

## ABSTRACT

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RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT:  
EVALUATING PUBLIC RELATIONS AS  
RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT IN  
INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

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There is a gap in public relations and marketing communication literature. In spite of increasing professional use of integrated communication—a process by which organizations coordinate the communication functions and activities for stakeholder impact—public relations roles have been under-developed in scholarship. In fact, most insights on public relations and integration appear to be opinion-based and normative. Hallahan (2007) has argued that the literature is “fragmentary and hardly conclusive” (p. 308), and other scholars claim that integrated communication research is still in its pre-paradigmatic stages of development (Kerr, et al., 2008) as research emphasizes definitions and perceptions (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 133).

This research—a multi-case study of three organizations that carry out varying levels of integration—addresses the need to outline and evaluate public relations and integrated communication from a theoretical perspective. This study considers public relations a strategic relationship management function, consistent with Grunig

(2006a), Ledingham (2006) and other public relations scholars. This perspective is in contrast with that of marketing communication scholars, who consider public relations a marketing support function (Keh, Nguyen, Ng, 2007; Debreceeny & Cochrane, 2004; Hendrix, 2004).

This study demonstrates that concerns that integrating public relations and marketing may lead to marketing imperialism and “an inferior technical role” for public relations, as Hallahan’s (2007) review of the literature discovered (p. 305), may be based in opinion only, and may not represent professional practice. In fact, higher levels of integration yield a greater emphasis on public relations as a strategic relationship management function. This research also demonstrates that integration occurs naturally, regardless of organizational structure. In spite of varying levels of integration evident at each organization (based on the structure outlined by Duncan and Caywood [1996] and Caywood [1997]) integration is a natural process based on internal relationships and connections—a process I refer to as “organic integration.”

This multi-case study fulfills three challenges facing public relations and integrated communication proposed by Hallahan (2007). It provides a research-based definition of integrated communication, considers the theoretical convergence of public relations and integrated communication, and it conceptualizes organizational communication and department structures (p. 309-313).

INTEGRATING STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT:  
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INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

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## Dedication

It has been said that behind a great man is an even greater woman. In my case, even an average man is privileged to have a great woman pushing him to greatness. It would not be without the support and encouragement of my wife that this study would be complete. Throughout the process of this dissertation and the duration of this doctoral program, I have overcome seemingly insurmountable odds, and my wife was there in every obstacle, picking me up and dusting me off when I have fallen, and believing in me even when there was little evidence that she should.

Staci, I dedicate this dissertation to you. You have helped me set my sights higher than I ever could have imagined. You have taught to believe in myself and dare to achieve what is seemingly impossible.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

In the effort to define public relations and distinguish it from other organizational functions, the concept of relationships may be the most distinctive. Over two decades ago, Ferguson (1984) argued that the study of relationships in public relations would be the most fruitful for public relations research and “would greatly enhance the probability of productive theory development” (p. 23).

Many public relations scholars have followed Ferguson’s call and have explored relationships as a central theme in public relations (Stroh, 2007; Grunig, 2006a; Gower, 2006; Hutton, 1999). Public relations has been defined as a strategic relationship management function (Grunig, 2006a; Ledingham, 2006; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Grunig, Grunig, & Vercic, 1998), and research has prescribed the best ways for public relations professionals to cultivate relationships (Ledingham, 2006; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Grunig & Hung, 2002; Grunig, 2002), has identified ways to understand an organization’s publics (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 2006a; Toth, 2006), and has built models for evaluating organization-public relationships (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham, 2006; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Yang & Grunig, 2005). In fact, Grunig (2006b) has argued that relationships should be the basis for measuring and evaluating public relations.

Relationships may also be central to organizational success. Post, Preston, and Sachs (2002) have argued that “organizational wealth can be created (or destroyed) through relationships with stakeholders of all kinds” (p. 1), and that relationships allow organizations to anticipate future threats or problems. Grunig and Hung (2002) have argued that relationships affect an organization’s reputation. Grunig, Grunig,

and Dozier (2006) argue that relationships help an organization manage its interdependence with the environment, and that relationships provide context for public behavior and save money by preventing crises or minimizing their effects.

Public relations may not be the only organizational function that emphasizes relationship-building as a defining concept. Marketing scholars also consider relationships the most important organizational asset (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998), arguing that the purpose of marketing communications is to cultivate relationships (Zahay, Peltier, Schultz, & Griffin, 2004; Cownie, 1999).

In fact, similar emphases between public relations and marketing reveal an overlap between the two functions. Marketing scholars, in particular, recognize the overlap with public relations around the concept of public relations as marketing support. Often considered a marketing communications function, public relations has been defined as promotion and publicity (Hendrix, 2004; Keller, 2003; Kitchen, 1999a, 1999b; Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999; Hallahan, 1996; Thorson & Moore, 1996). Although public relations scholars argue that public relations should be a strategic relationship management function (Grunig, 2006a; Ledingham, 2006; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000), separate from other departments with its own strategic purposes and goals, its overlap with marketing communications has led organizations to coordinate the two functions for a unified voice and greater relationship capacity. This integration of communication challenges the propositions of public relations scholars who have argued against conceptualizing public relations and marketing together (Grunig, 2006a; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995).

### Communication Integration

Organizations are integrating their communication functions and coordinating the efforts of public relations and marketing for the benefits of strategic consistency and providing a unified voice to consumers (Kitchen, 1999a). Recent surveys by the Association of National Advertisers reveal that as many as 74% of firms are operating integrated communication programs (Liodice, 2008).

Though integration scholars have yet to agree on an official definition, communication integration can be defined as “the coordinated use of a variety of different promotional communication tools toward a single objective” (Hallahan, 2007, p. 299). Communication integration involves the integration of communication content and messages, channels, stakeholders and consumers, and results (Kliatchko, 2008).

The dominant framework of communication integration is Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), which prescribes the coordination of all marketing mix tools including advertising, personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, publicity and public relations (Kitchen, 1999b). Early frameworks of integration were built around this emphasis on marketing communications, as the first definition of integrated communication labeled it “a concept of marketing communications planning that recognises the added value in a programme that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines—e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion, and public relations—and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Kerr, Schultz, Patti, & Kim, 2008; p. 515). As research and practice expanded, references to integration dropped the “m” in favor of

the term integrated communication (IC), to refer to the expanded understanding that integration should comprise all communication tools (Vos & Schoemaker, 2001; Gronstedt, 2000, 1996; Caywood, 1997). Some have even proclaimed that IMC is dead (Grunig et al., 2002), though research continues to refer to integration as IMC, and the term IC is used less frequently (Kliatchko, 2005, 2008). In some instances, the terms IMC and IC are used interchangeably (Thorson & Moore, 1996).

In spite of potential ambiguities in definition, the purpose of integration appears to be clear—organizations integrate communication to maximize impact (Kliatchko, 2005; Duncan & Caywood, 1996). This impact includes strategically managing the corporate brand (Kitchen, Schultz, Kim, Han, & Li, 2004; Kliatchko, 2005) and maximizing message resonance with consumers (Duncan & Caywood, 1996) through an understanding of the interplay between channels, audiences, and resources (Kliatchko, 2008).

In fact, purposes for integration may be relational. Pioneers of integrated communication research, Schultz and Kitchen (2001) have argued that the integration of communication should be dedicated to creating and sustaining relationships with an organization's brand, because "it is the brand with which customers and consumers have ongoing relationships" (p. 90). Keller (1996) has argued that through communication integration, an organization can create sustainable brand equity—which Keller considers as the value of an organization, product, or service beyond its value if not branded—and that the highest level of brand equity is brand resonance, or the state at which a consumer has built a relationship with the organization, product, or service (Keller, 2003).

Additionally, scholars have proposed that integration involves the recognition that an organization's publics overlap (Kitchen, Brignell, Li, & Spickett, 2004; Reid, 2003; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz, 1996)—that is, a customer may also be a stakeholder and vice-versa (Gronstedt, 1996; 2000). Integration scholars, then, argue that integrated communication is a necessity to build relationships with publics because publics are already integrating an organization's messages and behavior, regardless of intended communication strategies (Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz, 1996; Schumann, Dyer, & Petkus, 1996; Duncan, 1993).

### *Integrated Concerns*

Though communication integration may be ideal for message resonance and building brand equity, debate about the appropriateness of integrating public relations and marketing has been a focus of public relations literature (Hallahan, 2007, p. 309). In particular, public relations scholars have expressed concern of marketing imperialism in a model that would combine the efforts of both disciplines (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Hutton, Goodman, Alexander, and Genest (2001) have argued that, contrary to what integrated communication would prescribe, communication at organizations is not integrating, but disintegrating, as it loses responsibility for managing communication and relationships with strategic public groups to other departments. In fact, Hutton, et al. (2001) have argued that there may be value in keeping the two functions distinct. Their research showed that companies with a philosophy on managing relationships with non-customers separate from managing customer

relationships had stronger reputations than those who managed relationships with all publics as consumers.

To the concerns of public relations scholars, a majority of research in integrated communication has emphasized marketing perspectives. Integrated communication research considers the coordination of the communication mix based on marketing's four Ps (product, price, promotion, and place) (Keh, Nguyen, Ng, 2007), and evaluates the coordination of communication across multiple media (Stammerjohan, Wood, Chang, & Thorson, 2005) for proactive targeted marketing to specific audiences (Kitchen, et al., 2004; Reid, 2003; Schultz & Kitchen 1997).

Furthermore, Kitchen (1999a) argued for an emphasis in theory development on understanding consumer behavior and analyzing competitive advantage. Integrated communication research emphasizes persuasion and maximizing impact of marketing messages for consumer purchase decisions (Holt, 2003; Gabbot & Clulow, 1999; Croft, 1999; Keller, 1997). In a review of the literature, Kliatchko (2008) discovered that branding has been of particular interest to integrated communication scholars, as research considers integration's effectiveness in creating commonness of thought and meaning between organizations and publics (Kitchen, 1999c, p. 231). IMC scholars have hypothesized that integration leads to brand equity and shareholder value, and that there is a positive relationship between IMC processes and brand outcomes (Kliatchko, 2008).

What is more, public relations is commonly considered a marketing support function within integrated communication, and my assumptions going into this study were that public relations in integration follows this marketing perspective of public

relations that it is a marketing support function for enhancing marketing campaigns. Kliatchko (2008) argued that media relations and publicity (traditional marketing public relations roles) have been a priority in research on integration, particularly since 2000. Marketing roles of public relations that are commonly explored in integrated communication research include promotion, publicity, and media relations (Keller, 2003; Kitchen, 1999a, 1999b; Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999; Hallahan, 1996; Thorson & Moore, 1996). Research has also evaluated public relations against its values in building awareness at a fraction of the cost of advertising (Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999; Miller & Rose, 1994).

In spite of marketing-dominant perspectives of public relations, my purpose in this study is to liberate public relations from marketing-oriented perspectives, and solidify public relations as a strategic relationship management function. In fact, some marketing scholars have recognized public relations beyond its marketing support roles. Kitchen (1999a) explains that in the corporate balancing act of profits, consumer satisfaction, and public interest, the first two relate to marketing communications while the latter is the responsibility of corporate public relations. Caywood (1997) has posited public relations roles in establishing organizations as an operational member of society. Their perspectives, however, have need of being evaluated in practice.

### *Scope of the Study*

Integrated communication represents a development in an organization's communication structure that stands to influence public relations scholars' efforts to define public relations as a strategic relationship management function. In fact, a



review of the literature demonstrates a gap in understanding, as public relations roles in relationship management have been under-developed in integrated communication literature.

Research on integration is admittedly explorative to reveal issues (Kitchen, et. al, 2007; Kitchen & Li, 2005) rather than evaluative or to confirm theory. Most insight on public relations and integration appears to be opinion-based and normative, rather than research-based and evaluative. This research evaluates public relations against the concept of relationship-cultivation and strategic management of relationships. Relationship management has been an emphasis in public relations literature, but it has not been evaluated in the setting of integrated communication, though some scholars have suggested frameworks in which public relations may manage an organization's strategic relationships (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Caywood, 1997; Duncan & Caywood, 1996). The purpose of this study is to transcend opinion-based perspectives and evaluate practice against prescribed theoretical perspectives.

Integrated communication has also been underdeveloped in the literature, as studies have been conceptual and have emphasized definitions, rather than processes. In fact, much of the literature comprises definitional debates, and there is a need to evaluate how integration functions. For this reason, this study evaluates integrated communication as a process involving the integration of communication content, channels, stakeholders, and results.

Grunig (2006a) has argued that it is time for public relations and integrated communication scholars to conceptualize the communication principles in the context of integration:

“I believe it is time for public relations scholars, in addition to those in the IMC camp, to conceptualize marketing communication principles. Marketing scholars have developed concepts of relationship marketing...I believe public relations scholars can make an important contribution to marketing if we move beyond the messaging, publicity, and asymmetrical communication common in marketing communication and use our theories to develop symmetrical principles of cultivating relationships with consumers” (p. 170).

The purpose of this research is to fulfill Grunig’s call by conceptualizing public relations with other marketing communications activities within integrated communication. In particular, this research evaluates integrated communication and its influence on public relations as a relationship management function through case studies of multiple organizations.

### *Definitions and Delimitations*

This research considers public relations, marketing, relationships, stakeholders, and integrated communication as key concepts under study. The literature and understanding of these concepts is broad and expansive, and therefore, this study also makes delimitations on the scope of each function under study.

#### Public Relations

Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000, originally 1985) have defined public relations as:

“The management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 1).

In this study, public relations is considered consistent with scholarship that defines it as a strategic relationship management function. This is particularly relevant as titles reflecting public relations roles throughout the three organizations are not consistent. In fact, organizations have multiple communication functions that fall under this classification, and in this study, organizational functions considered as public relations included media relations, corporate communication, internal or employee communication, publicity, and public affairs, in addition to public relations.

#### Marketing

The concept of marketing in this study is the organizational function that fulfills the roles of sales, advertising, business development, and account management, and is based on the concepts outlined by marketing scholars (including Aaker [2008], Keller [2003]; and Kotler [2000]). Kotler and Mindak (2000) have explained that marketing coordinates all the “instruments and forces impinging on the customer.”

Modern marketing has evolved from the concept of selling, in which individuals seek buyers, display products, and negotiate prices (Kotler & Mindak, 2000, p. 354). The nineteenth century saw the growth of national markets and mass communication, leading manufacturers to recognize the value of advertising and as national markets grew into the twentieth century, the notions of selling, advertising,

and market research led to the development of the marketing department (Kotler & Mindak, 2000, p. 355).

Marketing communications, otherwise known as the marketing mix, refers to the separate activities that are used to achieve marketing objectives. Marketing communications activities include direct selling, direct marketing, advertising, promotion (Kitchen, 1999a, p. 24).

In this study, participants who were considered marketing professionals held the title reflecting their domain—marketing. Because marketing and public relations share at least one organizational activity (promotion), in this study, marketing is limited in consideration to the functions referred to specifically as “marketing” or “marketing communications.” The following chapter outlines marketing, marketing communications, and the literature defining these concepts.

#### Integrated Communication

Integration prescribes a total coordination of all communication for maximum message impact on a target group according to Kliatchko (2008). Christensen, Firat, and Torp (2008) discuss integration as the coordination of messages, symbols, procedures and behaviors across departments. In reviewing literature, they found that most of the definitions on integration emphasize coordinated central control over communication (pp. 423, 431). According to Moriarty (1996), the central idea behind integration is coordination and control of a company’s communication activities for maximum impact (p. 333).

A review of the literature shows that, in spite of multiple studies both in the United States and globally, there is little agreement as to what integration comprises

beyond a coordination of messages for a unified organizational voice and the synergy that the “one message, one voice” dictum stands to create (Kliatchko, 2005, p. 18; Stammerjohan, et al., 2005, p. 57). For this reason, scholars claim that integrated communication is still in its pre-paradigmatic stages of development (Kerr, et al., 2008, p. 511; Kliatchko, 2008; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000a, p. 17). In fact, Kliatchko (2008) argues that most of the research from 1990s to 2006 has been only on definition, perceptions, and theoretical foundations (p. 133).

