better results" (p. 111).

It is becoming apparent to authors who look specifically at international public relations that the program needs to be maintained by someone who works within the organization. Unlike outside agency personnel, this person would fully understand the interests and goals of the organization, its public relations needs, and the day-to-day changes that take place in a dynamic international entity. It is difficult for outside agencies to maintain this institutional knowledge, because they are not part of the daily operations of the organization. Agencies also are notorious for high rates of personnel turnover, which necessitates a constant (and often expensive) education process for the multinational client. However, if no one sits in the organization to understand the connection between the public relations goals and the purpose of the agency, who would train the agency to properly serve its purpose?

Vogl and Sinclair (1996) explained that, despite the argument for internal management of public relations, multinationals today tend to give international communication only token acknowledgement. They relinquish all local public relations activities to foreign subsidiaries, "who in turn assign these responsibilities to local firms -- frequently advertising agencies." They argued, however, that "while it is tempting to farm-out all manner of public relations and advertising functions through foreign subsidiaries, this results in significant lack of central knowledge and control" (p. 169). The consequence is that organizations march forward with their own agendas while



failing to understand what is happening with publics in their environments. Thus, the dominant home-country mindset is perpetuated, while the world around them is moving into a competitive global era that demands more globalized public relations.

Another problem that surfaces when no one is present to manage public relations internally is that agency relationships and activities become subservient to the marketing mindset. This mindset usually prevails when the organization retains advertising agencies, as Vogl and Sinclair (1996) suggested. When this happens, the agencies concentrate on sending one-way messages over mass media to potential consumers. All other critical stakeholders pointed out by Esman (1972) and by J. Grunig and Repper (1992) are ignored, and face-to-face interaction also is curtailed because it is difficult for the agencies to obtain commissions from such communication. The public relations goals of scanning and relationship building are sacrificed, and the organization becomes vulnerable to long-term damage from its publics.

This is not to argue that public relations agencies should be avoided in a multinational program. As in the domestic context, there is a place for agencies; otherwise, they would not exist. Local agencies can be particularly useful when staffing resources in the host country offices are not sufficient, or there is insufficient budget for high-level personnel. They also can be helpful in extending local contacts that may not be developed by the multinational office, or in assisting with large scale events or programs that are beyond the resources of the internal staff.

There are a variety of global public relations firms or global agency networks headquartered around the world that provide strategic counseling to multinationals.

These global agencies or networks can assist the multinational with certain programs or large issues that transcend borders, as mentioned previously. They also can be costly, however, and they still need direction on internal missions, organizational cultures, public relations goals, and other important elements of the practice from someone inside the organization who understands it well (Vogl & Sinclair, 1996).

7. All of these recommendations, if they are to be realized, require the support of the dominant coalition at all levels.

The first recommendation listed training as a prerequisite for this framework of excellence in international public relations. Without proper training, it was argued, none of the other suggestions would make any difference. The same can be said about this final recommendation; if there is no management support for the principles of public relations effectiveness, even the most well conceived programs will fail.

Management support is well established as one of the strongest indicators of successful public relations in a domestic context. For example, J. Grunig (1992b) proposed that, in the end,

organizations behave in the way they do -- in our case they choose the public relations programs they do -- because the people who have power in an organization choose that behavior. Organizations frequently do not choose the most rational type of communication behavior for their environment because the dominant coalition does not make a rational decision (p. 23).

Where management does support public relations, there is a greater chance for an excellent program to be put into place.

The need for management support seems even more important in the global realm than in domestic operations. In the first place, dominant coalitions can exist in the multinational both at headquarters and in the host countries. For public relations to succeed in such a situation requires the support of management at both levels. As the panel noted, if solid support is not established and clearly shown by headquarters executives, it becomes easy for local managers to eliminate or reduce the critical elements that help public relations be effective in the local units.

However, executive support for public relations still seems like a distant dream in today's typical multinational, for a number of reasons. First, the fact that multinationals emphasize the marketing support roles rather than strategic public relations (L. Grunig, 1992a) shows that entrenched worldviews still need to be changed. Second, as Vogl and Sinclair (1996) pointed out, it seems that multinationals do not wish to respond to the growing need for international public relations. Their senior managers rarely travel outside of their comfortable headquarters offices, and often they hand over control of their international programs to local subsidiaries. Finally, the sheer complexity of having many more managers in the multinational structure, with varying cultural backgrounds and managerial perspectives, will make the task of creating effective public relations much more difficult to achieve than it would be in domestic organizations.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

With the apparent confirmation of the propositions, and with the model developed from these propositions, this study should provide an introductory theoretical framework for effective public relations in the multinational organization. This



normative framework not only supplies guidelines for more effective practice, as just illustrated, but also should create a foundation for future research in "international public relations" as characterized by Culbertson (1996). The study more clearly explains the generic and specific concepts and extends the principles of the Excellence study further into the international arena. As a result of this framework, the study should contribute to the growing body of knowledge in public relations.

In addition to the practical implications of the study, the data obtained from the propositions that did not generate consensus have suggested opportunities for future research. These are explained as follows.

The first possibility relates to more confirmation of this study. Because the expert panel included only 23 around the world, a larger panel could be used to gain greater universal confirmability of the results. Specifically, more panel members from each country would indicate the degree to which that country was accurately represented in this study. Another examination with a broader sampling of respondents could test just the declarative statements and the attached Likert scales. This broader sampling could provide greater confirmability of the second round results. Another study could perhaps add more variables to the framework -- especially specific variables -- and test them to see what additional influences have an impact on local public relations practices.

Several future research possibilities also came from responses to the declarative statements. These potential research areas include:

1. Additional studies on how the multinational organization views and practices social responsibility (actual behaviors) in its home countries vs. its host countries, as well

as testing differences in public perceptions (the perceived behaviors) in home-and-host countries toward its socially responsible behaviors in each location.

2. Similar to the first possibility, except directed internally, a study comparing how employees in host countries feel the multinational treats them vs. how home-country employees and expatriots are treated.

3. Additional studies (several could be done) seeking more feedback on whether universal training of public relations practitioners is possible or desirable, and, if so, what would be considered as fundamental universal elements of public relations that could be incorporated into the training.

4. An examination of senior executives of multinational subsidiaries to determine their understanding of public relations -- something that was strongly questioned by the panelists. (Perhaps some of the same instruments that were used with senior executives in the Excellence study would provide some comparative measurements for this issue, or perhaps they could be given the same declarative statements that were given to the panelists in this instrument, and have the results compared.)

5. Investigations into how multinationals use public relations agencies, and whether those uses compare favorably with the principles of effective multinational public relations. Do most multinationals use global agencies or global networks, or do they mostly use local agencies? Do they use public relations or advertising agencies? Are their uses centered on public relations goals or marketing goals, or both? Do they have someone in-house to direct agency efforts at both the local and international levels? Are agencies helping to perform strategic roles, or just technical roles? And, most



importantly, do they contribute to effective public relations?