#### IMC vs. IC

There may be discord around the terminology of the phenomenon itself, as some refer to integration as Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC), others as Integrated Communication (IC). Early conceptualizations of the phenomenon used the term IMC to refer to the process of integrating all communication activities within the marketing mix (i.e. personal selling, publicity, advertising, etc.) (Kitchen, 1999b, pp. 9-13). As research and practice expanded, references to integration dropped the “m” in favor of the term IC, to refer to the expanded understanding that integration should comprise all communication activities (Grunig, et al., 2002, p. 269). IC expands consideration beyond marketing public relations to include corporate public relations responsibilities like investor relations, public affairs, government and public policy, employee communication, and even customer service and support, and recognizes that the concept of integration “must permeate through entire organizations...[and] involve every group or individual with a stake in the company’s success” (Gronstedt, 2000, p. 8). In spite of claims that IMC has been replaced by IC (Grunig et al., 2002, p. 269) research continues to refer to integration as IMC, and the

term IC is used less often in marketing literature (Kliatchko, 2005, 2008). In some instances, the terms IMC and IC are used interchangeably (Hallahan, 2007, p. 310; Thorson & Moore, 1996, pp. 2, 6).

This study assumes a general definition of integration. Rather than differentiate between Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and Integrated Communication (IC), this research explores public relations within the setting of “lower case” integration—that is, any type of integration of public relations with other communication functions, whether it be the integration of public relations as marketing public relations or the full gamut of public relations activities (often referred to as corporate public relations).

Integration should also be distinguished between media convergence. Though the two terms may be related, they are distinct. Whereas media convergence refers to the effect of the overlap of various media materials on targeted audiences, integration is the organizational effort to coordinate messages, symbols, procedures and behaviors across departments that may lead to media convergence, or the effect of such synthesis on audiences.

#### Integrated organizations

In this study, I chose to conduct research among organizations, rather than agencies. Multiple studies have explored the perceptions and workings of agencies (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Kitchen & Li, 2005), but studies have revealed that clients drive integration, rather than agencies (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Kitchen & Schultz, 1999), and inasmuch as Kitchen et al (2007) also found that the structure of an

integrated campaign may be missing, I consider it necessary to investigate organizations rather than agencies.

Though I used the grounded theory concept of theoretical sampling for participants (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), I sampled organizations based on three specific classifications. First, organizations demonstrated a classifiable level of integrated communication. Second, I sampled organizations that were available and willing to participate. Finally, I sampled companies that were local and I used a snowball technique to recruit more participating organizations. In this way, my sample of organizations was purposive and based on convenience.

#### Stakeholders

In many instances, scholars use the terms stakeholders and publics to refer to groups of people who may have a connection to the organization, whether that connection is active or dormant (i.e. whether groups or the organization recognize the connection or not). However, stakeholders and publics, as terms, may even have overlapping meaning. Both have been used in separate instances to refer to a group of individuals which might be of interest to an organization (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Gronstedt, 1996).

In my opinion, however, the term “publics” does not include enough specificity, and I think that when scholars use the term “publics,” the term “stakeholders” may be more concise. Post, Preston, and Sachs (2002) define stakeholders as “the individuals and constituencies that contribute, either voluntarily or involuntarily, to its wealth-creating capacity and activities, and that are therefore its potential beneficiaries and/or risk bearers” (p. 19). Stakeholders as constituents, or

those who have a stake in the organization, adds specificity to the consideration of groups of individuals relevant to an organization—that is, stakeholders share the benefits and risks of an organization’s operations and “their common desire is that the corporation should be run in such a way as to make them better off, or at least no worse off, than they would otherwise be” (p. 19).

Stakeholders as constituents from this perspective include employees, customers, investors, business partners, and government regulators, among others. Additionally, the notion that stakeholders provide an organization its “license to operate” (p. 9) also classifies community members and the media as stakeholders for an organization. In this study, the term stakeholders is used consistently with Post, et al.’s definition.

#### Relationships

Ferguson (1984) said that, in referring to relationships, researchers have used many terms that mean the same thing. “Some call it external linkage. Others call it interaction. Some use the term contact to mean relationship, while some suggest it implies interdependence” (p. 16). The term “relationship” comprises an extensive debate of concepts that may be too dense and extensive to explain here. For my purposes, I use a general definition of relationships, that is, a relationship represents a connection or linkage between two groups. In this way, relationships in this study reflect Broom, et al.’s consideration of relationships as “the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (p. 18).

In this study, relationships are represented and studied in terms of linkages. Grunig and Huang (2000) outlined a list of potential connections, including those



between an organization and a stakeholder group, an organization and another organization, and an organization and a public coalition (p. 34). In the context of this study, I also consider relationships between individuals as well, including between employees and between an employee and a media relations professional. In this way, relationships may also be inherently interpersonal, as Toth (2000) has argued. At the same time, it is not my purpose here to explore relationships from an interpersonal perspective, as Toth (2000) suggested. Rather, I simply recognize here that this study includes considerations of relationships as connections between individuals, in addition to those between an organization and its stakeholders.

### *Summary of Literature Review*

The bodies of literature that inform this study come from three sources: public relations, marketing, and integrated communication. The literature in public relations outlined in this study considers public relations as a strategic relationship function, and provides models for understanding and cultivating relationships.

The marketing literature provides a background for understanding marketing scholars' perspectives on roles of marketing and public relations, as well as the overlap between the two functions. Marketing's roles appear to be focused on branding and communication impact, and perspectives on public relations roles appear to consider the function as a marketing support discipline.

Finally, integrated communication literature explores the definitions and concepts of integration. A review of literature in integration reveals that scholars have yet to agree on an official definition of the concept, and research is still in a pre-paradigmatic state, as scholars seek to establish models and theories that explain

integration. One of the underlying frameworks used for this research, which can be traced through the literature Kliatchko, 2008), is that integration prescribes the coordination of communication content, channels, publics, and results.

Overall, the literatures in public relations, marketing and integrated communication reveal a gap in understanding around the roles of public relations in integration. Public relations literature has yet to explore public relations roles in integration with much depth. Integrated communication literature, on the other hand, has yet to detail the roles of public relations with much depth beyond marketing related activities (i.e. promotion, publicity, and media relations). Additionally, much of the literature in both public relations and integrated communication reflects scholars' opinions and proposed norms, and there is a need to evaluate these concepts' utility to explain practice.

### *Summary of Method*

This study employs qualitative methodology to evaluate public relations' roles in integrated communication, and integration's effects on public relations as a relationship management function. I have chosen qualitative methodology to explore this research area because evaluating organizational processes requires a detailed exploration of the depth of its influence, and qualitative research emphasizes depth over breadth (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Lindlof, 1995). Furthermore, qualitative research situates an observer in the natural world and relies on the researcher to piece together and interpret the representations to make meaning of the lived experience of participants and the research subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The notion of the bricoleur is most appropriate in my research endeavor. The bricoleur is a montage-maker, who pieces together evidence and source information to understand the situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The bricoleur also reads widely, making him or her knowledgeable for credible interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This notion of researcher as bricoleur is especially appropriate for my chosen method—case study research—because as a researcher, I have to read widely within the context of the case and gather information from multiple sources to be able to piece together the elements that make up the collage that is integrated communication.

This study employs case study research of three organizations with varying levels of integration in order to evaluate the processes of integration, public relations, and relationship management. The case study method allowed me to gather, analyze, and interpret data from multiple sources, including interviews, observation, and communication material.

Case study research has been chosen as the method for this dissertation because of its appropriateness and common use in understanding organizational decision making (Yin, 2003) and for its advantages over other qualitative methods in presenting a complete picture of the phenomenon under study. Case study research employs a broad set of qualitative methods, including interviewing, observation, and documentation content analysis, to provide a holistic perspective on integration, public relations, and relationship cultivation. Case study research is also effective in settings in which the researcher seeks questions of how or why in situations in which

behavior cannot be controlled or manipulated (Yin, 2003), a condition that also applies here.

Case study method allows researchers to retain holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events and maintains some advantages over individual qualitative research methods, including interviews and observation. Interviews, which operate on the notion that the most direct way to understand reality is to engage in conversation with participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003), may be limited by memory and biases of interviewees (Lindlof, 1995). Participant observation, which is based on the notion that enacting roles reveals understanding (Lindlof, 1995) and provides meaning through situated experience and lived context, may be problematic for researchers who seek understanding beyond the roles they have been given in the context. In short, case study research deals with the full gamut of available evidence in a research setting—a unique strength of the method (Yin, 2003)—allowing me to explore the phenomenon using the strengths of interviewing, observation, and document analysis (my three chosen sources of information).

In this study, I conducted a total of 31 qualitative interviews with communication professionals who are involved in decision-making or in the implementation of integrated communication. I also participated in a total of 20 hours of observation by attending meetings, forums, and even participating in a company initiative. Finally, I analyzed organizational documents that pertain to integrated communication, including promotional material, organizational hierarchies, websites, and other documents that reflect integrated communication strategy.

### Significance of the Study

The primary significance of this study is the understanding that it provides from the perspective of public relations. Public relations perspectives on integration tend to be opinion-based—Hallahan (2007) argues that the empirical evidence is “fragmentary and hardly conclusive” (p. 308). Most current integrated communication studies emphasize marketing concepts including branding and customer loyalty (Kliatchko, 2008). There is a need to understand integration from the point of view of public relations, in particular, the way integration affects and influences public relations and its roles in relationship cultivation and management.

A public relations-based approach to understanding integration has significance for both public relations practice and academic research. This study provides practical strategic priorities and tactics for public relations practitioners to successfully navigate and implement integrated programs. Furthermore, this study has value to integrated communication research, as it adds clarity to the understanding of the process of integration, which is an ongoing issue in research on integration (Kliatchko, 2008; Hallahan, 2007, p. 309). It also fills a gap in public relations literature, as few studies have explored public relations roles in integration.

### Limitations of the Study

This study is not without its limitations. Inherently limiting in the case study method is the inability to apply results to other specific cases. Yin (2003) terms this level of application “statistical generalization,” and he argues that case studies are not appropriate for this purpose. Rather, case studies provide a different but significant level of application: analytical generalization. In this study, I accounted for limits to

statistical generalization by extracting concepts that can be applied to theory, and thus, understanding of other cases from a theoretical perspective (analytical generalization). By using theory outlined in the literature to frame this study, my purpose was to corroborate the findings and expand understanding of integration, public relations, and relationship cultivation, and therefore, compensate for limitations in generalizability.

Other limitations this study include time and organizational availability. Understanding organizational processes can take years to comprehend. The time necessary for that level of detail exceed my framework for this study. Furthermore, I was limited by availability of organizational and individual participation. From the time I started this project until its completion, two of my three original organizations dropped out of the research, and I also had some difficulty accessing all the participants and experiences I hoped to evaluate. In particular, securing observation opportunities was my biggest challenge. I sought to overcome these limitations by triangulating my research methods and designing my study around the themes in the literature.

### Organization of Dissertation

In the next chapter, I outline the literature framing this study. The foundational concepts to this study include public relations as strategic relationship management, marketing communications theory, and integrated communication.

Chapter three establishes the rationale for choosing case study research of multiple organizations to explore integrated communication and public relations. It also details the strengths and weaknesses of case study research, which I employ for

the present study. I will also explain my choice of data sources: interviews, observation, and document analysis. In this chapter, I also describe my research design.

Chapter four outlines the results of this study. Each case in this study is outlined separately, in order to build an understanding for the respective contexts, scenarios, and processes involved in integrating communication and the roles of public relations, therein. The data from each case is categorized by research question as well. The purpose of this section is to outline the results and allow the data to speak for itself in each case by emphasizing description, over evaluation or interpretation, as Wolcott (1994) prescribes.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are three bodies of literature that inform this study. These include public relations, marketing, and integrated communication, and each one helps explain how scholarship perceives the practices under study. The purpose of this section is outline the current perspectives in order to give context to the practice studied in this research, but the purpose is also to provide a research-based context against which to evaluate practice.

The literature in public relations, marketing, and integrated communication is broad, and it is not my purpose here to discuss the gamut of theoretical insights that make up the volumes of scholarship underlying each concept. Rather, in this chapter, I outline the concepts that appear to be most relevant to public relations' roles within integrated communication.

For this study, the public relations literature regarding organization-stakeholder relationships and relationship management is most relevant, and the first section details the research that has been conducted that considers public relations as a strategic relationship management function. In particular, there are two lines of direction evident in the literature, one that discusses the process of relationship-building between an organization and its stakeholders, and another that explores causality behind relationship development. In this chapter, I explore both lines of scholarship.

Marketing, in this chapter, is discussed in terms of the activities that the marketing function fulfills in order to build relationships between an organization and its stakeholders—which for marketing, has traditionally been customers and



consumers, but may also include other company stakeholders. Three aspects of marketing scholarship appear to relate to relationship-building, and these include the marketing mix, branding, and relationship marketing.

Finally, this study relies on understanding the process of integrated communication. The literature in this area is developing and scholarship emphasizes terms, concepts, and purposes, though some work has been done to establish models to understand the integrated communication process. The literature under this section features both a description of the concepts as well as the processes of integrated communication. Discussion on the concepts of integrated communication is meant to build an understanding of its implementation, which serves to provide a framework against which to evaluate integrated communication in practice.

### *Public Relations*

In 1984, Ferguson declared that public relationships were a fruitful research paradigm for public relations research, the basket in which she would put “all her public relations theory development eggs” (p. 16):

“A research paradigm focus that comes to understand the study of public relationships as the study of relationships between organizations and public would do, I believe, as much to “legitimize” this field as have past efforts at defining the field in terms of the activities of those who practice it” (p. 21).

Ferguson (1984) further explained that an emphasis on relationships in public relations research would go beyond the traditional research focus on the public communication process and emphasize “organizations...publics, and...the larger social environment within which these two social units exist” (p. 22). From this

relationship mandate, several scholars have sought to establish public relations as a relationship discipline.

#### Public Relations and Strategic Relationship Management

Relationships may be the defining structure for public relations. Cutlip, Center, and Broom (2000, originally 1985) define public relations as:

“The management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends” (p. 1).

Research has supported this definition, asserting that the purpose of public relations is to build relationships with an organization’s key constituencies (Ledingham, 2003; Heath, 2001, p. 2; Dozier & Lauzen, 2000, p. 4; Hon & Grunig, 1999) and that the value of public relations to an organization is in the function’s relationship-building capacity (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; p. 548; Grunig & Huang, 2000). In fact, Heath (2001) argued that “the emerging vocabulary” of the public relations discipline featured relationship concepts like shared meaning, listening, social capital, mutual benefit, trust, and collaboration and that “the heart of the new view of the practice of public relations is the mutually beneficial relationships that an organization needs to enjoy a license to operate” (p. 2-3).

*Relationships in the strategic management paradigm.* Relationship management in public relations appears to be the purpose of scholarship in the strategic management paradigm of public relations. Research in the strategic management paradigm has examined the cultivation of relationships (Ledingham, 2006; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Grunig & Hung, 2002; Grunig, 2002), has considered

how relationships facilitate the understanding of an organization's stakeholders (Aldoory & Sha, 2007; Grunig, 2006; Toth, 2006), and has sought to build models to measure and evaluate relationship-building in public relations (Grunig, 2006; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002).

Grunig, et al. (2006) argued that relationships provide a context for behavior of an organization's various publics and they save money by preempting the costly effects of organizational crisis (p. 35). Murphy (2007) has added: "anticipating issues, identifying key publics, building and maintaining relationships that lessen conflict, acquiring the internal power to implement needed changes—all these tasks form the core of public relations that is truly strategic" (p. 119). Hutton (1999) argued that relationships are the only unique organizing structure of the field, and that a paradigm emphasizing strategic relationship management would feature three main ideas: 1) management (planning, control, performance), 2) strategy (prioritization and relevance), and 3) relationships (mutual adaptation and dependency).