6. A study of where public relations functions are located in the multinational -- if they exist at all. Does a senior practitioner report to the senior executive or to another functional executive such as marketing or legal? Does an international public relations program report to the senior public relations executive, or are the two separated? Do local practitioners report to their senior managers, or is there some reporting relationship to a public relations (or even marketing) unit at headquarters? In other words, is integration of public relations practiced in today's multinationals, or is it strictly an ideal?

7. What about interaction of public relations personnel in the multinational organization? Is there an overriding concept of global teamwork among the practitioners, or do the practitioners worry only about their own territories? Do in-house practitioners and agencies exchange information and ideas, or are they left to their own devices and intuition on all issues?

As discussed earlier in this report, significant research into international public relations is in its most preliminary stages. As can be seen by these categories, a tremendous amount of research can still be done. Even this study probably could generate two or three times as many research possibilities as were mentioned here. It is hoped that this listing will provide a good starting point for some of that essential work.

### **Limitations to the Study**

Although the study should provide a foundation for future practice and examinations of international public relations, the study also had limitations that must be noted if the readers are to objectively interpret the results. Some of these limitations

were as follows:

1. The cross-cultural nature of this study could have subjected it to all types of error. As Rieger and Wong-Rieger (1988) explained, error is a common problem in all international studies -- errors in language interpretations by both the participants and the researcher when second languages are involved, differences in cultural interpretations of the same situations, and such. This study certainly was no exception. All but one of the participants seemed to speak and understand English well, and I offered varying avenues for giving responses to meet their own comfort levels. Nevertheless, differing perceptions and interpretations still could have contaminated the results to some degree.
2. Related to this problem, potential differences in interpreting one fundamental element of the study could have skewed the data. One of the participants in the pilot pointed out that Europeans tend to view the term "symmetrical communication" differently than Americans. I attempted to correct that concern by offering definitions of the term and other potentially ambiguous concepts used in the study, but there still may have been confusion or differing interpretations of the symmetrical concept, as well as other fundamental ideas.
3. The size of the panel probably was too small for such an extensive study. Linstone and Turoff (1975) proposed that in a Delphi, panel size does not matter as much as the expertise or input offered. Other commentators noted that Delphi panels can range from as few as seven to hundreds of people (Delbecq et al., 1975; Pill, 1971; Tersine & Riggs, 1976). However, intuition tells me that for a study seeking a worldwide range of opinions, probably more than 23 would have been highly



appropriate. Not only was the number itself quite small, but it is easy to question whether one or two people in a given country represent the breadth of understanding or opinions that may exist there.

A qualitative study should not be intended to obtain a representative sampling of respondents. In the case of international public relations, as Dr. J. Grunig suggested to me, such a "representative" group probably does not exist. However, to assess the confirmability of this study, as suggested in Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for effective qualitative studies, I believe a much larger panel would have been valuable.

4. In addition to potential size limitations, the composition of the committee may have been problematic. I had utilized a snowball sampling procedure in an attempt to find "experts" among both the scholarly and practitioner ranks so that I could compare their opinions about the propositions. This task proved to be unfruitful, because almost no real differences surfaced for any of the propositions.

The concern is in the selection of experts, for two reasons. First, they were all acquaintances of mine or of someone else (as is usually the case in a snowball sampling). Could the responses of the panelists therefore have been biased by the very fact that many of them knew me or my committee members and previously had been exposed to many of the principles of the Excellence study? Also, I found through the first round responses that some of the scholars, particularly, were well acquainted with international communication issues but were not adequately versed in public relations. One respondent, for example, continually referred to the local office as the "bureau," as in news bureau, obviously reflecting his journalistic background. These problems could



have introduced inaccuracies into the results.

5. The final limitation was my own potential biases. Agar (1986) suggested that bias is possible in any form of research, but is particularly salient to the qualitative project. Any researcher, of course, comes into a project with his or her own perceptions. Mine perhaps came from the fact that I practiced international public relations for six years while conducting this study. I personally had seen the pains and pitfalls of implementing public relations in a multinational organization, which no doubt affected my own beliefs about what may or may not be appropriate. Many of those beliefs were centered on the propositions to this study. Also, because I completed the study in isolation from scholarly companions, I had to perform the interpretation phases on my own rather than using a committee as suggested by certain Delphi experts (Delbecq et al., 1975). Therefore, it is possible that my own experiences could have biased my instruments and interpretations.

Recognizing the possibility of bias, I tried to be as objective as possible in formulating my instruments and interpretations. For example, in the second instrument I purposefully included dissenting opinions that I disagreed with, to offer panelists a chance to respond to both sides of each issue. Also, some of the procedures I used in the interpretation process, such as reviewing responses without knowing their sources, perhaps assisted in maintaining objectivity. Whether these actions were enough to offer panelists all possible avenues for dissent and to retain objectivity is not really possible to know until future research projects are conducted.

### **Final Words, or -- Chaos?**

One final note. Or, call it my last disclaimer, if that is appropriate. After more than 300 pages of writing and a learning pursuit that has taken nine years to complete, what I say next may seem strange. But the comments represent an attempt to honestly assess this study and to add some post mortems. I also want to make sure my thinking is not misinterpreted by any future researchers, Ph.D. students or otherwise, who take this dissertation off the library shelves, dust it off, and refer to it for subsequent investigations of international public relations.

I have a story. In the true ethnographic tradition that fueled my interest in qualitative research, story telling is appropriate. This is not to imply that this study was an ethnographic project. Rather, it is to justify -- or at least rationalize -- the following story as helping to frame my thinking about the utility of my own study.

Two summers ago, I sat in an outdoor restaurant on the grounds of an old, abandoned castle overlooking the stunning vista of Bled, Slovenia. With me were my wife and two members of my committee -- Drs. James and Larissa Grunig. The second annual International Public Relations Research Symposium had just ended, and we were discussing the people and ideas we had just experienced in the two-day conference.

Although the Grunigs were the obvious "stars" of the symposium, they also suffered considerable critique of the two-way symmetrical worldview of public relations. As the creator of the symmetrical model, James Grunig endured the brunt of the discussion. This was not because the attendees disagreed with the symmetrical model -- to the contrary, the model was cited in almost every paper presented. Rather, the



participants contended that the model was not applicable to "real-world" settings. Some people even suggested that because the model did not apply to actual practice of public relations, perhaps it had not been conceptualized well enough.

I do not agree with the criticisms of the symmetrical model at the Bled conference, nor with those criticisms that have come from other sources. Much of the disapproval has stemmed from practitioners who say that no organization can truly practice symmetrical communications because they would have to relinquish some of their power (and presumably their profits) to their publics. Having practiced for more than a dozen years myself, I argue the opposite: An organization that does not treat its publics with respect and does not engage in dialogue with them honestly and openly will not survive in the long run. Therefore, I think the symmetrical assumptions have great practical application for the field, even with the slight modifications that have subsequently occurred (as shown by Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995).