Grunig (2006) summarized three central areas of theoretical development within the strategic management paradigm: 1) identifying stakeholders vis-à-vis the issues they create, 2) developing communication strategies that cultivate relationships, and 3) evaluating organizational success based on the quality of public relations. Work by Grunig and Huang (2002) has sought to emphasize organizational behavior in relationship-building, that is, "what an organization does (more than what it says) has a strong influence on what people think and say about it and the relationship they have with that organization" (p. 14). In this way, public relations

manages organizational behavior through environmental scanning, advocating, and balancing public needs (Grunig, 2006).

Consistent with scholarship in the strategic management paradigm of public relations, I define public relations as a strategic relationship management function that provides value to an organization by building and maintaining mutually-beneficial relationships. In the sections that follow, I will outline the scholarship that considers public relations as a strategic relationship management function. In particular, there are two areas of theoretical development on relationships in public relations literature: 1) the process of relationship-building and 2) the causes and influences on relationship-building. Research on organization-stakeholder relationships and expanding theory in that area informs the process of relationship-building. Relationship management theory, and corresponding scholarship, explores relationship influencers and causality.

#### Defining Organization-Stakeholder Relationships

Relationships in public relations are considered as dynamic entities based on organization-stakeholder exchange and interaction. Broom, Ritchey, and Casey (1997, updated in 2000), proposed some of the earliest conceptualizations of organization-stakeholder relations, borrowing perspectives from interpersonal communication, interorganizational relationships, psychotherapy, and systems theory. The authors defined relationships as: “The transactions that involve the exchange of resources between organizations...[which] lead to mutual benefit, as well as mutual achievement” (1997, p. 91). They argued that “relationships are represented by the

patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics” (p. 18).

Ledingham and Bruning (1998) have built Broom, et. al’s (1997) concept of organization-stakeholder relationships from exchange and transaction, to linkage and impact. They defined relationships as “the state which exists between an organization and its key publics in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural, or political well being of the other” (p. 62).

Postmodern research has also added to the understanding of relationships in public relations. Postmodern scholars refer to relationships as “the crux of all interactions” (Stroh, 2007, p. 205). For postmodern scholars, social relations are “shaped by competition, conflict, struggle, and domination” (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 365) and are constantly in flux, unplanned and unpredictable (Stroh, 2007). From this postmodern perspective, Hung (2007) proposed an alternate definition for organization-public relations—one which considers relationships a “dynamic social entity...[based on] the ongoing interplay between contradictory expectations” (p. 469-470). Hung asserted that relationships are better characterized as spiraling entities, rather than linear interactions, because relational parties “act and react as relationships spiral forward and reshape reality” (p. 451).

Public relations scholars have expanded this concept of an organization-stakeholder relationship as a dynamic interaction, focusing on what that interaction involves. Scholars have explored relationship causes, strategies, and dimensions. Much of the research is based on the framework, originally proposed by Broom, et al.

(1997), which explores relationship causes, or antecedents, relationship strategies, and relationship consequences, or outcomes.

*Relationship antecedents.* Relationship antecedents are precursors to a relationship and include the “perceptions, motives, needs, and behaviors” that make up the contingencies of a relationship (Broom, et al., 2000, p. 16). Antecedents include social and cultural norms, resource needs, and perceptions. Grunig and Huang (2000) added that antecedents include various levels of influence between an organization and a public (p. 34). They also argued that antecedents are born in change pressures from an organization’s environment, and that they are situational and fleeting (p. 35).

Other causes or precursors to an organization-public relationship can be seen in postmodern research—in which scholars explore relational tensors, or irreconcilable differences, that lead to, form, and influence relationships (Holtzhausen, 2007). Hung (2007) argued that relationships are best represented by the dialectic model of relationships, which states that relationships are born of opposition rather than mutually benefit interaction (p. 450). A postmodern orientation to understanding relationships posits that relationships are shaped by contradiction, conflict, and competition (Holtzhausen, 2007, p. 365; Murphy, 2007) and are constantly in flux (Stroh, 2007, p. 215; Botan & Taylor, 2004). Through the dialectical model, scholars consider relationships in terms of the interrelated oppositional forces and change pressures that are simultaneously present in a relationship, including: autonomy and connection, novelty and predictability, and closedness and openness (Hung, 2007, p. 450).

*Relationship strategies.* The second concept in Broom et al.'s (1997; 2000) framework is termed relationship “concepts” and features the properties and qualities of an organization-public exchange. Research in this area has considered the strategies involved in building organization-stakeholder relationships. Grunig and Huang (2000) renamed the category “maintenance strategies,” and identified five symmetrical relational strategies: 1) positivity, 2) openness, 3) assurances of legitimacy, 4) organizational networking with the same groups with which its publics network, and 5) shared tasks (p. 37). These symmetrical strategies are based on research by Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995) that suggests that relationship strategies should help management and stakeholders negotiate conflicts, and should also lead to organizational change toward and mutual benefit (p. 100). To this end, symmetrical conflict resolution strategies include integrative strategies (negotiation for reconciliation of the interests of both parties), distributive strategies (maximizing gains and minimizing losses), and dual concern strategies (collaboration in a mixed-motive game) (p. 38).

Relationship strategies are based on perceived quality of a relationship, and Ledingham and Bruning have demonstrated the influence of relationship strategies on relationship quality. In their study of the relationship between a telecommunications provider and its consumers, Ledingham and Bruning (2000b) assessed the influence of stakeholder perceptions of trust, commitment, involvement, investment, and openness. They discovered that “an organization must engage in behaviors that benefit its publics as well as serving the interests of the organization” and that “communication should be utilized to inform key publics about the organization’s

behaviors” (p. 66). Their research also confirmed this orientation to relationships influences loyalty and purchase behavior (p. 169) and has the potential to “offset financial incentives offered by competing organizations” (p. 170).

*Relationship outcomes and consequences.* Finally, organization-public relationships are considered in terms of the consequences for the relationship participants. Broom, et al. (1997, 2000) identified goal achievement and dependency as relationship consequences. Huang (1997) and Grunig and Huang (2000, p. 42) conceptualized consequences in terms of outcomes, and identified trust, control mutuality (or the power balance and decision-making agreements in a relationship), relational commitment, and relational satisfaction as primary outcomes.

Recent research has extended the understanding of these four relationship outcomes. Trust has been considered as a key to legitimating relationships, and it includes public perceptions of integrity, dependability, confidence and openness (Ki & Hon, 2007, Scott, 2007, p. 263; Jo, et al., 2004, p. 17). Commitment is considered as stakeholder dedication, loyalty, and resource investment (Scott, 2007, p. 263; Bruning, Castle, & Schrepfer, 2004, p. 439; Heath, 2001). Control mutuality has been considered as the level of involvement, control, and decision-making that each party has in a relationship, and includes the elements of negotiation, reciprocity, influence and constraints (Scott, 2007, p. 263; Ki & Hon, 2007; Heath, 2001). Finally, satisfaction is defined as the overall assessment of a relationship, including the interplay of costs, benefits, and expectations and performance (Scott, 2007, p. 264; Jo, et al., 2004, p. 17).



Whereas satisfaction is commonly listed as a separate element, at least one study has suggested that satisfaction may be a function of the positive perceptions of one or more of the other outcome variables (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2005).

Relationship consequences or outcomes appear to be a commonly studied relationship element. Other studies have expanded the concepts of trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction to include goal achievement, intimacy, credibility, autonomy, mutual gratification, and reciprocity (Broom, et al., 2000, p. 16; Dimmick, Bell, Burgiss, & Ragsdale, 2000, p. 132; Wilson, 2000, p. 137).

Overall, Grunig and Huang (2000) asserted that trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction represent the success or failure of a relationship:

We believe that organization-public relationships are likely to be considered successful to 'the degree that organization and publics trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another' (pp. 42-43).

*Relationship types.* Hung (2005; 2007) reviewed the literature on relationships and discovered several types of organization-stakeholder relationships. Exploitative relationships feature one party taking advantage of the other. Manipulative relationships occur when an organization uses asymmetrical strategies to influence its publics. Contractual relationships are based on an agreement between the two parties. Symbiotic relationships occur when the two parties recognize their interdependence and work together. In covenantal relationships, the two parties work together for a common good. In mutual communal relationships, each of the sides seeks to provide benefit for and protect the welfare of the other.

Hung (2007, p. 457; 2005, p. 411) tracked relationship types on a continuum based on the relational parties' self interests and concern for others' interests. Starting with a focus on self-interest and progressing to concern for others, relationships progress from exploitive to manipulative, contractual, symbiotic, exchange, covenantal, mutual communal, and finally one-sided communal. The win-win zone between an organization and a public occurs in exchange relationships, covenantal relationships, and mutual communal relationships (Hung, 2005, p. 411).

Hon and Grunig (1999) considered two types of relationships between an organization and its publics: exchange relationships, or relationships based on expectation of benefit or return, and communal relationships, or relationships based on caring or concern for welfare, without promise of return. Hon and Grunig cited research in psychology that has demonstrated that "most relationships begin as exchange relationships and then develop into communal relationships as they mature" (p. 21).

*Relationship phases.* In early research, Ledingham and Bruning (1998) conceptualized relationship management as a two-step process in which organizations 1) identify constituencies with which to build a relationship and 2) communicate organizational activities that build relationships (i.e. social responsibility initiatives, customer service, etc.) (p. 63). Ledingham and Bruning (1998) borrowed from interpersonal perspectives, positing that organization-public relationships thrive when the relationship is balanced with equal investment of trust, support and commitment by both parties (p. 58).

Ledingham (2000) has identified five stages for building relationships. The relationship starts at the introductory phase, as organizations use communication to engage publics in a relationship. Next, both sides of the relationship assess whether a relationship of mutual benefit is possible (exploration phase). In the escalating phase, both parties feel confident that they understand the other's needs leading to the assimilating phase in which the parties agree on decision-making structures. In the final phase—the fidelity phase—the public expresses loyalty as the organization commits to pursuing public interests (pp. 44-45). Ledingham (2000) similarly identified five phases for relationship collapse, beginning with the contrasting phase in which stakeholders find dissonance between their perspectives and those of the organization. In the spiraling phase, the frequency and quality of communication declines, leading to the idling phase in which the relationship neither progresses nor digresses, the evading phase, in which both parties avoid interaction, and finally the discontinuance phase, in which the parties disband the relationship (p. 45).

The literature outlined in this section has considered the processes underlying the development of an organization-stakeholder relationship. The following section explores the scholarship on relationship influences.

#### Managing Relationship Influences

Up until this point, I have outlined the scholarship that explores the process through which an organization-stakeholder relationship develops. Another stream of literature explores the influences on relationship development and proposes direction for practitioners to cultivate and manage effective relationships. Ledingham (2003;

2006) has proposed a “general theory of relationship management,” which serves as a foundation for understanding relationship influences:

Effectively managing organizational-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics (2006, p. 190).

In this theory, Ledingham asserts that relationships are influenced by an organization’s ability to balance interests and ensure stakeholder benefit. Other research also considers relationship management in this way. Bruning, Castle, and Schrepfer (2004) defined relationship management as “the management of organization-public relationships around common interests and goals” (p. 435). Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier have argued that the two-way symmetrical model of communication, which is the most effective model for building long-term relationships (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 99) is based on balancing the organizational and stakeholder interests for a win-win situation through a steady stream of public input (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006, p. 55; Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995, p. 99; Grunig & White, 1992, p. 39). Grunig (2006a, 2006b) has argued that the most excellent communication creates mutually beneficial relationships, and that identifying publics for relationship-cultivation is a central focus for public relations management.

The concept of mutual benefit has particular importance in relationship management theory. Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that the most productive relationships are based on mutual benefit—that is, relationships should “benefit both parties in the relationship rather than the organization only” (p. 11). Bruning,

DeMiglio, and Embly (2006) studied the concept of mutual benefit in relationships and found evidence that it “provides competitive advantage, is influenced by respondent organization-public relationship perceptions, and is an outcome that is specific, measurable, and unique to public relations” (p. 38).

*Relationship indicators.* Public relations scholarship has identified several relationship dimensions that influence the quality of the relationship. Bruning and Ledingham (2000a) demonstrated that five relationship dimensions—public perceptions of trust, commitment, involvement, investment and research—“impact the ways in which organization-public relationships are initiated, developed, and maintained, and ultimately can engender loyalty toward the organization among key publics” (p. 162). Research has demonstrated that these five dimensions, cut down from an original 17 (Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison, & Lesko, 1997), correlate with stakeholder loyalty to and perceptions of an organization (Bruning, Dials, Shirka, 2008, p. 26; Bruning & Ledingham, 2000a, 200b; 1998; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000b; 1998).

Postmodern scholarship has also identified relationship-quality indicators that inform strategy. For example, Hung (2007) used the dialectical principles of contradiction, change, praxis, and totality to understand organization-public relationships (p. 452). Contradiction represents the relational tensions of integration and separation, stability and change, and expression and privacy. Praxis states that people are both “proactive in choosing their social behavior...and reactive to the situations they encounter” (p. 452). Finally, totality considers relationships in the

context of the rest of the world, and the influences of elements outside of the individual parties of a relationship (Hung, 2007, p. 452).

Other relationship quality indicators include considerations of time and duration. Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson (1999) found that the length of time in a relationship affects publics' perspectives of relationship dimensions and loyalty (p. 179) and suggested that building relationships requires a long-term orientation to relationships. Furthermore, Ledingham, et al. (1999) found that relationships are susceptible to termination in the early stages of the relationship, and that practitioners should nurture relationships early (p. 179).

Bruning, et al. (2004) explored the interaction between relationship indicators and customer behavior. They discovered that anthropomorphism (giving human qualities to an organization), personal commitment, and comparison of alternative relationship opportunities correlate with customer loyalty (p. 442).

New communication technology has also been studied for its influence on organization and stakeholder relationships. Kent, Taylor, and White (2003) contend that new technology facilitates relationships, as websites enable organizations to communicate with stakeholders in a controlled way and make it possible for publics to respond (p. 63). Kent and Taylor (2002) surmised that the Internet requires an interpersonal orientation toward relationship management, including the skills of listening, showing empathy, identifying common ground, and being able to contextualize issues within local, national and international frameworks (p. 31). They argued the internet's facilitation of "ongoing communication and relationships" requires an emphasis on recognizing organization-stakeholder interdependence,

consulting and listening to stakeholders on matters that influence them, and demonstrating empathy, willingness to enter into a relationship, and commitment (pp. 24-25).

*Measuring relationship quality and impact.* Scholars have sought to quantify relationship quality and the impact of relationships on organizational outcomes. Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that most public relations evaluation has focused on measuring the short-term outputs and outcomes of public relations initiatives, rather than on measuring relationships (p. 6). They proposed that perceptions regarding an organization's long-term relationships with key constituencies would be measured best by six relationship outcomes: control mutuality, trust, satisfaction, commitment, exchange relationships, and communal relationships. They hypothesized that public relations professionals add value to an organization when they develop communal relationships with all stakeholders affected by organizational behaviors—not just those who provide the organization something in return (p. 21).

Studies have supported Hon and Grunig's measurement indicators. Jo, Hon, and Brunner (2004) used them to analyze university-student relationships, reporting them to be effective for relationship measurement. They also discovered that trust, commitment, control mutuality, and satisfaction were closely related. From their results, Jo, et al. (2004) proposed that relationships followed a sequenced structure in which trust precedes and commitment follows relational satisfaction.