I also disagree with the criticisms because without those models the public relations field would have had precious little foundation for the research that has been done in the past two decades. I am not alone in that thinking. In a discussion about the various paradigms operating in public relations today, Botan (1993) said, "It may not be an exaggeration to say that Grunig's work over the last 20 years has provided the foundation for there to even be a paradigm struggle in public relations" (p. 109)..

Nevertheless, I remember well the reaction of Dr. Grunig that night at the castle restaurant. He said that it was difficult for him to sit and listen to all of the criticisms of his early model ( even though he had taken the discussions in a highly professional

manner during the conference). Then he said, "be very careful what you produce in your early research. Even if your own thinking about your preliminary research changes over the years, everybody else will cite that early research as though you still believe it. So, you have to live with your early work for a long time."

With that story told, my final comments are this: After this study, after pulling together the propositions on international public relations, after testing them through a variety of scholars and practitioners in public relations around the world, after developing recommendations based on this study, and even after practicing international public relations myself for many years -- after all this, I'm not sure how much merit the study deserves.

Blame chaos theory for my suspicions. Chaos theory does not follow the patterns of traditional science as described by Kuhn (1970), but looks for and even celebrates the "outliers" or the exceptions to the norms. Cottone (1993) stated:

Chaos looks at real world phenomena and sees what really happens in the world. It acknowledges the orderly patterns in disorder, it sees sudden and profound changes, fluctuations, bifurcations, oscillations, and transformations. It ... like nature, is multidynamic, always changing, rearranging (p. 171).

Actually, chaos theory is not so much theory as it is life itself; it is the haphazard state of humankind and the world around them that long predated the human constructions of science. Chaos theory often leads to transformation through the revolutionary thinking of individuals who shatter those norms and point out why they do not fit the holistic cycles of life.

Cottone (1993) suggested that public relations "is poised for new discovery" (p. 172). Public relations desperately needs new discovery. Chaos theory helps the discovery process because it is concerned with global systems, and public relations is becoming global. Also, chaos theory incorporates the entire interdisciplinary realm that is the very nature of public relations. Chaos advocates acknowledge the extreme views that the field must address if it is to benefit a society characterized by dramatic changes and accelerating turbulence (Maddox, 1993), for it is the extremes in society that often foster turbulence and changes. And the unmanageability of public perceptions make public relations an inexact science. As Murphy (1996) stated, "because it emphasizes uncertainty, open-endedness, plurality, and change, chaos theory runs counter to the goal-oriented, certainty-seeking mode which many public relations professionals and their managements are currently trying to refine" (p. 102).

I found Cottone's (1993) article only recently, while sifting through the library yet one more time (Ph.D. candidates understand this obsession). The article caught my attention for two reasons. First, I read about chaos theory long ago and it intrigued me; but, because I read about it in a novel, I never took it seriously until I saw Cottone's article. The second attraction was the author. She doesn't know me, but she is a friend of a good friend. So, I read the article.

In my estimation, Cottone (1993) is absolutely on track. Because public relations, and particularly international public relations, operates in a chaotic environment anyway, it makes sense that chaos theory would be relevant. As she claimed, the field has long needed new researchers who can question the "old guard"



theory building that is out there. She also suggested that this inquisitive group is found within the circle of feminist scholars. I do not question that these scholars have contributed significantly to critical theory in the field but would hope that there is also room for males to contribute to the inquisition.

With my naturally questioning mind, I have harbored many reservations about the study throughout its six year process. The reservations ran the gamut:

1. Even though the theories used for my framework seem to have universal application, is it still possible that they are actually quite ethnocentric and dogmatic?

2. Even though I used an interdisciplinary framework (as encouraged by chaos theory), were the theories from enough disciplines to really cover all of the factors that affect public relations practice?

3. Even though I tested the propositions, was that testing among enough scholars and practitioners in enough countries to reasonably assure their validity, even in a qualitative sense?

4. Even though I tried to be painstaking in my analysis and recommendations, were they actually fraught with my own cultural biases, or sufficiently representative of the expert opinions I solicited?

5. And, in the real world, will these recommendations hold up very long, if they are considered at all?

All of these concerns were so overwhelming that they proved an almost insurmountable psychological barrier for me. Together, they caused procrastination right up to the deadline for completing the dissertation (and brought me perilously close to not

completing it, after all of this time and effort). After all, I thought, can a dissertation with this many problems be good enough for approval or publication?

I think the answers to the questions just raised are yes, there is still some ethnocentrism in my framework, despite the attempts to prove their universality. No, the study has not invoked sufficient interdisciplinary theories to adequately explain international public relations, because it is impossible for one researcher to examine virtually all of the social science domains that affect the practice. No, my study was not tested with a large enough sample, as explained above in the limitations section. If I were to repeat the study, I would like 100 respondents from at least 30 countries. And no, they probably will not be considered by many practitioners for the same reason many domestic theories are not considered; many practitioners do not even read these works, much less have the theoretical insight to incorporate them. However, if the recommendations are ever incorporated by some organization, they may hold up -- at least until the world changes again.

Nevertheless, the study is completed, and I feel it is valuable to the field for a number of reasons. The first is that, as I have talked with several people from my expert panel, and as I have gone about the world and conversed with practitioners in 21 countries, the topic of my study has always evoked considerable interest. Almost everyone has agreed that the study is needed for the field and encouraged me to keep at it. The second reason the study is valuable is that it appears to be a first of its kind in international public relations. I have not come across anyone who has completed a multi-country examination of what principles make an effective public relations program.



(The closest is a random-sample survey of American practitioners with international responsibilities being conducted by Laura Ralstin, a Ph.D. student at the University of Alabama. I am anxious to see the results of her work.)

As Dr. J. Grunig suggested to me on that cliff above Bled, Slovenia, someone has to start the process. Because the study tests the Excellence variables in many countries, it should help the symmetric/systems domain of public relations research expand further into the international realm (Botan, 1993). Knowing these things, and despite the many doubts that plagued me through the study, I finally plowed ahead to the finish.

So, the study may be important -- even if it just unleashes additional thinking on international public relations over which others can take "pot shots," as they say in the western United States. To review Pauly's (1991) comments in Chapter One, I have "joined the conversation" on international public relations. Whether other researchers like the conclusions or not, they are free to analyze my thinking and produce their own conclusions. If they want to argue whether a universal theory was created here, or even if such a theory is possible, let them. As Leeper (1996) said, "What an ongoing dialogue ensures is that valid exceptions can be made to universal statements, thereby generating new universal statements that recognize those exceptional situations" (p. 141).

I would always welcome any and all additional discussion on this topic. Meanwhile, with some hope, I, too, will continue to analyze the field, and perhaps over the years will revise my own recommendations. I have a passion for international public relations, and passionately hope it can be done right -- whatever right is. If there is such a thing. So, let the conversation continue.

## APPENDIX A

### Delphi Instrument One Cover Letter

July 20, 1994

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

You were recommended by Dr. Hugh Culbertson as an expert on public relations in \_\_\_\_\_ (country) \_\_\_\_\_. We are seeking your valuable contribution to a Delphi study on the practice of public relations in multinational organizations.