Research in public relations has also demonstrated that relationships provide value for an organization. Huang (2001b) provided evidence that relational factors including trust and control mutuality help reduce conflicts and generate cooperation

between stakeholders and organizations (p. 288). Yang and Grunig (2005, p. 321) demonstrated that organization-stakeholder relationships influence corporate reputation, discovering that active communication with an organization leads publics to hold a favorable impression of the organization. Ledingham and Bruning (2000b) asserted that their research demonstrated that relationships “may be more influential than price or product features in predicting consumer behavior” (p. 59). Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2006, p. 35) have argued that organization-public relationships allow organizations to anticipate issues, lessen conflict, and save money by preempting the costly effects of organizational crisis. Kim and Lee (2005) found that favorable relationships positively influence perceptions of a crisis, lessening perceived severity and organizational responsibility, making relationships a good preventive strategy for crises (p. 22). Kim and Chan-Olmsted (2005) discovered that organization-public relationships are a good predictor of brand attitude and purchase intention (p. 165). They also added to Hon and Grunig’s (1999) work, discovering that only satisfaction directly leads to improved attitude and hypothesizing that the others (trust, commitment, and control mutuality) lead to satisfaction (p. 164).

*Relationship management online.* Communication technology presents additional influences on relationships, and a new, emerging context for relationship management. In fact, Hon and Grunig (1999) have argued that further research on relationships should examine the influence of new media on public relations roles in relationship management (p. 39).

New media, including blogs, podcasts, social networking sites (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, etc.), forums and citizen media sites (i.e. Youtube) are a growing force



defining the relationship-capacities of public relations practitioners. By the end of 2006, over one-fifth of the top 100 websites were blogs (Marken, 2006/2007, p. 33). A survey of Fortune 100 company executives revealed that emphasis on the skill sets associated with traditional media outlets is giving way to the influences of social media and blogging (Rand & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 9). Surveys show that a majority of public relations firms (84%) maintain blogs on behalf of their clients (Rand & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 6). Research has suggested that social media are used for relationship-building and cultivation (Kelleher & Miller, 2006, Vorvoreanu, 2006), and that two-way dialogue is a standard for social media relations (Rand & Rodriguez, 2007, p. 13, Marken, 2005, p. 33)

Research has shown that social media is reshaping public relations approaches to organization-public relationships (Seltzer & Mitrook, 2007, p. 227) as communication technology has afforded organizations a greater opportunity to reach publics, and practitioners can play a more direct role in guiding the conversations taking place about the organization (Porter, et al., 2007, p. 94). However, public relations research is just beginning to evaluate the effects of social media on organization-public relationships. Sweetser and Metzgar (2007) analyzed the use of blogs as a relationship management tool for communicating during a crisis, and found that six factors influenced relationship perceptions: conversational human voice, relational commitment, task sharing, relationship quality, responsiveness/customer service, and positivity/optimism (p. 341). Of the six factors, the researchers discovered that conversational human voice and responsiveness/customer service were the most important dimensions for perceptions of relationship quality (p. 342).

In summary, the previous section outlines the influences on relationship management and quality. Public relations scholars propose that relationships should be built on mutual benefit and that mutually-beneficial relationships require interaction and balancing interests. Scholarship emphasizes interpersonal approaches like building on common interest, trust, listening, and others to manage organization-stakeholder relationships, especially in relationship-management online.

### Marketing

The previous section explored the perspectives on public relations as a strategic relationship management function. The purpose of this section is to outline the perspectives on marketing, and provide context for its roles and activities vis-à-vis public relations in managing relationships. Marketing perspectives in this area primarily comprise expert opinions from trade literature, and the concepts in this section are representative of the ways the industry talks about marketing and relationship management.

Marketing is considered the organizational function that is designed to generate market intelligence about the needs of current and potential customers, create product value for customers, and achieve competitive advantage (Aaker, 2008, p. 120; Zahay, et al., 2004, p. 6). Marketing heads the strategic analysis of customers, competitors, and markets; develops business strategies around the value the firm offers to its customers (the customer value proposition); leads the firm's growth; and manages the corporate brand and product brands (Aaker, 2008, pp. 2-3). Marketing identifies consumer trends and strategizes communication for sustained profitability

and brand equity (Aaker, 2008, pp. 132-133; Schultz & Kitchen, 2004, p. 348; Keller, 2000; 1996, p. 128; Thorson & Moore, 1996, pp. 3-4).

This study considers three marketing activities to conceptualize the purposes and processes of marketing: the marketing or promotional mix, branding, and relationship marketing. Though the full array of marketing responsibilities goes beyond these three activities, I consider these relevant to this study's focus on an organization's communication functions and relationship-building.

#### The Marketing Mix

Marketing is commonly considered in terms of the marketing communications mix or the promotional mix, and can be used either separately or together in an effort to “create meaningful exchanges with potential customers” (Kitchen, 1999b, p. 13).

The marketing mix includes (Kitchen, 1999a):

- Advertising, or paid communication for the purpose of promotion,
- Personal selling, or oral communication with the purpose of making a sale,
- Sales promotion, or incentives to encourage purchasing,
- Direct marketing, which is designed to induce a direct response from customers,
- Publicity and public relations, or communication designed to stimulate demand for a product or service through media relations and other consumer communication (p. 24).

The use of marketing communications tools is influenced by consumer needs and wants, product loyalties, competition, financial risk, and the drive for market-share (Kitchen, 1999a, p. 33). Recent literature in marketing has focused on the

importance of a customer-centric or market-orientation worldview, in which customer attitudes, preferences and perspectives define a firm's external communication (advertising, customer service, market research, product development, sales, and promotion) because doing so generates competitive advantage and sustained profitability (Dewhirst & Davis, 2005, p. 86; Rust, Zeithaml, & Lemon, 2004, p. 2; Schultz & Kitchen, 2004, p. 349; Zahay, et al., 2004, p. 6).

Marketing practices are commonly designed for profitability, competitive advantage, and customer loyalty. Marketing communications management involves assessing the strengths and weakness of the organization (and its competitors), setting strategic priorities, creating corporate and product brands, analyzing long-term return-on-investment, and managing message distribution (Aaker, 2008).

#### Branding

Discussed as a process of associating salient characteristics about a product, service, or organization in the minds of consumers, branding is used for building customer relationships and loyalty (Aaker, 2008, p. 161; Rust, et al., 2004, p. 4; Holt, 2003, p. 7; Keller, 2000; 1996, p. 109; Campbell, 2002, p. 208-209).

Keller (1996) defines the brand as a symbol, logo, or image that “identifies and differentiates a product or service” (p. 103). The brand is considered one of the most important elements of business strategy (Holt, 2003, p. 1) and includes several concepts, including brand relevance, or customer desires for a brand characteristic and the brand's position within a individual's purchasing consideration set (Aaker, 2008, p. 162); brand image, or the way consumers perceive an organization, its products, services and behavior (Keller, 2003; 1996, p. 106); brand positioning, or the

brand elements actively communicated by the organization (Aaker, 2008, p. 173; Keller, 1996, p. 111); and brand identity, or the aspirational associations an organization seeks to create mediated through direct consumer contact or experience (Aaker, 2008, p. 168; Vos & Schoemaker, 2001).

The overall purpose of branding is to build brand equity—or “the marketing effects uniquely attributable to the brand” (Keller, 1996, p. 105). An emerging focus is on customer-based brand equity, which is “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 1996, p. 105; see also Rust, et al., 2004; Campbell, 2002).

The brand is an actively managed entity, through the identification and communication of brand associations designed to fulfill the needs of consumers (Madhavaram, Badrinarayanan, & McDonald, 2005, p. 69-70; Holt, 2003, p. 4; Campbell, 2002, p. 210-211; Keller, 2000, p. 7; Eagle, 1999, p. 58). Kitchen (1999b) has argued that the underlying purpose of marketing communication is the creation and management of the firm’s brand for the purpose of influencing buyer behavior (p. 8). Marketing communication creates and promotes the company’s brand symbols and values that differentiate the company from a competitor (Aaker, 2008, p. 123; Keller, 2003). In this way, practitioners seek to establish brand equity (Aaker, 2008, pp. 157-158; Madhavaram, et al., 2005 p. 69; Keller, 2003, p.).

Keller (2003) emphasizes branding as a practice for instilling deep mental processing, rather than simple logo design and image coordination. His branding model, Customer-based Brand Equity (CBBE) is designed to achieve such mental processing, leading to brand resonance, or the state in which a customer builds a

loyalty-based relationship with the company and its products and services. CBBE is defined as “the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of that brand” (Keller, 2003, p. 60) and recognizes that the essence of the brand is born in consumer needs, wants and behaviors.

The theoretical claim of CBBE is that equity is created through high levels of consumer awareness along with strong, favorable, and unique brand associations (Keller, 2003, p. 87). Awareness consists of brand recognition and recall (the ability to retrieve brand information in a purchase decision) (Keller, 2003, p. 67). Keller argues that brand awareness and a positive brand image influence purchasing decisions, and that strong brands appeal to both the head and the heart—they appeal to a customer’s judgments and emotions (p. 59-60).

Keller (2003, 2000) combined the elements of brand equity into a pyramid that illustrates the levels of consumer resonance with the brand identity. At the base of the pyramid is brand salience, which is the level of awareness a consumer maintains about a brand. Above salience are brand performance and brand imagery, or how a brand meets customers’ physical and psychological needs, respectively. Brand judgments (personal opinions) and brand feelings (emotional responses) come next, leading to the highest level of CBBE, brand resonance or the connection between the consumer and the brand. At this level, the consumer is actively involved in a relationship with the brand, leading to brand loyalty and even brand advocacy (2003, p. 76).

## Relationship Marketing

In the 1990s, marketing scholars proposed that to succeed in the global marketplace of increasingly diverse interests and needs, organizations needed to build interrelated networks of cooperation built on trust (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; p. 20). Recognition of diverse needs led to a paradigm shift in marketing, in which short-term transaction-based relationships were replaced with attention on ongoing relational exchanges that extend beyond a customer's purchase because of the need to ensure loyalty (Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 21; Zahay, et al., 2004, p. 7). In this way, relationships are an emerging focus in marketing (Dewhirst & Davis, 2005, p. 86; Madhavaram, et al., 2005, p. 71; Zahay, et al., 2004, p. 1; Cownie, 1999, p. 405; Morgan & Hunt, 1994, p. 20), as marketers now try to “optimize individualized communications and interactions with customers and prospects to develop a long-term profitable relationship with them” (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 138).

The concept of relationships in marketing is built on the notion of exchange (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998, p. 4; Kitchen, 1999b, p. 113), or as Aaker (2008) explains, superior customer relationships are built on “experience that connects the offering to the customer on a more involving and passionate level” (p. 144). Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that relationships can be grouped into relational exchanges between varying organizational and public partners (p. 32). In this way, types of market relationships include relational exchanges between manufacturers and suppliers and agencies and clients, strategic alliances, partnerships for joint business development, and relational exchanges between companies and customers, employees, and departments (p. 21).

Morgan and Hunt (1994) have proposed a model of marketing relationships—termed the Key Mediating Variable model, in which trust and commitment are the primary mediating variables between relationship precursors and outcomes, and thus, constitute a marketing relationship (p. 22). Commitment, they theorize, comprises parties' dedication to a relationship due to expected outcomes and trust reflects partners' confidence in the others' reliability to provide expected outcomes (p. 23). Precursors to relational commitment and trust include: consideration of termination costs and relationship benefits, recognition of common beliefs and shared values, communication, and perceptions of opportunistic behavior of the other party (p. 23-25). Morgan and Hunt (1994) also posit that relational outcomes include: acquiescence and propensity to end a relationship (otherwise referred to as relational stability), cooperation, functional conflict (or constructively working through problems) and reduction of decision-making uncertainty (p. 25-26).

Cownie (1999) has illustrated relationships as exchange on a continuum with discrete, short-term relationships and a low expectancy of future interaction at one end, and on-going and highly personal relationships of trust and high expectancy of future interaction at the other (p. 406). Along this continuum, relationships in marketing move from transactions (at the low end) to long-term relationships, strategic alliances, networks and vertical integration (at the high end) (p. 406). Aaker (2008) characterizes the latter, advanced relational structures through the notion of customers as active partners in product design and distribution (p. 217).

Other research has also considered marketing relationships in stages, in which customers progress from first company contact to loyal company customers (Kitchen



& De Pelsmacker, 2004). These stages include the acquisition stage, in which marketers identify target customer groups, the customer growth stage, in which customers are encouraged to purchase more company products, the retention stage, in which marketers listen and respond to customer issues to engender customer loyalty, and finally the reacquisition stage, in which marketers seek to minimize customer defection (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 134).

The process by which marketers employ relationships to engender customer loyalty is known as “relationship marketing.” Morgan and Hunt (1994) define relationship marketing as: “all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges” (p. 22). Kitchen and De Pelsmacker (2004) define relationship marketing as “relationships, networks and interaction...aimed at establishing long-term win-win relationships with customers” (p. 124). Cownie (1999) argues that relationship marketing is company-customer interaction designed to cultivate “effective, long-term, profitable, and mutually rewarding relationships” (p. 416).

Relationship marketing represents a departure from traditional short-term transaction marketing in favor of long-term efforts to engender loyalty as marketers seek to move customers up “the loyalty ladder” from first contact to partner (Kitchen & de Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 125). Though coordinated brand communication is often used to manage this process (Kliatchko, 2005, p. 9; Keller, 2003; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998, p. 5), relationship marketing shifts focus from a one-way orientation to two-way interactive communication (Cownie, 1999, p. 416; Eadie & Kitchen, 1999, p. 461).

Relationship marketing principles include long-term win-win customer-collaboration, interaction between both parties, collaboration, commitment, dependency, personal contact, and customer trust (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 127). Morgan and Hunt (1994) theorized that trust and commitment “is central to successful relationship marketing, not power and its ability to ‘condition’ others” (p. 22).

Through relationship marketing, marketers “bring quality, customer service and marketing into close alignment, leading to long-term and mutually beneficial customer relationships” (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2001, p. 340). Relationship marketing is driven by customer satisfaction and retention, which leads to new customer acquisition, and customer profitability, or the notion that the longer a customer interacts with an organization, the more profitable the customer becomes (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, & Van den Bergh, 2001; p. 328; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998, p. 10; Mentzer, 1995, p. 117). In this way, the value of relationship marketing is often discussed in terms of lifetime customer value (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 136).

Relationship marketing is also referred to as frequency marketing, derived from the concept of frequent-flyer programs, and comprising efforts to “identify, maintain and increase the yield from Best Customers, through long-term, interactive, value-added relationships” (Barlow, 1995, p. 201). Frequency marketing programs feature five common elements: a database for tracking customer activity, a structure for customer relationship building, benefits to encourage customers to enter into a

relationship with the organization, communication for customer interaction, and program evaluation based on customer preferences (Barlow, 1995, p. 203).

Database management plays a critical part in relationship marketing.

Databases enable marketing to support a “customer-first” orientation, as marketers use databases to register each contact with customers, keep regular contact, and mass customize messages for large groups of customers (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004, p. 133). In this way, relationship marketing is also purchase-oriented. Marketing literature advocates segmenting publics into customer-characteristics (i.e. lifestyle, age, and demographics), and product-related elements (i.e. user type, usage, and price sensitivity), tracking buying behavior, enhancing customization, and personalizing service (Aaker, 2008; Cownie, 1999). Marketing literature also posits that through relationship marketing, marketers engage in after-marketing activities to ensure added value and quality for consumers even after the purchase has been made (Keller, 2003, pp. 245-246; Cownie, 1999; Eagle, 1999).

Overall, the purpose of marketing communications may be to ensure competitive advantage and profitability through effective management of marketing mix elements (i.e. advertising, publicity, direct selling, etc.), a customer-orientation, effective branding, and relationship marketing.

#### Public Relations and Marketing

Of the developments in the practice of public relations, integration and the overlap of public relations and marketing continue to be debated, but little explored. Marketing scholars have long recognized that public relations and marketing, as the primary external communication functions of the organization, cover related areas

(Kotler & Mindak, 2000, p. 351). Though operating separately, both seek to satisfy stakeholder needs, and, to that end, while marketing incorporates public relations publicity within the marketing mix, public relations seeks influence over marketing and to serve as a watchdog to ensure that a company's marketing practices are socially responsible (Kotler & Mindak, 2000, p. 351). Whereas some recognize that an investment in marketing and advertising is distinct from an investment in public relations (Debreceeny & Cochrane, 2004, p. 45), marketing scholars recognize a blurring of the boundaries between the two functions, or as Kotler and Mindak (2000) asked, "Where does marketing end and public relations begin?" (p. 351).