Some 40 experts like you, representing more than 25 countries, will be participating in this study. A few excellent studies already have contributed to the small but growing body of knowledge about "international public relations," but each of these studies was conducted mostly in an individual country. As far as we know, this project is a first. It will combine data gathered from many countries into one study on public relations management in the multinational organization.

I am a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Maryland, working with Dr. Jim Grunig and Dr. Larissa Grunig on this study. Together, we have compiled a list of experts whose input would be invaluable. Your name was included on that list.

In the past few years, we have searched the literature in the rapidly growing area of international public relations to determine what scholars and practitioners are saying about it. We found that authors are greatly divided in their views on how international public relations should be practiced. Some say multinationals should control all public relations activities from headquarters, in some sort of globalized effort. Others claim that local culture, political and economic factors are so strong that all public relations must be coordinated locally (with headquarters maintaining a "hands-off" posture). Now there is a growing middle ground: a combination of centralized and local activity that seems to be most likely to foster an excellent international program. If that is true, what is that middle ground? What exactly should be done centrally and what locally? These are questions we are trying to answer.

This study concentrates on theories from the Excellence Model of Public Relations and Communication, developed by a team of researchers under the auspices of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC). We believe these theories may be the proper umbrella for central activities. We would like you to respond to these theories, then would like your input on what constitutes proper local activity. If



Introduction letter, Page 2

you disagree with our assumption that combined central and local activity makes the best program, we would like that input and rationale as well.

Thank you in advance for participating in this important project. You are an extremely busy person, but this should not take a great amount of time. A Delphi study requires at least two "rounds" of data gathering, and perhaps three. In other words, after you respond to the initial set of propositions enclosed here, the data will be analyzed and compiled into one more set of statements to which you again would be asked to respond a few months from now. If you agree to participate in the project, it is critical that you continue with it through both rounds. When the project is completed, we will supply you with the information and theories that we hope will come out in the study.

Enclosed are two documents. One is the study instrument -- the listing of proposals and questions to which we would like your reactions. The second is a summary of the Excellence Study, that may help you better understand the propositions.

Because this study crosses a variety of countries and languages, we will be conducting it in English. We understand that everyone in the study speaks English pretty well. Because it may not be your first language, however, you may have some discomfort in offering your responses. Please don't worry about this. We are offering two methods by which you may participate. You may write responses and fax them or send them back to me. If you are more comfortable speaking the language, feel free to audiotape your responses and send me the tape. I will have it transcribed. If there are any words or phrases in our enclosed document that you do not completely understand (there tends to be a certain amount of jargon), please call or fax me and I will try to explain.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you will participate in this study. My phone number at work is (801) 345-2109. At home it is (801) 225-8784. My work fax number is (801) 345-2199. My address is:

1960 South 50 East  
Orem, Utah 84058  
United States of America

I look forward to working with you. Thanks again.

Sincerely,

Robert I. Wakefield, APR



## APPENDIX B

### Delphi Round One Instrument Packet

#### Research Protocol: How to Proceed with the Responses

Below are several propositions about the management and practice of public relations in a multinational organization. We define such a program as one that has certain coordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that has potential for consequences or results in more than one country. Our assumption is that to be excellent, an international program must have a combination of centralized and localized activity.

The first group of propositions are "generic" variables of excellent public relations practice that should be universal, but with adaptations made according to local politics, cultures, or mores. The second set includes "specific" variables that are the local factors. The propositions are normative, meaning we think this is how multinational public relations should be organized to be excellent.

The scenarios drawn by these propositions may be very different from public relations practice in your country. This is what we need to know. Do you agree with our propositions? If the practice is different from our normative views, in what ways? Are these views possible in your country? If they are not possible, why? Our purpose here is to begin a dialogue of experts that may eventually lead to a theory or theories on international public relations.

To assist us with this study, then, please carefully review these propositions, then respond to them according to your experiences and understanding of public relations in your native land or other countries in which you've practiced. As you look at each proposition, you may ask yourself, or even respond to, the following questions:

- a. Do you agree with the statement?
- b. If you do agree, why? If not, why not?
- c. Is the statement true in every situation you know of, or might there be circumstances which would create the need to adjust the statement?
- d. If circumstances render the need for modification, what adjustments would need to be made to make the statement largely accurate?

Once you have considered these questions, as well as the specific questions included at the bottom of each proposition, please respond to each proposition by supplying your views of how the normative theory may work in your country or how it may have problems. Please try to supply specific examples to support either view. (Note: The XXXXXX's are there only to separate the proposition from the questions we would like you to consider about the proposition.)

You may complete this assignment in writing or by tape recording. Here are the propositions, then, for which we would like your response:

### "Generic" Propositions

- #1: Excellent international public relations is based on a philosophy of two-way symmetrical communication [see definition, p. 7] that pervades the organization *worldwide*. Top management at headquarters and senior managers in each market carry a philosophy of mutual trust, respect for others, and the need for establishing two-way mutual benefits between the organization and all publics -- internal and external -- on whom its success or failure depends. XXXXXX [Is this possible? Is it desirable? Is so, why? If not, why not? More fundamentally, do you see "excellent" public relations and "excellent" international public relations as the same or different? Why, in either case?]
- #2: This two-way symmetrical philosophy will be reflected in the organizational culture and in internal communication styles *worldwide*. Management would respect all employees as important contributors to organizational success and would implement methods that foster participation and two-way symmetrical communication among all of its employees throughout the world. XXXXXX [Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Is this possible in your country? Examples of why or why not.]
- #3: Excellent public relations is a strategic management function working as part of and directly with senior management and the dominant coalition [see def., p. 7], *worldwide*. In an international public relations program, the senior practitioner at headquarters will perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning, counseling with the dominant coalition, and setting communication strategies that support organizational goals. Senior practitioners in each region and country must also perform strategic roles that identify local audiences, build relationships with them, and adapt quickly to changing local conditions. XXXXXX [Do you agree with these statements? Why or why not? Is it possible or desirable in your country?]
- #4: Excellent international public relations is integrated, meaning that *worldwide*, practitioners report to the public relations department at headquarters and work under a single umbrella (as opposed to, for example, public relations in one country under marketing, in another country under human resources, etc.). It is recognized that senior managers in each country are responsible for activities in that country and that the senior practitioner must work closely with that senior manager. But if something negative happens anywhere, headquarters is ultimately responsible. Public relations must be connected worldwide to build consistent programs and respond quickly to problems that arise. A senior practitioner at headquarters must supervise all communication programs, and local practitioners must be trained to carry out the same organizational philosophies, themes and goals. This requires close cooperation and communication between offices and headquarters. XXXXXX [What kind of structure do you normally see in a multinational organization? Is this proposition possible? Do you agree with it? What does this mean when a public relations agency is involved? Examples?]