Kotler and Mindak (2000, p. 352) have proposed four "classes" of public relations and marketing overlap in professional practice. Class One enterprises (i.e. small nonprofit organizations like social service agencies) do not use either function in a formal sense. Class Two enterprises maintain a formal and established public relations function, but no marketing function (i.e. hospitals and colleges, which tend to employ public relations officers for the gamut of communication needs). Class Three organizations have a strong marketing orientation but a weak public relations function (i.e. small manufacturing companies). Class Four organizations have strong marketing and public relations departments, such as those in large Fortune 500 corporations. In these latter organizations public relations and marketing may operate independently and report to separate corporate officers, though in some cases, public relations may be housed under marketing (Kotler & Mindak, 2000, p. 352).

Traditionally, public relations and marketing communications have occupied relatively distinct roles from a marketing communications perspective—public

relations addresses an assortment of groups using publicity or uncontrolled media tools like press releases and annual reports while marketing addresses consumers, distributors, and customers using paid-for media tools like advertising, personal selling, and direct marketing (Gronstedt, 1996, p. 288).

Kotler and Mindak (2000) have recognized that the two seek potentially incompatible goals, the one looking to make the company more market-oriented, the other, more public-oriented (p. 355). Kotler and Mindak have developed five models for understanding the relationship between marketing and public relations: 1) separate but equal functions in which marketing serves customer needs and public relations spurs corporate social responsibility; 2) equal but overlapping functions, in which the two may be distinct, but they share some common goals and operate in similar domains (i.e. product publicity and customer relations); 3) marketing as the dominant function, 4) public relations as the dominant function; and 5) marketing and public relations are the same function (p. 357).

*Marketing perspectives of public relations.* Marketing researchers separate public relations into two functions: marketing public relations (MPR) and corporate public relations (CPR) (Schultz & Kitchen, 2001; Gronstedt, 1996, p. 290; Hallahan, 1996, p. 307). Kitchen (1999a) explains that the distinction relies on the type of public issues that the organization faces. In the corporate balancing act of profits, consumer satisfaction, and public interest, the first two relate to marketing communications (and MPR), while the latter is the responsibility of Cpublic relations (p. 21). Under MPR, public relations supports marketing efforts through promotion, publicity, and media relations (Hendrix, 2004; Keller, 2003, p. 321-322; Kitchen,

1999a, p. 24, 1999b, p. 10; Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999, p.344; Hallahan, 1996, p. 307; Thorson & Moore, 1996, p. 9) and is recognized as a tool for building awareness and favorability at a fraction of the cost of advertising (Hendrix, 2004; Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999, p. 346-347; Gronstedt, 1996, p. 289; Miller & Rose, 1994). In fact, Kotler has argued that public relations should be added to the four Ps of marketing for its roles in attracting support of publics who may be blocking market entry (like government, interest groups, and labor unions) (p. 289).

Under the heading of CPR, public relations is recognized as a public management function for building favorable relationships between organizations and non-customer publics (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 23) because “non-marketing problems cannot be solved by marketing” (Kitchen & Papasolomou, 1999, p. 344). Marketing scholars value public relations as Cpublic relations for its consideration of all company publics for building relationships rather than for traditional marketing purposes like advertising and selling (Kitchen, Schultz, Kim, Han, & Li, 2004; Gronstedt, 2000, p. 17; Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 23; Gronstedt, 1996, p.289).

### *Integrated Communication*

The maxim in professional communication is that to reach the heart and mind of the consumer, one must integrate public relations and marketing, and therefore protect the corporate reputation and the brand image (Debreceeny & Cochrane, 2004, p. 28). However, an understanding of this maxim is still based primarily on definitions and concepts, and there is a need to explore the process of integrated communication.

Much of the research on integrated communication has emphasized opinions of management on integration, especially the issues around coordinating communication across traditional organizational and departmental barriers. Kitchen, Spickett-Jones, and Grimes (2007) interviewed senior executives at public relations and advertising agencies in the United Kingdom and found that though the concept of integration is recognized, barriers to integration hinder the process and implementation. Zahay, et al. (2004) argued that barriers to integration also include sharing of customer-level data between different functional areas and decision makers, which requires a cultural shift in organizational philosophies and structure because most organizations fail to share this type of information (p. 4). Much of the research discusses the turf battles involved in integration and scholars argue for a transition from silo-mentality to unified singularity (Liodice, 2008; Kitchen, et al., 2007; Duncan & Everett, 2000). Perhaps for this reason, integrated communication has been criticized as a management fad rather than a scholarly domain (Cornelissen & Lock, 2000).

The purpose of this section is to outline a framework for understanding the process of integrated communication. This section includes integrated communication concepts and frameworks, and though much of the literature focuses on defining integrated communication, it is my purpose here to outline the theories that seek to explain how it works.

## Elements of Integration

The basis for exploring integration begins with an understanding of what is integrated. The first official definition of integration came in 1989 when the American Association of Advertising Agencies defined the phenomenon as:

“A concept of marketing communications planning that recognizes the added value in a program that integrates a variety of strategic disciplines – e.g. general advertising, direct response, sales promotion and public relations – and combines these disciplines to provide clarity, consistency and maximum communication impact” (Kerr, et al., 2008, p. 515).

Though this definition is still widely used today (Kerr, et al., 2008), scholars have added the concepts of branding (Madhavaram, et al., 2005; Schultz & Schultz, 1998, cited in Kliatchko, 2005), information control for message resonance (Madhavaram, et al., 2005; Keller, 1996), the integration of audiences (Reid, 2003; Schultz & Kitchen, 1997; Schultz, 1996), and the interplay between channels, audiences, and content (Kliatchko, 2008) to the definition. Kliatchko (2008) argues that an appropriate definition of integration, based on literature, is:

“An audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs.’ (p. 140).

I am now going to discuss four elements of Kliatchko’s definition: the integration of stakeholders, content, channels, and results. These elements provide a framework against which to explore the process of integrated communication.

*Integrating stakeholders.* Kerr, et al. (2008) have explained that the emphasis of stakeholders is a relatively new development in IMC research—scholars originally,



emphasized customers and consumers as the main targets of integration but have expanded to include all publics that a campaign may reach (p. 516). Research is increasingly recognizing the importance of including *all* stakeholders in integration strategy (Gregory, 2007; Gronstedt, 2000).

Within integration, communication professionals seek to match strategy to publics or stakeholders (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 145-147; Kim, et al., 2004, p. 33). Early research by Duncan (1993) claimed that individuals “self-select and identify themselves as being interested in a brand” (p. 18). Stakeholders are the foundation for integration, because they are already *integrated* and *integrating*. J. E. Grunig and L. A. Grunig (1998) argued that integration should proceed from public needs, rather than from communication objectives. Gronstedt (1996) also emphasized stakeholder orientation, based on his claim that the groups that public relations and marketing target are not mutually exclusive (i.e. an employee may also be a consumer or a consumer may also be an opinion leader) (p. 292). In this way, integrated communication addresses a merging stakeholder base and research on this level emphasizes public and consumer relationships, rather than communication effects (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 152; Madhavaram, et al., 2005, p. 72; Kitchen, et al., 2004, p. 1419).

*Integrating content.* The purpose of integration is synergy, or the added value of coordinating communication content that is greater than the sum of individual communication parts (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 154; Stammerjohan, et al., 2005, p. 55; Moriarty, 1996). Moriarty has suggested that message impact is created through

synergy, which entails “linkages created in a receiver’s mind as a result of messages that connect” (p. 333). She further explains:

“Synergy suggests that an entire structure of messages—with its links and repetition—creates impact beyond the power of any one message on its own and this happens even in situations where there might be little attention paid to conventional advertising...Communication synergy can be best maximized by extending message encounters beyond the traditional advertising media into every possible situation where a receiver might have contact with a message from a company” (p. 333).

Moriarty argues that synergy’s impact is born in a cycle in which message concepts, channels, and audience responses are connected and lead to “repeated units of meaning over time [as] different channels and sources come together to create coherent knowledge and attitudes” (p. 333).

Synergy is a fundamental concept in integrated communication literature. Kliatchko (2008) reviewed the IMC literature and found that synergy has been a research priority in IMC since 2000. Schultz (2005) has explained that research in IMC explores:

“How various marketing and communication activities interact with each other in the marketplace and how the various brand ‘touchpoints’ come together to impact and influence consumers, customers, employees, channels, the financial community, and the host of other stakeholders that are involved in today’s marketplace success” (p. 7).

Synergistic communication activities influence purchase decisions and lead to sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 2008, p. 125; Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 14). The benefits of communication synergy are basis for integrated communication scholars' argument that organizations coordinate and synchronize communication activities for a single organizational persona or voice (Kliatchko, 2005; Schultz & Kitchen, 2001; Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 15). Several scholars argue that such coordination for synergy is born out of digital communication technology that has given stakeholders increased access to a diverse array of organizational messages and behavior (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 148; Schultz & Kitchen, 2001; Kitchen, 1999b, pp. 12-13).

Integrated communication researchers emphasize the effects of message synergy on groups and the benefit of synergy to organizations that integrate communication (Madhavaram, et al., 2005; Moriarty, 1996; Schumann, Dyer, & Petkus, 1996; Solomon & Englis, 1996). One of the main benefits of integrating communication messages discussed by researchers is brand equity (Madhavaram, 2005; Campbell, 2002; Kliatchko, 2005; Debreceeny & Cochrane, 2004; Kitchen & Schultz, 2001; Keller, 1996, p. 128). Madhavaram (2005) even argues, "IMC research has come a long way from being conceptualized as the coordination of communication tools for a brand" and is now considered a critical driver for brand equity through "an interaction-focused view of brand communication" (p. 70). In his review of the literature, Kliatchko (2008) found that the emphasis on synergy in IMC research has been focused on branding and brand equity research. Kitchen, et al. (2007) also discovered that integration is often considered for brand advantage,

enabling organizations to extend their products and services beyond their competitors because of the brand equity that IMC provides (p. 150).

Further, Kitchen et al. (2007) discuss the notion of integrated brand communication, in which external and internal communication are coordinated and based on the organization's central brand (p. 154). In this structure, every department and internal public "speak the brand language" in their interactions with customers, suppliers, and clients (p. 154). Research by Kerr, et al. (2008) confirms the holistic effect of communicating brand messages, that integration recognizes the benefit of coordinating *all* messages, rather than only marketing messages (p. 516).

*Integrating channels.* The integration of company communication across multiple media or platforms for desired effect is a recognized emphasis in IMC scholarship (Stammerjohan, et al., 2005, p. 59). Media planning for synergy has been of particular emphasis in research on integrated communication for IMC research (Kliatchko, 2008, p. 136).

Media fragmentation and communication technology are recognized driving forces for integration (Kitchen, et al., 2007); and, to this point, Kitchen, et al. (2007) conceptualize integration as a quick-response mechanism to the "diversified media sector...widely varying consumers' needs and tastes, and clients' desires to develop a cost-efficient and effective marketing strategy" (p. 33). The coordination of communication channels is considered another way to ensure synergy in the management of various creative elements (Kitchen, et al., 2007, p. 156).

Integration of channels includes consideration of all company touch-points—or access points in which an individual or group might come in contact with an

organization or its products. Touch-point considerations are based on customer preference for each channel (Kliatchko, 2008, pp. 149-150). That is, integration not only involves using a diverse mix of media outlets, but using the *correct* mix of media outlets. Kitchen et al (2007) found that the strength of the IMC concept among agency executives existed in the ability and need to communicate with publics via multiple ways and channels, and that singular marketing practices are not enough to communicate with publics anymore (p. 157).

*Integrating results.* Integration is said to emphasize a results-oriented perspective on communication planning and evaluation. In Kliatchko's (2008) review of the literature, he asserts that organizational effectiveness and measurement are key components of integration (p. 151). Furthermore, Zahay, et al., (2004) argue that integration is designed for enhanced performance and measurement of customer data (pp. 6-7). Kliatchko (2008) indicates that the results of integration emphasize measurement based on behavioral response rather than brand awareness or recall. That is, measurement in integration emphasizes the evaluation of outcomes rather than outputs (the message) or outtakes (the resulting change in attitude or perception) (p. 142). IMC outcomes include consideration of long-term results, such as relationship-building (Kerr, et al., 2008).

Liodice (2008) proposed that in addition to common objectives and strategies, integration requires common measurement process. He suggests that marketing mix modeling is one such process (p. 26). Through marketing mix modeling, also known as econometric modeling, companies use sales to evaluate communication activities (Hughes, 2002). Using regression analysis and historical data (Doyle, 2004),

marketing mix modeling enables companies to “estimate the impact marketing activities are having on sales, and then build forecasts for future sets of promotional campaigns” (DemandGen, n.d.). This modeling process allows companies to decipher which part of the communication mix is working, and which is not (Nardone, n.d.). Modeling variables run the gamut from pricing decisions and packaging considerations to the weather, economy, and even seasonality (Frances, 2005; Doyle, 2004).

Marketing mix modeling is gaining interest among marketing decision-makers (Hughes, 2002), and has been a large part of the marketing budget at Proctor & Gamble (Neff, 2007), thanks to its “operating efficiency and unmatched clout as the world's biggest marketer to massively outspend its rivals” (Neff, 2007, p. 1). In fact, marketing spending power is a key ingredient for modeling because “models require clients to invest large amounts of data and time” (Hughes, 2002, p. S4). For this reason, some argue that modeling stands to benefit the biggest spenders in marketing (DemandGen, n.d.). In fact, one analyst suggests a marketing budget of at least \$10M to even \$50M for modeling to be efficient (DemandGen, n.d.).

#### Models of Integration

In spite of little theoretical development of the concept of integration (Kliatchko, 2008, 2005; Schultz, 2005), some models of integration have been proposed. In particular, models have been developed based on two aspects of integration: 1) integration of communication tools and 2) structural or organizational integration.

Gronstedt (2000, p. 18, 1996, p. 289) has developed a model for understanding integration based on the idea that public relations' and marketing communications' tools and publics overlap. In his stakeholder relations model, Gronstedt (1996, p. 291) combines each function's sending, receiving, and interactive tools into separate tool boxes that can be used to communicate with the full gamut of organizational publics (i.e. employees, media, suppliers and distributors, customers, etc.). For example, in the sending tools box, Gronstedt combines advertising, sales promotion, and publicity (p. 298). In the receiving tools box, Gronstedt considers both primary research methods (i.e. surveys, interviews, press clippings, etc.) and secondary data (i.e. journals, government records) (p. 296). Finally, interactive tools include e-mail, phone, alliances, and conferences, among others (p. 297). In Gronstedt's model, organizations use these three communication tools to manage relations with stakeholders, which represent an interrelated set of individuals, at the center of which is the customer. Each stakeholder group is attached to the customer and each influences customer behavior (p. 292-293).

From a structural or organizational integration standpoint, some IMC scholars have sought to conceptualize how integration happens on the corporate level. Kliatchko (2008) has argued that integration is managed from the top down, and Kim, et al. (2004) argue that organizational variables, such as degree of customer segmentation, diffusion of information technology, size of organization, and client demand influence integration. Schultz and Schultz (1998, as cited in Kliatchko, 2008) propose four levels of integration, in which integration progresses from tactical coordination to application of information technology, and eventually to strategic

integration. In other words, integration is a procession from the integration of content, to channel integration and eventually stakeholder integration (Kliatchko, 2008).

Duncan and Caywood (1996, also Caywood, 1997) have built a model based on research that outlines the stages of IMC implementation at an organization arguing that integration begins as awareness of changing business landscapes and the need to respond leading to an integrated system (pp. 22-23). In stage two—image integration—organizations begin by synchronizing the look and feel of the organization, and in subsequent stages, the organizations advance through stages of integration that are of increasing complexity (p. 25). Stage three yields functional integration, or increased involvement of separate departments (p. 26). Stage four features coordinated integration, in which the barriers to integration begin to disappear as each function is considered with equal status (p. 27).