- #5: An excellent public relations program is not subordinated to marketing, legal, or other organizational departments. In international settings, public relations often is subsumed into marketing and relegated to product publicity roles. When this happens or public relations is placed under another function, the organization loses its ability to identify and build relationships with all of its critical publics (as opposed to just customers). By remaining separate from other functions and building long-term relationships with all stakeholders, public relations can help the organization make money and keep from losing it to costly lawsuits, legislation, etc. XXXXXX [Do you agree that PR in multinationals often supports marketing goals only? Do you agree that PR should be a separate function? Is this possible? What are the potential results of such a situation? Examples?]
- #6: Senior practitioners *all over the world* will be qualified for their positions. They will be trained in public relations, not marketing or another field. They will understand the importance of having integrated public relations worldwide, as well as the importance of advising the senior managers and the dominant coalition. They will be qualified to perform the managerial roles of boundary spanning and counseling, and will value and foster the use of two-way symmetrical communication. However, there certainly would be variations in necessary qualifications directly related to the given culture. XXXXXX [What do you perceive to be adequate qualifications? What might be some of the local variations? Do you agree with the statements we have just made about qualifications? Why or why not?]
- #7: In an excellent multinational organization, hiring and promotional practices would foster diversity by offering equal opportunities to women and "minorities" (those who typically are not accepted in the cultural mainstream) *in every country*. Particularly, the organization's philosophy would be to recruit and promote individuals who are empathic to others and who have ingrained the two-way symmetrical values of respect, cooperation, negotiation, and compromise. XXXXXX [Are these organizational values possible in your country? Do you agree or disagree, and why?]
- #8: Because the organization faces a turbulent, dynamic environment internationally, the public relations program is structured to be flexible and adaptable to that environment, *worldwide*. XXXXXX [What does this mean to you, if anything? What kinds of structures and/or flexible arrangements are possible or most suited to make this happen in an international context? Do outside agencies give a multinational greater or less flexibility?]

#### "Specific" propositions

- #9: A nation's *level of development* will affect the practice of public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will adjust to the particular nation's level of development and develop effective programs of communication to respond to that environment. XXXXXX [Do you agree with this statement? If so, exactly how does development level affect PR, and how does PR adjust? If you don't agree, why not?]

- #10: The *political system* of a given society will influence public relations. A local component of an excellent international public relations program will respond to and build relationships with whatever political entity it faces. XXXXXX [Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? If the political system does affect PR practice in your country, how, and how does PR adjust to it? Are there political systems where public relations cannot build relationships with the government? Examples?]
- #11: An excellent international public relations program will respond to varying indicators of *cultural differences* within and between each country. Cultural indicators [or specific ways of doing things that help distinguish a given culture from another culture], and the way an organization deals with them, become important to the success or failure of the organization in each country. XXXXXX [Do you agree with this statement? What kind of cultural indicators do you see that may affect the practices in your country or of an international program? Is adjustment necessary just on a local level, or at headquarters as well? If so, why? If not, why not? Examples?]
- #12: Because language nuances vary from place to place, an excellent international public relations program will place people in each country who understand those nuances and can deal with them most effectively (as opposed to transplanting expatriates, for example). XXXXXX [Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? If expats are in the local office, how should they be positioned, structurally, in relation to the locals? What about the natives of host countries working at headquarters?]
- #13: The potential for *activism* [defined as action which could include letters, complaints, boycotts, strikes, or even bomb threats, by a pressure group against an organization in an attempt to make the organization change behaviors] makes the international environment particularly turbulent, but the extent and type of activism may vary from society to society. Thus excellent international public relations will contain a component in each country that can scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and build programs to deal with them. The means for accomplishing this may vary from country to country and even within countries. XXXXXX [Do you agree with our definition of activism? Why or why not? Is there evidence of activism in your country? What types do you see? How does this affect organizations in your country, and is the affect on multinationals different from strictly domestic firms? Do you agree that activism is a problem?]
- #14: The *mass media* differ from country to country, with differing degrees of government control and of specialization and localization. Also, because of distance between host countries and organizational headquarters, media coverage can influence the way people think about multinationals. An effective local component of an excellent international program will build relationships with local media and with publics who may have received unrealistic pictures about the multinational organization. XXXXXX [Do you agree with these statements? Why or why not? What types of media are dominant in your country, and how do public relations practitioners interact with them (if they do at all)? What, generally, is the kind of coverage given to multinationals, if any? Examples?]



## What We Mean When We Talk About "International Public Relations"

When we discuss international public relations in these documents, we are referring to "a multinational program that has certain coordination between headquarters and various countries where offices and/or publics are located, and that has potential consequences or results in more than one country." It seems that four important factors must be present for the practice to be called "international public relations." These are:

1. The program must have the potential for publics and consequences that cross national boundaries or that are in a different country than the multinational's headquarters.

Many activities sound international simply because they are on the other side of the ocean (Anderson, 1989). A campaign conducted in Nigeria may sound international to Americans, but it is a domestic program. To be truly international, public relations must build relations with key publics in countries different from the one in which it is headquartered.

2. The public relations activity must carry a global perspective or orientation.

It is essential to have a global perspective, "to see the trees *and* the forest" (Anderson, 1989, p. 414). For public relations to build consistent, long-term relationships with multinational publics, it must have global vision and coordination.

3. The program must have the capacity and flexibility for responding quickly to local audiences in any country.

Traverse-Healy (1991) said "the action" is wherever the organization must deal with its publics. In today's global environment, the focus is moving away from institutionalized mass communication toward speedy, personalized direct response to publics in any given location.

4. The public relations program must be positioned with management and founded on two-way communication.

Two-way communication is a precondition to the very name of "international public relations" (Botan, 1992). Such a requirement is consistent with the accepted definitions of the field explained above. Likewise, the function must be separated from marketing goals and positioned within management circles to be effective for the multinational organization. (This prerequisite distinguishes "international public relations" from "international marketing.")



## **Excellence in Public Relations Management: IABC Excellence Project Summary**

For 10 years, a group has been studying what makes public relations most able to contribute to organizational effectiveness. The study was funded by the Research Foundation of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), and called the Excellence Project because it identified and described characteristics that contribute to excellent public relations.

The Excellence Project began with a review of literature from public relations, management, sociology, psychology, marketing, communication, anthropology, philosophy, and feminist studies. From that review, the team proposed a theory of public relations excellence that was reported in the book, "Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management" (J. Grunig, 1992). The team then developed a set of questionnaires that were administered to more than 300 organizations in the U.S., Canada, and the United Kingdom. In these organizations, the senior public relations person, the chief executive officer, and 20 employees completed questionnaires.

From the study, the team identified 14 characteristics of excellent public relations. These characteristics are consolidated into nine categories and summarized below.

### **Involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management**

Effective organizations engage in long-term planning that helps them develop a mission and set goals that respond to their environment (defined here as the social/political/economic arena in which the organization operates). Excellent public relations units must be involved in this planning process. They help the organization recognize and enact the parts of the environment (i.e., stakeholders and strategic publics) that affect the organization's mission and goals.

Organizations that practice public relations strategically develop programs to communicate with internal and external publics that form the greatest threats to or opportunities for the organization. Organizations strive for good relationships with the publics that can limit their ability to pursue their goals. They also cultivate relationships with publics that support their goals. Building good relationships with strategic publics maximizes the autonomy of organizations to pursue their goals, which is important because the literature shows the effective organizations are those that choose appropriate goals and then achieve them.

When public relations helps organizations build relationships, it contributes to the "bottom line." Public relations saves money by reducing the costs of litigation, legislation, pressure campaigns, or boycotts that result from publics that activate when relationships are bad. It also helps make money by cultivating relationships with donors, consumers, shareholders, and legislators.

### **Empowerment of Public Relations in the Dominant Coalition or a Direct Reporting Relationship to Senior Management**

The strategic management of public relations must be directly connected to the strategic management of the organization. For that to happen, the public relations unit must be empowered to practice PR according to professional principles rather than the often misguided ideas of senior managers. Public relations is empowered when it is placed in the organizational structure so that



the senior PR executive is part of the "dominant coalition" (defined as the powerful group of managers that makes decisions for the organization), and has ready access to that group.

### **Integrated Public Relations Function**

Many organizations create more than one public relations unit. These units often develop historically rather than strategically, reflecting the most critical relationship problems of the organization when the public relations function was first developed. For example, if an organization once had trouble with its labor union, it might emphasize employee relations within the Human Resources Department; if it received negative publicity over lawsuits, it may have media relations under the Legal Department. In contrast, excellent organizations integrate all public relations functions into a single department or have a mechanism set up to coordinate the departments. Only in an integrated system of public relations is it possible to strategically manage communication needs.

### **Public Relations as a Management Function Separate from Other Functions**

Many organizations splinter public relations by making it a supporting tool for other departments such as marketing, human resources, or legal. When public relations is sublimated to other functions, it cannot be managed strategically because it cannot move communication resources from one strategic public to another -- as an integrated public relations function can. Public relations counsels all other management functions on their communication and relationship problems with publics, but it must be independent of any one of these functions if it is to counsel all of them.

In international organizations, in particular, public relations and marketing often are confused -- to the detriment of public relations. Public relations practitioners communicate with publics that threaten the organization's autonomy or provide opportunities to enhance that autonomy. Marketers, by contrast, create and seek out markets that can use or consume products or services. If public relations becomes solely a marketing function, the organization loses its ability to build relationships with all of its strategic publics and is limited to communication with consumers.

### **Public Relations Unit Headed by a Manager Rather than a Technician**

Public relations practitioners fill two major roles in organizations -- the manager who plans programs strategically and the technician who writes, edits or produces publications at the direction of others. Without a manager to coordinate public relations, the public relations unit cannot be part of strategic management. In smaller organizations, the same person may occupy both roles -- and technicians are necessary to carry out daily tasks. Yet, excellent public relations units must have at least one senior communication manager who conceptualizes and directs public relations, or this direction will come from other senior managers who do not understand communication or relationship building.

### **Commitment to Two-Way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations**

"Two-way symmetrical" describes public relations based on research and two-way communication to improve relationships with publics. "Symmetrical" means the organization values relationships



based on equality and trust, and is as willing to make its own changes as to have its publics change. The "two-way symmetrical" model is one of four models of public relations developed by J. Grunig in 1984. Excellent public relations units use the two-way symmetrical model more than the other three models of public relations.

The "press agency" model applies when a public relations program strives only for favorable publicity -- often in a deceptive way. The "public information" model uses "journalists-in-residence" to disseminate relatively objective information through the mass media, newsletters, brochures, direct mail, etc. The "two-way asymmetrical" model uses research to develop messages that are intended to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants. Both press agency and public information are one-way models of public relations; they are not based on research and strategic planning. The press agency, public information, and two-way asymmetrical models also are "asymmetrical" -- that is, they try to change the behaviors of publics but not of the organization.

### **A Symmetrical System of Internal Communication**

Communication inside an organization is crucial to effective management. Excellent organizations have decentralized management structures that give autonomy to employees and allow them to participate in decision making. They also have participative, symmetrical systems of internal communication. Symmetrical communication with employees increases job satisfaction because employee goals are incorporated into the organizational mission.

### **Knowledge Potential for Managerial Role and Symmetrical Public Relations**

Excellent public relations departments have practitioners who have learned a theoretical body of knowledge in public relations. Some have gained this knowledge from experience, self-study, or professional development courses. More and more practitioners are getting this knowledge from a university program in public relations, however, and most will get it this way in the future. Excellent programs also are staffed by professionals, people who not only are educated in the body of knowledge but who are active in professional associations and read professional literature.

### **Diversity Embodied in All Roles**

Effective organizations have as much diversity inside the organization as in their environment. This is especially important in public relations because the unit is responsible for communicating with varied publics. Thus, excellent public relations includes both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Excellent public relations units, however, do not pigeon hole women and minority practitioners into programs to communicate only with women or minority groups. Instead, diverse practitioners interact in all public relations programs.

The feminization of the public relations profession that seems to be occurring throughout the world increases diversity, but it will limit the potential of a public relations department if the organization discriminates against women and keeps them out of management roles. Excellent public relations units have mechanisms to help women gain the power they need to advance from the technician to the management role and to implement their knowledge of two-way symmetrical public relations.

## APPENDIX C

### Delphi Round One Followup Letters

January 27, 1995

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thank you for expressing your willingness to participate in a Delphi study on the practice of public relations in multinational organizations. As of yet, I haven't received your input from the study. Your response would be tremendously valuable, and will add considerably to the final project.

I am sending you a copy of the three documents that I sent to you earlier. The first is the study instrument, the listing of proposals to which we would like your reactions. This document, on pages 1-4, is the only one you need to respond to. The other documents are to help you understand our thinking. One is a definition of international public relations -- entitled, "What we mean when we talk about international public relations." The other is a summary of the Excellence study, from which many of our propositions were drawn.

I imagine that you are a very busy person, and appreciate the time you could take to complete this request. Could you please respond by February 15?

Sincerely,

Robert I. Wakefield, APR



FACSIMILE TRANSMISSION

To: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Pages: \_\_\_\_\_ (including cover)  
Date: February 15, 1995

From: Robert I. Wakefield, APR  
(801) 345-2199 (fax)

(801) 345-2109 (phone)

---

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Thanks so much for your fax expressing your willingness to assist in this Delphi study. As I am now getting close to 25 responses from more than 20 countries, I'm getting excited about the results that should come out of this study. Since you and \_\_\_\_\_ are the first from \_\_\_\_\_ to assist with this study, your information should be very valuable.

I've just corresponded with \_\_\_\_\_ as well. Sorry for the delay on my end. Unfortunately, the flu bug caught me for a few days and I just got back into my office.

I understand the language considerations here, and recognize, too, that this study is complex. It will take some time. Please take a few extra days, or even a week, if you need it. As I mentioned to \_\_\_\_\_, you and he are welcome to work on the study together. In fact, if you do, it would not be the first combined effort.