These first four stages of integration (or first three—Caywood [1997] combines coordinated and functional integration into one level) are considered lower levels of integration, because they represent one-way, outward processes and may not consider stakeholder priorities. Caywood (1997) argues that more advanced levels of integration “expand the range of audiences from customers to all stakeholders” and consider stakeholder interactions and contact points with the organization (preface, p. xx). These “higher degrees” of integration include consumer-based integration, in which customer touch-points are evaluated and communication activities planned from the outside in (Duncan & Caywood, 1996; p. 29), stakeholder integration, in which organizations assess how they relate to “a rich mix of individuals” (Caywood, 1997, preface, p. xxii), and relationship management integration, in which



communication management converges around building relationships with a full range of stakeholders and consumers (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, pp. 32-33).

Finally, throughout the development of integration, the benefits of communication functions (i.e. advertising, corporate and marketing public relations, direct marketing, etc.) are “weighed and balanced to create the best mix” (p. 23), until a fully integrated strategy incorporates each communication function equally into the success of the corporate mission.

In sum, further theoretical development of integrating communication tools and integrating organizational communication structures are under-examined in professional practice. They represent fruitful structures from which to establish an understanding for integration from a practice perspective.

#### *Integration Gaps: Relationships and Public Relations*

A review of the literature reveals that there are two underlying gaps in research on integration: 1) integration and relationship-building and 2) public relations within integration.

*Integrated relationships.* In spite of an underlying recognition that relationships are important in communication integration (for example, Gronstedt, 1996; Duncan & Caywood, 1996), few research studies have explored relationship-building and integration in practice.

Perhaps the most representative work has been conducted by Gronstedt (1996). Gronstedt’s stakeholder relations model emphasizes a dialogue approach in which organizations and stakeholders build mutually beneficial relations, and the notions of target audience, impact and campaign are replaced with relational terms

like networking, partnerships, and alliances. He recognizes that all stakeholders are interdependent, and, therefore, building sustainable relationships is vital. For Gronstedt, relationships are an outgrowth of a successful integration:

“The integrated use of the receiving, interactive, and sending tools will facilitate a dialogue in which the stakeholders are active, interactive, and equal participants of an ongoing communication process. The purpose of such communication process is to build lasting relationships that...are treated as a marriage, rather than a date” (p. 297).

Studies that have discussed relationship-building and integration consider integrated communication a public relations concept. Kerr, et al. (2008) discovered through an analysis of university courses, that relationship-building is not taught in IMC programs, and speculated that it may be taught in public relations’ programs. Similarly, Kliatchko (2008) argues that the concept of relationship building comes from public relations, and that IMC notions of transactional relations, need to assume public relations’ standards of long-term relationship capacities. Similarly, Zahay, et al. (2004) argue that IMC requires a shift from traditional exchange-based and closed-link transaction relationships to a long-term relational exchange where organizations view customers as assets and seek ongoing loyalty through a 360 degree view of customer (pp. 4, 7).

The concept of customer and stakeholder relationship-building may be a new direction in IMC research (Kerr, et al., 2008). Kitchen, et al. (2007) found that few integrated structures enable agencies to effectively manage the network of relationships with clients and other service providers and pointed toward a need to

improve relationship capacities in integration, and Schultz (2005) found in a review of the research that future IMC studies should “focus on identifying the interactions that IMC creates” (p. 7).

Overall, it is evident that the concept of relationship-building is underdeveloped in research on integration. There is a need to explore how organizations build relationships in an integrated structure.

*Integrated public relations.* The gap in understanding public relations in communication integration differs from that of the relationship gap—research in IMC has addressed public relations, but it considers public relations as a marketing communications function, exploring its roles in media relations and publicity more than it considers public relations as corporate public relations, public affairs, or stakeholder-relations.

Studies have often considered public relations as a marketing communications tool for IMC (Kerr, et al., 2008; Hallahan, 2007, 1996). For example, Lawler and Torelle (2002) demonstrated how public relations was used to educate and excite a market prior to the launch of a new Microsoft software operating system, thus complementing marketing efforts and creating recognition for the company’s products.

Early research did conceptualize integrated public relations beyond marketing communications and publicity (Caywood, 1997; Duncan & Caywood, 1996; Gronstedt, 1996). Caywood (1997) argued that public relations would lead organizations on management levels of integration, including the integration of stakeholder relationships, structural integration, and societal integration (preface, p.

xii). Under stakeholder relationship integration, public relations professionals use their relational skills to build relationships with strategic stakeholders and enhance organizational reputation, strengthening “the outside-in perspective of an organization through its managed relationships” (p. xii). Under management integration, public relations assumes a leadership role in the organization, in particular because of its acumen and expertise in managing communication. Through structural integration, public relations becomes involved in other management functions, assuming a leadership role over functions like marketing communications. Finally, under societal integration, public relations leads the organization’s integration into society as an operational member of the society, matching corporate purposes with societal goals.

Some research has explored public relations beyond its marketing communications roles, though it is often devoid of theoretical base or comprises opinion-based arguments on how public relations *should* be integrated. For example, Debreceeny and Cochrane (2004) have demonstrated how the insurance firm, Allstate, integrated corporate public relations efforts with marketing communications during a wildfire season in California. In order to enhance communication outreach and aid people affected by the fires, Allstate assembled an integrated team comprising government relations, corporate relations, advertising, and customer communication, plus agents, regional sales, and claims center professionals. Through the cross-functional, Allstate set up mobile claims centers in highly-affected areas, created a California Wildfire Relief Fund to help aid recovery (which yielded media opportunities), and used advertising to instruct consumers on how to be safe and prepare for the post-fire environment.

As mentioned above, such efforts like that of Debreceeny and Cochrane (2004) are valuable practice-based analyses, but they are devoid of theoretical foundations. Furthermore, opinion-based arguments seem to be the emphasis in the literature on public relations and integration. In particular, several scholars argue that public relations is in strongest position to lead the integration process (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Grunig, et al., 2002; Caywood, 1997) because of the function's focus on strategic relationship management with all organizational stakeholders. However, there is a need to transcend opinion and establish a theoretical understanding for public relations' value and roles within integration, and in particular, its unique emphasis on relationship cultivation. In particular, Caywood's (1997) roles of public relations (relationship integration, management integration, corporate structure integration, and societal integration) provide a theoretical foundation for exploring public relations and integration.

#### Public Relations and Integration

Hallahan (2007) has reviewed the public relations literature on integration. Citing articles and discussions from J. E. Grunig, L. A. Grunig, Dozier, Broom, and others, Hallahan found that public relations scholars met the concept of integration with resistance (p. 301-308). Many of the responses appeared to be opinion-based, stemming from perceived differences between marketing and public relations philosophies (p. 301) and citing "unscrupulous marketing practices" (p. 305) and marketing imperialism as threats to the profession of public relations (p. 301-302). Arguments against integration of public relations and marketing also included considerations that the two rely on different communication models (marketing being

one-way, public relations, two-way) and the potential relegation of public relations to “an inferior technical role...divest[ing] public relations of any significant administrative responsibilities” in an integrated model (p. 305).

Perspectives on public relations in an integrated communication structure have been mixed. Hallahan (2007) reviewed the findings of the Excellence study—which revealed that key characteristics of excellent communication were that public relations should operate as a single department, separate from marketing (p. 303). At the same time, however, other research findings from the excellence study showed support for integration (Hallahan, 2007, p. 308). In their 2002 report of the Excellence study, authors Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002) found that practitioner Excellence scores were above average when marketing and public relations received equal support and were treated as equal partners (cited in Hallahan, 2007 p. 308). Additionally, they found no statistical difference in excellence scores based on department structure or integration of public relations and marketing (Hallahan, 2007, p. 308). However, in that report, Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier called for integration of all communication activities within the public relations department (Hallahan, 2007, p. 308).

It is apparent that research may be inconclusive on the roles of public relations in integration. Hallahan (2007) ends his review of the literature with a similar statement:

“The key empirical evidence provided is fragmentary, and hardly conclusive to support the argument favoring a single public relations department or the necessity to avoid sublimation by marketing” (p. 308).

Hallahan then proposed three challenges facing public relations research in integration: 1) a better definition of integrated communication, 2) consideration of the theoretical convergence of public relations and integrated communication and recognition of the similarities between the two disciplines, and 3) the need for conceptualization of communication and department structures (p. 309-313).

One key point raised by Hallahan (2007) that informs this study involves the concept of relationships:

“In light of the shared focus on relationship management found in the literature, it is becoming increasingly necessary to understand the parallels between how public relations and marketing approach building and maintaining relationships” (p. 317).

#### *Literature Review and the Scope of this Study*

Scholars have argued that the concept of relationships differentiates public relations from other disciplines, especially marketing (Gower, 2006; Hutton, 1999). The current study will explore public relations practice as a relationship management function, and will use the concepts, dimensions, and indicators of organization-public relationships reflected in public relations literature to distinguish public relations within the context of integrated communication.

Literature reviews (Hung, 2007; Ki & Shin, 2006) have indicated that public relations research has commonly explored relationships against Broom et al.'s (2000) relationship outcomes and antecedents, as well as relationship indicators, outcomes and dimensions spelled out by Grunig and Huang (2000), Hon and Grunig (1999), and Ledingham and Bruning (1998; 2000a, 2000b). Following this precedent, the

current study will use these perspectives on relationship antecedents, maintenance strategies, and outcomes to conceptualize relationship management in public relations and potentially distinguish it from relationship marketing. At the same time, I will also consider spontaneous and oppositional forces at play in relationship creation, spelled out by Hung (2007).

This study will also evaluate public relations relationship strategies against marketing strategies. Public relations emphasizes the values of communal relationships, while marketing emphasizes exchange relationships built on expectations and returns. Although this distinction is evident, the literature is overlapping in discussion of these dimensions. This focus meets the aforementioned call of Hallahan (2007) to understand the parallels between public relations and marketing relationship-building (p. 317). In this way, this study will evaluate public relations relational activities against Grunig and Huang's (2000) symmetrical relationship strategies—positivity, openness, assurances of legitimacy, networking, and shared tasks—and relationship marketing's concepts of exchange, expectation and return (Kitchen & De Pelsmacker, 2004; Morgan & Hung, 1994) to differentiate public relations relationship management in an integrated communication environment.

Finally, this study seeks to answer Hallahan's (2007) call to better define integrated communication. To this end, I will use Kliatchko's (2008) framework of integration, including integrating content, channels, audiences, and results, as well as Caywood's stages of integration to establish an understanding of integrated communication in the organizations participating in this research.



### Research Questions

The following research questions have been developed based on the literature to fulfill gaps in understanding of public relations and integration:

Research Question 1: How is the integration of communication defined, understood, and implemented in organizations?

Under this question, I explored integration according to Klitachko's (2008) review of the literature and the four pillars of integration that he proposes: 1) content 2) stakeholders, 3) channels, and 4) results. Under this question, I also evaluated integrated communication against Gronstedt's (1996; 2000) model of stakeholder relations, and Duncan and Caywood's (1996) stages of integration.

Research Question 2: How is public relations and marketing differentiated under the context of integration?

The literature review reveals a need to explore how public relations and marketing are differentiated. Current perspectives label marketing in advertising, sales, and branding, while public relations roles include MPR and CPR considerations. Furthermore, this research question was designed to reconcile the difference in perspectives between marketing and public relations scholars on public relations. Marketing scholars may consider public relations as marketing and promotion, but public relations scholarship demonstrates a focus on strategic relationship management. Caywood (1997) considers public relations roles in leading integrated communication.

Research Question 3: How do relationship models of public relations in the literature help explain the public relations role in integration?

In this study, I explored public relations' activities in building relationships with organizational stakeholders against the concepts of relationship theory and organization-public relationships outlined in the literature. The purpose of this question was to evaluate whether integrated communication influences relationship management, based on the concepts proposed in public relations scholarship.

Research Question 4: Does the level of integration influence public relations' activities in strategic relationship management?

The purpose of this study is to assess whether scholars' assumptions that integrated communication threatens public relations' roles in strategic relationship management can be corroborated in research. To make this assessment, I compared public relations roles and relationship management activities against both public relations and marketing considerations of functional purpose and relationship management.

This research question assumes that strategic relationship management exists, to some extent, at the organizations I studied. It is my assumption that the goal of communication at an organization is to establish some level of relationship with an organization's stakeholders. In the previous section, the literature in public relations demonstrates that building relationships with stakeholders is or should be the *modus operandi* of public relations and communication management, and I approached this research from that perspective, that strategic relationship management should exist for communication functions to fulfill its roles to the organization.

In the section that follows, I outline the research methodology utilized to answer these four research questions. This research involves a qualitative case study of multiple organizations that demonstrate varying levels of integration. The following chapter explains the rationale for my choice of the qualitative methodology and case study method to inform this study and outlines the processes employed in this research.

## Chapter 3: Methods

Qualitative research is the science of the observed (Lindlof, 1995). It is a situated activity that locates the observer in a world and features interpretive practices to make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative researchers seek to transform the world into a series of representations, studying phenomena in a natural setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Qualitative methodology has been chosen for this research project because of its appropriateness in clarifying theory, achieving depth of understanding in representing real life in natural settings, providing insight into meaning and behavior within social structures, and solving problems in the social world.

Qualitative research is one of the most appropriate methodologies for clarifying theory, and is often used as a precursor to testing theory (Cheseboro & Borisoff, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Coulon (1995) maintains that qualitative research should precede quantitative research, allowing the researcher to clarify social facts before measuring variables.

Qualitative research is an effective methodology for representing real life in natural occurrences and achieving richness and depth (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). One of the primary goals of qualitative research is to gather thick description in studying phenomena and events (Miles & Huberman, 1994) as the qualitative researcher seeks to represent experience and preserve processes in a natural setting (Cheseboro & Borisoff, 2007). Chambers (2003) argues that qualitative research has evolved from studying groups or cultures to studying the processes that happen in human events—that a growing emphasis in qualitative

research is exploring negotiation of behavior and structure in processes and interactions. Such emphasis on thick description, experience, and depth in understanding processes are unique strengths of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

My research purpose is to understand the complicated processes underlying integration and public relations practice. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that qualitative research seeks to describe complicated things through reduction or explain complicated things by showing how the parts fit together according to rules and standards. Evaluating public relations practice within integration requires that I portray, represent, and explain the underlying rules that dictate how the parts fit together.

Qualitative research emphasizes meaning and behavior in a socially-constructed world (Cheseboro & Borisof, 2007; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative researchers are not interested in numbers but in the relationships between subjects and participants under study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Qualitative methods require the researcher to explore situations and interpret social facts to make sense of phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Choosing a qualitative research methodology has the advantage of observing, interpreting, and representing practitioner roles and processes that constitute public relations functions within integration.

Finally, qualitative research is advantageous to me because it emphasizes action and application; its underlying purpose to solve problems in the social world (Cheseboro & Borisof, 2007). Research results should be pragmatic and have utility

for intended audiences (Cheseboro & Borisof, 2007; Kvale, 1995). Denzin (2003) has argued that one of the commitments of qualitative researchers is to produce works that represent participants' worlds in a way that will effect change.

### Assumptions

Through qualitative research, the researcher engages in three interconnected activities. The researcher begins by approaching the world with a framework or set of ideas defining the research situation, then specifies the questions the researcher investigates, and finally, dictates the specific ways in which the researcher explores those questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). My assumptions approaching this research project were two-fold, that public relations processes can be observed and can also be deciphered by gaining insights into participants' verstehen or lived experience (Lindlof, 1995). In other words, I assumed that participants' perspectives can represent and reveal organizational processes. Lindlof (1995) maintains that human consciousness orders the world, and inasmuch as I sought to evaluate public relations within an integrated structure, this study considered the consciousness of practitioners as a representation of integration.

At the same time, however, I also maintain the belief that participant perspectives may not be complete, and may not directly link to organizational processes. For this reason, this project employed multiple research activities, including document analysis and observation.