Thanks again for your willingness to assist with this study. As soon as we can analyze the data, we'll send along the second round -- which should be much easier and faster for you to complete!

Sincerely,

Robert I. Wakefield



## APPENDIX D

### Delphi Round Two Cover Letter

January 11, 1996

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I hope you recall participating in a Delphi Study on international public relations several months ago. Finally, after too many months of procrastination followed by long-delayed analysis of your responses, the second round of the study is ready for your participation.

I have taken far too long to extend my appreciation for your response to the first round. For this delay I apologize. The past several months have included three lengthy trips to the Pacific Rim and four more to Europe for my full-time employer. Unfortunately, I was not able to move ahead on this study as quickly as I would have liked.

However, for the good news. You and practitioners and scholars in public relations, representing 18 different countries, have responded to the propositions I sent to you last fall. I am extremely pleased with the breadth of participation. It represents a broad portion of the world. And from your combined, thoroughly insightful comments, we have been able to produce the second instrument.

Now that you have so kindly participated in the first round, your assistance in the second round instrument is even more important. Would you please review this instrument and respond to its declarations by no later than **February 1, 1996**. The instrument is really too long, and will require a considerable block of time to complete. I have tried to cut it to the bare minimum without dropping out so much that we can't get a decent read on your feelings about all 14 of the propositions. (And you might gain some comfort in knowing that at one point there were 136 statements, but I've cut it down to just 77!).

The declarative statements in the instrument are your combined assertions and opinions about the propositions. I have tried hard to select a sample of statements that represent the broad range of your feedback -- those that agreed and those that disagreed with my own viewpoints. The statements, for the most part, are included here exactly as you wrote them. In a few instances, I had to modify a word here or there to clarify or strengthen the assertion. Please don't be offended if you recognize one of your comments that has been slightly changed (or understand that someone else may have made a comment very similar to yours, and theirs is the one actually included here).

As you can see, there are a few lines for additional responses after each statement. I do not expect that you will comment on each of these statements. Probably the best way to proceed is to go through each statement and circle the letter/s which best represent the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Complete the task through the entire document. Then, if you feel particularly strong about any of the statements, go back and write your comments to those statements. I would hope to see as many as 10 or 20 comments per respondent -- any more than that and I would certainly thank you for going above and beyond the call of duty!

Thanks again for your willingness to participate in this project, and for your thoughtful participation already. The responses to the first round were so helpful, I look forward to your response on this, the final round. If you have any questions or comments about the instrument, please feel free to call me at my office, (801) 345-2109, or at home (801) 225-8784; or send a fax to (801) 345-2199. If you need to write, my current address is: 1960 South 50 East, Orem, Utah, 84058, USA.

Kind regards,

Robert I. Wakefield  
University of Maryland

## Appendix E

### Delphi Round Two Instrument

#### Delphi Instrument II

Please read each statement carefully. On the scales to the right of each statement, mark the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement\*. Then, if you wish, add comments as to why you feel that way (if you don't have a specific comment about a statement, you need not say anything—but comments would be appreciated).

- |  |    |   |   |   |    |
|--|----|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Excellent public relations and excellent international public relations are essentially the same.<br><hr/> <hr/>  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 2. Managing international public relations is exponentially more complex than domestic public relations because of more diverse publics, cultures, governments, media, etc.<br><hr/> <hr/>       | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 3. Two-way symmetrical communication between a multinational entity and its publics is:<br>a. possible.<br>b. desirable.<br><hr/> <hr/>  | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 4. Most multinational organizations do not care about the benefits of external publics.<br><hr/> <hr/>   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 5. Public relations and international public relations should be the same in terms of goals and strategies, different in terms of tools and tactics.<br><hr/> <hr/>                              | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 6. Symmetrical communication programs cannot benefit organizations in terms of money.<br><hr/> <hr/>   | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 7. Only an organizational culture that values symmetrical communication can offer employees around the world the respect and flexibility they need to do their jobs well.<br><hr/> <hr/>         | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 8. Many multinational organizations have persistent perceptions among employees that only those hired directly by headquarters are treated well, not other "locally hired staff."<br><hr/> <hr/> | SA | A | N | D | SD |
| 9. Organizations that concentrate only on increasing sales in each local market actually hurt their sales in the long run.<br><hr/> <hr/>  | SA | A | N | D | SD |

\*Scale: SA = strongly agree; A = agree; N = neutral/noncommittal; D = disagree; SD = strongly disagree.



10. The likelihood of tension between local and international interests in a multinational means that strong commitment to two-way symmetrical communication is required. SA A N D SD
11. Local adaptations to establish mutual benefits with local publics make supranational public relations strategies impossible. SA A N D SD
12. When talking about strategic planning, a public relations background will hardly suffice. SA A N D SD
13. The same strategic public relations role that is played at headquarters also needs to be played in each local situation by the senior public relations practitioner there. SA A N D SD
14. While it is logical to expect public relations techniques to vary from country to country, it is nevertheless wise for multinational organizations to have a common public relations strategy that all subsidiaries can follow. SA A N D SD
15. Headquarters cannot and should not be held responsible for problems that arise at the local level. SA A N D SD
16. Public relations practitioners in a multinational should be connected worldwide and should operate under a single umbrella; senior public relations managers at headquarters should supervise, but local practitioners should have room to improvise based on their knowledge of local conditions or their cooperation with the local manager. SA A N D SD
17. The cultures in which multinationals operate are so different that it is not possible nor desirable to have an integrated public relations program that is guided from headquarters and that works with top local management and not under local management. SA A N D SD
18. The goals and content of a multinational public relations program should be established within the organization, rather than turning it over to an outside public relations firm that will have a difficult time understanding the internal concepts. SA A N D SD
19. It is cheaper to hire local public relations agencies to perform local functions than to hire an internal public relations staff member. SA A N D SD

20. In working with public relations agencies, it is desirable to pick the best agency in each market, even if that means staying away from the one-agency-for-multiple-countries concept.	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. When it comes to major decisions at the local level, top managers should not relinquish their power or authority to any public relations people, locally or at headquarters.	SA	A	N	D	SD
22. Many top managers in my country do not understand what public relations is about apart from issuing press releases and doing charity work.	SA	A	N	D	SD
23. Why not split public relations into a centralized and decentralized part; centrally, the organization could make sure the mission statements and their basic philosophies about relationships to publics are fulfilled in the various countries, and locally practitioners who have an intimate knowledge about specific problems would have leeway to design public relations practice in compliance with the mission statements.	SA	A	N	D	SD
24. Public relations should be a separate function from marketing, working independently but closely with marketing, legal and other organizational functions.	SA	A	N	D	SD
25. In today's business climate, it is not really feasible to separate public relations from marketing.	SA	A	N	D	SD
26. Organizations should be more concerned with sales turnover than public perception or credibility, because organizations are set up to make money.	SA	A	N	D	SD
27. It might be appropriate for public relations to be subordinated to senior lawyers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
28. Few multinational organizations have worked to make themselves part of the fabric of local society, or to contribute to national goals and interests.	SA	A	N	D	SD
29. The basic public relations skills do not vary from one culture to the next.	SA	A	N	D	SD



30. For international public relations to be effective, practitioners at headquarters and in the local units should be academically trained according to international standards on public relations education and other relevant fields. SA A N D SD
31. Most public relations practitioners in local units are not well trained for the job. SA A N D SD
32. Effective communication means you must speak the language, you must know the culture. SA A N D SD
33. The ideal qualifications for public relations education and training would be:
- a. An undergraduate education that includes principles of communication, research, public relations techniques, organizational management, etc. SA A N D SD
  - b. A post-graduate degree that includes principles of strategic planning, management, sociology, psychology, political sciences, etc. SA A N D SD
  - c. A clear understanding of local politics, media, culture, language, etc. SA A N D SD
  - d. A comprehensive education on international issues, cultures, and perspectives. SA A N D SD
34. In regards to hiring of women and minorities, more than anything else the organization must be responsive to the culture of each host country ("when in Rome..."). SA A N D SD
35. I do not see multinational organizations bucking local cultural practices to add more minorities and women to the workforce in countries where discrimination is the norm. SA A N D SD
36. The only criterion for hiring practitioners should be, is this person the best one for the position? SA A N D SD
37. I agree with the need for represented diversity in public relations departments or firms. SA A N D SD
38. The environment is much more turbulent than ever before; therefore, successful public relations programs should be flexible and highly adaptable to several environments. SA A N D SD
39. Outside public relations agencies give multinational organizations greater flexibility. SA A N D SD

40. Multinational public relations agencies may be just as unresponsive to the local cultures as the client organizations themselves. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
41. It is more important for multinationals to be flexible than for domestic organizations. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
42. Flexibility means that public relations programs must be based on thoroughly conducted research and environmental scanning. SA A N D SD
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- 
43. Headquarters needs to run the show when conflict has broken out of local boundaries and threatens organizational interests on a wider scale. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
44. If headquarters involves local practitioners in the planning processes, it can gain insight about local conditions, resources and possibilities, and would profit from the input of global-minded proposals. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
45. The Gross National Product (GNP) economists use to measure development is a slippery concept because it does not take into account all the factors underlying local conditions; if development means GNP per capita, I don't see it as affecting public relations practice. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
46. Public relations will not be affected by "level of development" because the local component of an excellent international public relations program will adjust to the local situation and "translate" messages in a way that is acceptable to local publics. SA A N D SD
- 
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47. A nation's low level of development gives you the freedom to develop your own communication environment, as opposed to adapting to one that is already structured. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
48. Low development levels affect the avenues and content of communication; low economic levels affect publics who may gain access to a specific product or service; development will also affect education levels, which in turn affects desires to have a voice and strategies to be heard; these factors all affect the way public relations is practiced. SA A N D SD
- 
- 
49. Most multinational organizations are after all trying to introduce the Western consumer culture, which may actually work against "development" for that nation. SA A N D SD
- 
-

50. In too many developing countries, the heritage of colonialism and entrenched elites created by it contribute to gaps in knowledge, resources, and power that inhibit the flexibility needed to achieve excellent public relations.	SA	A	N	D	SD
51. Public relations should exploit any means to help organizations achieve their goals, including building relationships with any political entity it faces.	SA	A	N	D	SD
52. Public relations as a worldwide field should not tie in too much with shifting political systems; rather it should identify with the ideals of a free press and expose violations of widely accepted standards for ethical behavior.	SA	A	N	D	SD
53. To be successful, it is necessary to adapt to the political system of a given society.	SA	A	N	D	SD
54. In political systems without freedom of speech and other related political freedoms, there is no room for public relations.	SA	A	N	D	SD
55. Political systems have more effect on multinational public relations than cultural factors.	SA	A	N	D	SD
56. Public relations must adjust to the local cultures.	SA	A	N	D	SD
57. It is necessary for headquarters to have some understanding of and empathy for local cultures to ensure that decisions are not made that could insult local populations or cause the organization considerable harm.	SA	A	N	D	SD
58. An important cultural factor is that multinationals should identify with the national interest and be perceived as benefitting the community; simply providing products or employment opportunities is not enough for people to accept a foreign organization.	SA	A	N	D	SD
59. In different regions within my country, there are large differences in cultures, strong regionalist (or nationalist) feelings, and significant economic differences.	SA	A	N	D	SD



60. Adjustment for cultures is very difficult at the headquarters level. SA A N D SD
61. Understanding language nuances is an important element in public relations when building relationships with various publics. SA A N D SD
62. The range of language differences even between countries that supposedly speak the same language (like England and Australia or Spain and Mexico) is deceptively high. SA A N D SD
63. An expert from headquarters in the local office could function as:
- a. An ad-hoc communication link to headquarters SA A N D SD
  - b. An macro-level advisor to the department head or general manager SA A N D SD
  - c. A translator of the meanings of message content from headquarters SA A N D SD
  - d. A trainer about organizational culture and mission SA A N D SD
  - e. An expert in the overall international field of public relations SA A N D SD
64. The use of expatriots in local offices and locals at headquarters facilitates more multicultural feedback within the multinational organization. SA A N D SD
65. Locals at headquarters play an important role because an organization's host cultures need to be interpreted to the home culture just as is true in the opposite direction. SA A N D SD
66. Activists in my country give business and government organizations much pressure. SA A N D SD
67. Adaptation is the best way to avoid activist problems; on a local level you can adapt in a certain way, but on a global level this is impossible. SA A N D SD
68. Domestic organizations are usually more prone than multinationals to respond favorably to activist pressures. SA A N D SD
69. Activism emerges locally but can spread worldwide in its results; therefore, multinationals typically are exposed to much more activism than domestic organizations. SA A N D SD

70. I don't see activism as a problem for public relations, but as an opportunity.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
71. The level of activism can be a good predictor of the level of public relations needed.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
72. An excellent international public relations program will have a local component in each market to scan the environment, identify potential activist groups, and establish programs to build relationships with them.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
73. In the mass communication media, global village is a reality; news about parent organizations often reaches the local media, whether negative or positive.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
74. Local people these days understand the power of the media and are more likely to use media coverage to make their complaints known.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
75. Public relations officers in my country see the press as their most important public.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
76. I agree that a local component of a multinational organization should build relationships with local media.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
77. Generally, the coverage of multinational organizations in my country is not worse than the coverage of domestic organizations.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					
78. The mass media in different countries vary most because of:	SA	A	N	D	SD
a. The economic support base that allows technological adjustments.	SA	A	N	D	SD
b. The extent of their dependency on government.	SA	A	N	D	SD
c. The extent of their dependency on advertising.	SA	A	N	D	SD
d. The recognition within the media of their own professional responsibilities.	SA	A	N	D	SD
_____					
_____					



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