Additionally, my assumptions about public relations and marketing informed my research direction. The literature reveals differing concepts of public relations: marketing communications scholarship considers public relations as publicity,

promotion, and marketing support; public relations scholarship often considers public relations as stakeholder relationship cultivation.

My professional experiences in marketing communications also informed my assumptions here. For seven years, I worked in marketing communications positions, managing communication and brand marketing strategies. In my work, I was considered a marketing communications and public relations professional—the two functions synonymous in their consideration. Positions I held considered marketing and public relations as the same function.

My education in the public relations track at the University of Maryland's communication department included a conceptual contrast to my professional experience—public relations and marketing as conceptually distinct. In my research, I have sought to understand this conceptual separation. Research projects I have conducted have studied practitioner differences in consideration of public relations and marketing, measurement and evaluation of the two functions, and public relations practice as marketing communications and brand management.

One thing I found common in both my professional experience and academic education was the defining role of relationships. The publics with which I sought to build relationships distinguished the roles I fulfilled—marketing roles emphasized consumers, public relations emphasized media professionals, business alliances, and government officials. Relationship management also appears to represent a distinction between the two functions in academic literature—on the one hand, marketing communications builds relationships of exchange and transaction, on the other, public

relations emphasizes communal relationships (with both functional areas emphasizing the importance of symmetry and mutual benefit).

Although my professional experiences and assumptions guided this research, I sought to keep these biases in check. I recognize that my assumptions may have influenced this research, but I was cognizant and sensitive to such biases, and throughout the write-up of this study, I have sought to acknowledge them.

### *Research Design: Structure and Logic*

In this study, I conducted multiple case studies to evaluate public relations within an integrated communication context. My primary unit of analysis was organizational units and departments, in part, because this represents a new and underdeveloped unit for research in integration.

A majority of research has explored communication functions in integrated structures based on the individual as the unit of analysis, and corresponding practitioner opinions of integration and preferences within that context (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Kitchen & Li, 2005). Schultz (2005) has argued that these traditional approaches to understanding integration are inadequate and has called for a new approach establishing “how IMC works, how it impacts the various parties, and how it can be developed and maintained” (p. 7). In short, Schultz calls for an approach that evaluates structure and function. Case study research fulfills this mandate, as it facilitates the evaluation of structure and may be the most appropriate qualitative research method for analyzing the organization as the unit of analysis.

A case study is an empirical method of inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context (Yin, 2003). Case study



research is designed for exploring contextual conditions, includes consideration of multiple sources of evidence and is useful in explicating phenomena when the phenomena and the context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2003). Through case study research, a researcher seeks to present a situation, problem or decision in its situated context in an effort to present meaning and process, form and function.

#### Strengths and Limitations

Through case study research, the researcher uses a diverse set of research methods and considers the full gamut of available evidence in a research setting, which is a unique strength of the method (Yin, 2003). Case study research employs different kinds of information gathering, including interviewing, observation, and documentation content analysis, to provide a multiple-point perspective on a process or event. Case study research is not limited to the need to observe processes as they unfold, but rather, through document analysis and other methods, allows the researcher to take into account activities that have already occurred (Yin, 2003).

This use of multiple methods or sources to investigate a problem is also referred to as triangulation (Lindlof, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Triangulation requires researchers to build the framework for a study on theoretical claims and then search for evidence using multiple methods (Erzberger & Kelle, 2003). This was the structure of my study, as each of case studies began with interviewing (with questions based on my theoretical propositions). I then triangulated the results with document analysis and observation.

Case studies can be used to explain, describe, illustrate, explore, and meta-evaluate phenomena (Yin, 2003). The case study method also best answers empirical

questions like “how” and “why,” and helps researchers build an understanding of theory, by seeking illustration that matches the theory. Case study research is commonly used in organizational settings (Yin, 2003). Case study research also provides a holistic view of organizational processes, and helps describe underlying structures in organizations.

The case study method is not without its limitations. First, cases do not permit generalization across other research settings. Yin (2003) explains that this form of generalization—statistical generalization—is not appropriate in case study research, but rather, this method’s strength is in its analytical generalization. That is, case studies can be used to explore and evaluate theory, and the theoretical insights gained can be tested further. Another limitation of case study research is that it can be given to interviewer bias (Yin, 2003). As the researcher is immersed in the organization’s information and data, he or she can become too enthralled with the case organization in question.

Case study research may also be limited by unreadable or long documents (Yin, 2003). In order to produce a report that is readable, the data write-up in the results section and interpretation in the conclusion section emphasize contribution to theory and practice, as well as my purpose to provide thick description.

In consideration of these perspectives, I sought to overcome the limitations of case study research by evaluating the practices studied against public relations and integrated communication theories contained in the literature. In this way, I worked to establish Yin’s (2003) notion of analytic generalizability, in which the research results can be used to evaluate current theory.

### Multiple-case method

This study involves a multiple-case study method. Yin (2003) argues that the multiple-case method may have an advantage over single-case method because evidence from a multiple-case study may be “more compelling” and therefore considered “more robust” (p. 46). I chose to conduct a case study of multiple case organizations to add confidence to my research findings.

Miles and Huberman (1994) claim that multiple-case sampling adds confidence to the findings and enhances generalizability as it enables the researcher to look across multiple scenarios and settings. Similarly, Yin (2003) argued that multiple-case studies follow “replication logic” that through more than one case, results can be verified and transferred to other organizational scenarios (p. 47). The replication logic I used for this study was Yin’s concept of “theoretical replication,” that is, multiple cases were used in order to “predict contrasting results for predictable reasons” (p. 47).

Yin also explains that the use of single- vs. multiple-cases involves consideration of the types of cases under investigation. For example, if a researcher is investigating a rare or unusual case, a single-case study method is most appropriate. Yin argued, “Every case should serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of inquiry” (p. 47). I took this instruction into consideration when designing this study. Because my purpose was to obtain insights from various types of organizational communication structures, each case served the specific purpose of providing a different level of integration for analysis. In this way, the single-case method was inappropriate for this study, and the multiple-case method was selected.

Yin also argues that multiple-case studies may be a better option than single-case studies. “The first word of advice is that although all designs can lead to successful case studies, when you have the choice (and resources), multiple-case designs may be the preferred method” (p. 53). He further argued that single-case designs are “vulnerable if only because you will have put ‘all your eggs in one basket,’” and multiple-case studies maintain analytic advantages over single-case designs (p. 53).

For this study, I used a multiple-case design comprising three forms of data gathering: interviews, observation, and document analysis. These methods are described here, including the advantages and disadvantages of each.

#### Interviews

Interviewing, as a form of information gathering, recognizes the creation of meaning through conversation, and that knowledge is obtained through discourse (Kvale, 1995). Interviews operate on the notion that the most direct way to understand reality is to engage in conversation with participants (Fontana & Frey, 2003). Qualitative interviewing is the process of engaging an individual in dialogue through a flexible, loosely structured, but purposeful conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Interviewing can be understood as a conversational partnership, in which both the interviewer and the interviewee participate in the creation of reality and understanding. Rubin and Rubin (2005) term this conversational partnership “The Responsive Interviewing Model,” and researchers who engage interviewees must create an atmosphere in which the interviewee feels open to talk about what he or she deems important while, at the same time, the interview is organized around the

researcher's own purposes and motives. In this way, perhaps the most valuable contribution of interviewing is the ability to derive meaning directly from the participant through guided dialogue and interaction.

There are limitations with interviewing, however, as meaning may be limited to the interviewee's words, gestures, and other communication signals. With few sources outside of the interaction with the interviewee to gather meaning about the research topic—in this case, organizational processes—the researcher may be left vulnerable to the face value of the interviewee's verbal and non-verbal communication.

Interviewing over the phone versus interviewing in person may also influence and even limit research results. On the one hand, interviewing in person can be uncomfortable for participants who may feel an interviewer may be invading personal space, especially if the interview is conducted at the interviewee's office or residence. Telephone interviewing provides a remedy to this concern, as phone conversations may be less intrusive on a participant's personal space. At the same time, however, a telephone interview can be limiting because it separates the researcher from the research participant, limiting the researcher's ability to take into account gestures, body language, and other non-verbal communication signals. Telephone interviews may also be limiting because spending long amounts of time on the phone can be uncomfortable and even undesirable for participants, especially those who may be not be using a "hands-free" device that enables them to listen and talk on the phone without holding the receiver. Also, telephone interviewing can remove the participant from a structured physical research setting, and in the privacy of a participant's office

or home, he or she may “multi-task” during interviews (i.e. send emails, surf the Internet, interact with others, etc.), causing a loss of concentration on the interview, itself, and inhibiting responses.

Analyzing verbal or non-verbal communication, alone, in an interview setting as a representation of reality can be problematic (Silverman, 2003) and the activities behind the narratives gathered in an interview should be studied as well (i.e. daily activities and experiences). This is especially important given that responses are often influenced by the novelty of participating in a research project (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), and participants may even enact the role of expert interviewee or good participant and provide the researcher with the opinions the researcher may be looking for (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). For this reason, Lindlof (1995) argues that a researcher who engages in interviewing as a primary method must keep a grasp on the interviewee’s world and situate his or her responses in the context behind the responses.

#### Observation

Observation is a form of information gathering that establishes meaning through the witnessing of everyday occurrences and events (Coulon, 1995; Sanday, 1979). Observation relies on field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995) and on the words used in a natural, uncontrolled setting by participants who are going about their daily activities (Lynch, 2002).

Observation as a research method can be considered under two separate headings, participant observation and direct observation (Yin, 2003). Participant observation is based on the notion that enacting roles provides understanding and

meaning through situated experience and lived context (Lindlof, 1995). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) maintain that participant observation is the most effective method for gathering meaning because it involves direct participation. In this way, the researcher becomes immersed in the experience and becomes the research instrument (Sanday, 1979). Direct observation, on the other hand, involves collecting data on sources within the research setting, but without becoming involved in the research process.

Lindlof (1995) has argued that even the “fly on the wall” has a role, and researchers must understand the range of actions, obligations, and involvements that accompany their roles in a social system while observing. Observation roles include complete participant (where the researcher is a fully-functioning member of the system), participant as observer (the researcher maintains his or her research role but has access to multiple perspectives), observer as participant (in which participation is based on the research agenda and what the researcher seeks to observe), and complete observer (in which the researcher observes without being present in the situation) (Lindlof, 1995).

#### Document analysis

Through document analysis, a researcher collects and analyzes documentation and archival records of a research subject (Yin, 2003). Documentation can include external or internal material, including letters, memoranda and other material for external consumption as well as documents intended for internal or private audiences like personal records and strategy documents (Yin, 2003). The types of documents used in this study included power point presentations, organizational hierarchies,

promotional and advertising material, newsletters, websites, press releases, meeting agenda, and strategy documents.

Yin (2003) argued that the most critical use of documents is to “corroborate and augment evidence from other sources” (p. 87). The strengths of documentation as a form of source evidence is that it can be reviewed repeatedly, is unobtrusive, is precise and features exact references to details, and provides broad coverage of events, settings, and timeframes (p. 86). Limitations cited by Yin (2003) include issues of access and retrievability as well as bias. Selectivity may be inhibited by researcher bias, and if access is limited, it may provide an impartial perspective of the research subject.

Another limitation of document analysis is misinterpretation. Documents, as stand alone data, may be given to misinterpretation because they can be taken out of context. A memo, instructional document, training manual, or other form of organizational document may have had an effect or role in the organization that, without the context, may be difficult for a researcher to ascertain. In fact, documents under analysis may have a different effect than was intended or than what the researcher may assume.

Documentation may also be inherently biased toward the organization, as some documents may represent the organization’s “best work” (i.e. advertisements, corporate strategy memos, etc.). With this in mind, conflicts and contrasts in individual perspectives may not be evident. In fact, documents may not be accurate or may represent a potential false standard, rather than current organizational reality. For example, a guide for conducting communication campaigns that highlights the



organization's preferred approach may not represent actual practice, as employees may work based on their own preferences. Yin (2003) said that documents "may not always be accurate and may not be lacking in bias" (p. 87).

Documents may also lack permanence and may not be representative of an organization's current reality. Documents may be either outdated or they may represent perspectives that have yet to be implemented.

The research design of this study sought to compensate for the limitations of documentation analysis. First, the multiple-case design employed here combines insight from documents as well as interviews and observation to provide a holistic view of the organization. I also discussed documents with interviewees to obtain context and understanding.

#### *Research Design: Sampling and Recruiting*

In order to evaluate public relations in an integrated context, I conducted case studies of three organizations that have a distinct public relations function and demonstrate varying levels of integrated communication based on Duncan and Caywood's (1996) and Caywood's (1997) framework. I used interviews, document analysis, and observation as three sources of data collection. My sampling strategy was based on Miles and Huberman's (1994) framework of appropriate sample sources—that is, sampling as structured, purposive and theory-driven, and boundaries for research.

### Sampling framework

I recruited research participants based on the concept of theoretical sampling, which prescribes that researchers make sampling decisions regarding people, places and situations based on the theoretical concepts under study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Using the concepts of theoretical sampling, I identified and recruited participants at each organization who could discuss as many categorical concepts as possible (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

### Recruiting sources

In order to maximize the number of organizations in my consideration set, I used various sources for recruiting, including lists of organizations participating with public relations institutes, societies, and associations like the Arthur Page Society, the Institute for Public Relations, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. I also worked through my network of public relations professionals and agencies.

In conducting interviews, I sampled various levels of communication and marketing practitioners, consistent with the themes of theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Throughout my research, I recruited varying levels of communication managers, directors, and practitioners because I recognized that practitioners on different levels would be able to contribute different perspectives of the process of integrating public relations.

Overall, my approach to sampling was based on the notion of saturation—that is, continuous selection of interview participants, research settings, and sources (i.e. organizational activities, events, meetings, and communication material) were gauged

against the research reaching a saturation point, in which perspectives overlapped enough that further research sources no longer offered new perspectives.

### Data Collection

Prior to data collection, I secured approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The purpose of this approval is to ensure that the research would not put me or my research participants at risk. IRB approval included a consent form, which can be found in Appendix A. This form lists the conditions of the research, which were explained to interviewees and which interviewees accepted prior to participating in the research. The form also discusses my efforts to ensure their confidentiality. Though each interviewee agreed to be tape recorded, I committed to not reveal any individual or company names in the report. For this reason, the results section features fictitious company names and interviewees are only referred to by a generic title.

Following IRB approval, I initiated contact with organizations through an introductory email, explaining my research interests and requesting an opportunity to conduct research with the organization. As incentive, I offered an analysis of each organization's communication, based on the results of this study. The introductory letter and executive research summary I used can be found in Appendix B.

For each organization, I gathered several forms of data, through interviews, document analysis, and observation. Table 3.1 outlines the data I gathered for this study.

## Interviews

My primary method of gathering information was qualitative interviews. In this study, I conducted a total of 31 interviews with public relations and communication professionals. Participants included males and females with varying levels of responsibilities (from associate/technician to director and vice president levels) and tenure at the organization. In this way, my interviews were designed to be informant interviews (Lindlof, 1995) with individuals who were the most knowledgeable about the research topic.

The interview process was based on Rubin and Rubin's (2005) responsive interviewing model and Lindlof's (1995) concept of the respondent interview. Interviews were loosely structured based on an interview guide that directed questions but required open-ended responses.

Table 3.1			
Data Source	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
Interviews	11	11	9
Observation	7 hours	7 hours	6 hours
Documents: Web Sites	Website (1), Department Websites (3), Online News Site (1), Event Website (1)	Organization Website (1), Media Website (1)	Network sites (6), Blog/Fan sites (20) Twitter site, Intranet Portal
Documents: Strategy	Brand Promise Architecture, Brand Strategy Write- Up, Brand Strategy Brainstorm Session Document,	Corporate Governance Brochure, Operational Framework	Communication Toolbox Document
Documents: Presentations	Branding Strategy Presentation,	Media Relations Strategy Presentations (2), Operating Group Strategy	Company Investor Presentation,
Documents: Organizational Hierarchy		Operating Group Structure	
Documents: Other	Promotional material (5)	Internal Newsletter	Corporate Newsletter

The number of interviews I conducted was based on three factors. First, the participants I recruited were communication executives, decision-makers, and professionals (in both public relations and marketing communications)—those that would provide meanings about the communication processes at an organization. It was my assumption that there were eight to 10 individuals, on average, at each organization involved with the decisions of an organization's communication activities. I also interviewed communication practitioners to give me another perspective of how integration and public relations work.

The other two considerations in my interview sample were availability and saturation point. In each case study, I was at the will of the participants who had time to be involved in this study. I also tried to pursue interviews with respondents until I reached a satisfactory understanding of integration of public relations in which further interviews did not reveal new insights.

Interviews generally lasted between 45 to 75 minutes, and took place at the participants' convenience, either over the phone or in person. In three instances, I was only granted 30 minutes for an interview and in such instances, I used observation and documentation to compensate for any missed perspectives. Interviews were recorded, with participants' permission, and transcribed. Most of the transcriptions were completed professionally, though I personally transcribed some interviews as well. In all, I personally transcribed 8 of 31 interviews.

Though having transcriptions completed by someone else can be an efficient way to complete a research project, it may also influence a researcher's ability to be close to the data. To compensate for this potential limitation, I wrote field notes and

end notes following the interviews I conducted, and took notes on themes, directions, issues, and non-verbal cues of each interview to enhance understanding of the processes under study. I then reviewed the transcriptions three times, including my own field notes and observations in the margin of the transcriptions. In this way, I do not believe that I sacrificed closeness with my research data for research efficiency. Rather, I took the steps described above to ensure closeness. Furthermore, I believe that while the transcription process does render a researcher close to the data, it's in the reading, re-reading, and analysis of the data, as well as the interview itself, that enable a researcher to be close to the data. This is because the processes of interviewing, reviewing transcripts, and analysis are based on understanding, while transcription can be done without much attention to meaning, and with more focus on getting the words right.

Interviews were loosely structured and conversational, and were based on an interview protocol that featured questions based on my research questions. Interviewees were asked about the structure and processes of integration and the roles of public relations and other communication functions within that context. I also asked them to discuss the ways in which public relations is used to cultivate relationships with stakeholders. My interview protocol, which can be found in Appendix C, guided conversations, though subject matter and direction of interviews depended on interviewee responses. The protocol I used was exhaustive, and featured a number of topics and questions related to my research objectives. As such, the document included, what I considered was every possible question I could ask a respondent. Though I did not use every question, I began with the main questions

(highlighted in bold font in Appendix C) and used other questions for probing and follow-up as needed. In particular, I let respondents lead the direction of conversation under each bolded question, and in doing so, many times the respondents answered questions I had not asked. When I felt that I had reached a saturation point in understanding under a bolded question, I moved on to the next bolded question.

Inasmuch as communication strategy and planning tends to be confidential, I offered to keep individual names and programs confidential, and encouraged participants to discuss issues in general, assuring confidentiality of their identity and that of the companies they discussed.

I also pre-tested my interview protocol on three personal contacts with experience in public relations and integrated communication to ascertain if meanings of the questions were understood as intended. I read questions aloud and asked the participants to provide brief responses, thus allowing me to evaluate the questions as well as the flow of the interview protocol. I also used the pre-test to gather input from interviewees about questions that may have been confusing or redundant and revised the protocol based on their suggestions. Revisions to the research instrument based on pre-tests were minimal and included minor changes on wording. I also received a few suggestions to help make questions less “academic” and more “practice-based.”

#### Observation

I also conducted six to seven hours of observation at each organization. Observation experiences ranged from company meetings to training sessions and forums. In one organization, I was granted the opportunity to conduct participant

observation. I helped coordinate efforts for a company event, and was asked to analyze online coverage of the event. I also helped conduct evaluation of the event.

In conducting observation, I followed the techniques proposed by Lindlof (1995). In order to develop a heightened sensitivity to the participants, situations, and activities, I made careful written observations of behaviors and objects, as well as conversations, discussions, and comments. I also used these experiences to help corroborate my interviews, checking perspectives on meetings and other events I attended.

Throughout this research, observation was the most difficult method to secure among the organizations I studied. My efforts to secure opportunities to observe processes, meetings, strategic sessions, and other events at each organization was often met with resistance because some feared that the information at each meeting or event was too sensitive, and that I might reveal confidences that should not be shared outside of the organization. In fact, in at least one meeting I attended, the meeting facilitator prefaced the discussion by informing me that I was not to report on the ensuing discussion. At the same time, however, my research focused on processes, not on the specifics of the discussions, so this did not present a limitation. The difficulty in securing opportunities to observe may have been more limiting, however, and in my efforts, I assured management that I would pass everything I reported on through the supervisor or manager with whom I was working, and would only report on the information that was approved by the organization. I also offered my services as an unpaid intern. In the end, I was able to secure six to seven hours of observation



at each organization, the information from which I used to corroborate the findings in the interviews.

#### Document Analysis

In addition to interviews, I analyzed communication material from each organization. Documents included both internal and external materials, including outlines of organizational hierarchy, memos, presentations, websites, intranet sites, direction sheets, newsletters and brochures, and company guidelines and frameworks. I also investigated third-party blogs and websites.

I used various sources to obtain documents. My priority was on getting documents from research participants and participating organizations directly. During interviews, I requested copies of any documents that participants mentioned, and I also requested any additional documents that the participant deemed relevant or that I thought might represent or provide more context for interview responses. For example, when interviewees in one case organization discussed challenges in the process of writing and securing approval for press releases, I requested copies of both the original press release and the final, approved-version of the press release. I also requested meeting agenda for each meeting I attended.

I also gathered documents on my own. I used organizational websites and Google searches to find documents that would add context to my interviews and observations. Common documents I obtained for analysis in this way included press releases and promotional material as well as stakeholder perspectives of the organization.

### Data Analysis

I followed Wolcott's (1994) framework of description, analysis, and interpretation, in which I emphasized Wolcott's notion of "staying with the data" as I described the phenomenon, and then moved to identify systematic relationships and analyze how public relations works within integration. My data analysis also reflected Miles' and Hubermans' (1994) concept of social anthropology, in which my analysis emphasized description of behavioral patterns—in this case, the description of the patterns of public relations within integration.

Throughout my analysis, I followed Miles' and Hubermans' (1994) strategy for analysis, primarily 1) identifying and matching codes and noting reflections, 2) identifying relationships between processes and themes, isolating patterns and elaborating on generalizations, and 3) pitting data against the theories of public relations as relationship cultivation and the theoretical concepts of integration.

In my data analysis efforts, I started with Miles' and Huberman's framework for analysis (1994). They propose that prior to analysis, a list of codes should be developed based on the literature and the research questions. I chose this method because my intent was to evaluate integrated communication as a process, and the role of public relations in that process, against the literature. However, in my data, I found several areas that were not consistent with or were missing from the literature, as themes emerged from the data through my interviewing, transcription, and re-reading of the transcripts.

For this reason, I also used a grounded theory approach by keeping my perspectives open to concepts outside the literature. Using both the structured

perspectives of Miles and Huberman (1994) and the grounded theory approach by Glaser and Strauss (1967), I started with the list of categories and codes based on current theory and literature. In my first reading through the transcripts and data sources, I noted reflections and summary codes, keeping in mind the list of codes but not using them specifically. Rather, I summarized chunks of data and noted potential inconsistencies with the current literature. After this first set of coding, I aggregated all new themes into the original list of codes, highlighting the new themes that emerged from the data. I did this for each case individually, so as to capture the themes that related specifically to each case. I then coded each transcript using an evolving code list of current themes and themes that related specifically to my data.

I then reviewed the transcripts a third time and aggregated all the relevant codes under each research question, including the specific codes that were reflected in the literature, as well as the new codes that emerged from the data. I then wrote vignettes under each research question, summarizing the insights together and noting connections and patterns. After my analysis, I wrote summaries and outlines for each case as a method of analysis, aggregating all the codes and ideas in describing the data for each individual case. I also approached analysis as a non-linear process, as Miles and Huberman affirm (1994), recognizing that analysis and interpretation is ongoing throughout the research process.

I also emphasized thick description and based my data decisions on my research purposes and saturation or sufficiency (Wolcott, 1994). In this way, I borrowed from the concepts of phenomenology as I studied conscious phenomena or how things “show themselves,” searched for essential structures that may not be

observable, and analyzed the correlation between the object (public relations and integration) and the appearance of that object (Sanders, 1982). Furthermore, in spite of my assumptions, I worked to bracket my personal biases (i.e. that integrated communication is an effective communication strategy and that public relations should recognize its role in marketing and integration and build value for the practice through that context).

### Data Interpretation

Because this study emphasizes Wolcott's (1994) preference for description over interpretation, I considered my role in interpretation from the perspective of the researcher as bricoleur.

Qualitative research situates an observer in the natural world and relies on the researcher to piece together and interpret the representations to make meaning of the lived experience of participants and the research subject (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The notion of the bricoleur is most appropriate in this effort. The bricoleur is a montage-maker, who pieces together evidence and source information to understand the situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). The bricoleur also reads widely, making him or her knowledgeable for credible interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). This notion of researcher as bricoleur was especially appropriate for case study research as I read widely within the context of each case and gathered information from multiple sources to be able to piece together the elements that make up the collage that is public relations in an integrated setting.

Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that interpretation, or the generating of meaning, can come in various ways. A researcher can note patterns, visualize

plausibility, build metaphors, partition variables and deal with relationships abstractly, find intervening variables, and make theoretical coherence of research data. In this study, I tried to make theoretical sense of the research data by evaluating the data against the perspectives in the literature. In situations in which current theory did not explain patterns, I considered data that fill in gaps in understanding, letting new theoretical insights arise from the data naturally.

In my interpretation efforts, I sought to generalize “the story” of public relations and integration, evaluating data against models that connect propositions, specify relations, and predict patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The process was also reflexive. While I compared the data against themes in the literature, I wrote memos and noted reflections, and spent time working out the complex processes I studied at each organization. Even while I was away from the data, I worked through connections in my head, and often found myself writing notes to myself in some of the oddest locations and times—in planes, while driving (I would wait for a stop light), and even in the middle of the night (on more than one occasion, I found myself getting out of bed to note reflections). In this way, I learned the true meaning of Miles’ and Hubermans’ claim that “we need to keep a box score along the way” (p. 86).

In short, I used data collection, analysis, and interpretation to evaluate practice against current theory, with a goal to assess the applicability of the concepts in the literature. In situations in which the literature was not sufficient to explain my data, I combined my evaluative approach with a grounded approach, generating conclusions and using the data as evidence.

### Validity

Validity has been defined as the confirmation that a researcher is studying what, indeed, he or she has set out to study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2006). This perspective of validity requires that the data and the results represent the nature of the subject under study, and may also emphasize objectivity and accuracy in research.

Notions of representative objectivity raise issues for qualitative researchers, who question whether objectivity is relevant or even attainable (Wolcott, 1994; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Denzin, 2003; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In fact, Wolcott (1994) argued that validity may not be relevant for qualitative researchers at all—rather the proper notion is that of understanding of the lived experience of participants. Inherent in a qualitative researcher's quest for understanding, are the concepts of subjectivity, multiple and even contradicting realities, and interpretation, rather than a single, objective truth (Lincoln & Guba, 2003).

Still, validity in terms of accuracy is valued in qualitative research. Accuracy is born in the idea that credible qualitative research requires skilled researchers (Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Lindlof, 1995) to accurately represent the contextually situated and socially created experience of the research participants, or the "plausible" meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994) represented in the context and experience of research participants or a subject. To this point, Kvale (1995) has argued that validity in qualitative research requires confirmation that research methods are accurate, and that results are representative of the research's

subject or participant experience. In this study, I used Kvale's (1995) three concepts of validity: craftsmanship validity, communicative validity, and pragmatic validity.

*Craftsmanship validity.* Craftsmanship validity is born in the research design, and requires that the researcher and the method are continuously checked for rigor. In this way, validity depends on the quality of the researcher and the research method. Miles and Huberman (1994) explain that a researcher must have familiarity, conceptual interests, and good investigative skills. In fulfilling this standard of craftsmanship validity, I developed a flexible interview guide based on the concepts of the literature. I also tested my interview protocol with professionals to ensure it was fluid and easy to follow. During the interview, I also sought to be a skilled investigator by using active listening, taking notes on responses, and following-up on issues that the interviewees seemed to consider important. With regards to interview questions, I also used pauses to allow participants to think and respond, I asked "how" and "why" questions to encourage detailed responses, and I tried to demonstrate good verbal and non-verbal communication signals.

Another way to ensure craftsmanship validity may be to build research around other established research (Hodder, 2003). The preliminary theories I used from the literature served as a guide for the development of my research protocol, and helped me seek information, carry out analysis, and make interpretations. At the same time, I paid attention to any divergences in the data from the theories I started with.

*Communicative validity.* Under Kvale's (1995) concept of communicative validity, Kvale instructs that the establishment of knowledge claims is achieved through discourse. Though this form of validity is most appropriate in a research

project that emphasizes the individual as the unit of analysis, discussion and discourse is also important for uncovering underlying processes, and especially, organizational cultural variables that may influence public relations' role in integration. Using this level of validity, I explored the social creation of reality through interviews and observation of discussions at organizations.

Validity has often been defined as confirmation of interpretations (Hodder, 2003; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This confirmation also extends to the confirmation of findings through theoretical fit (Hodder, 2003; Yin, 2003; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In this study, I designed the research around theoretical fit by using current theories for understanding public relations and integration, and modeling my research protocol around those theories.

*Pragmatic validity.* I also believe that my research has pragmatic validity, or a beneficial effect on relevant audiences. Applicability of models or theories developed in a study is critical for validity (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Richardson, 2003). In evaluating public relations' roles in integration, my purpose was to build understanding that would help professionals navigate the integrated environment, and also give them best practice perspectives to effectively manage public relations. Finally, I used the concept of saturation—or reaching a point of data collection in which further data replicates and does not add to existing data—to ensure validity.

*Reliability.* In addition to the notion of validity, reliability is also a gauge by which the quality and accuracy of research is judged. Reliability can be defined as the consistency in research findings between researchers, or that a study would yield the same results regardless of the researcher who conducts the study (Gravetter &



Forzano, 2006). Reliability has been debated as inappropriate for qualitative research (Wolcott, 1994), primarily because of the role of the researcher in influencing the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Some have even affirmed that research data may not exist without the intervention of a researcher (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez, 2003; Wolcott, 1994). Though I expect that certain consistencies would be discovered in this research regardless of the researcher who conducts the study, I affirm that reliability is not appropriate in this research and I recognize my inevitable influence on the data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I have earlier affirmed that I have kept my biases in check in the research project, but at the same time, as the researcher of this study, my own perspectives had an inevitable influence on the design of this study, and it is likely that another researcher, with different perspectives and approaches, might report different findings. At the same time, the research results in this study represent a plausible explanation and evaluation of public relations' roles in integrated communication, which I affirm with Wolcott (1994) is a value of qualitative research.

In sum, this section has outlined my qualitative approach to this research project, and has included the concept and process of the case study method. In the following chapter, I detail the results for each of the four research questions. In writing the research results section, emphasize thick description and have sought to explain the process of public relations practice, integrated communication, and relationship management in practitioners' own words.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research findings and to offer my interpretation of the integrated communication structure, processes, and communication roles inherent in each organization. This chapter is divided by case, and in each section I outline the research results for each organization. The cases in this chapter are further structured by research question.

### *Case 1: Park University – A State-funded Institution*

Park University<sup>1</sup> is a state-funded, public university in the eastern part of the United States. Started as an agricultural college over 150 years ago, the university is a top public institution, and boasts 29 programs in the *US News and World Report* top 10, and 86 in the top 25.

Considered the college of choice for state residents, Park University maintains strengths in both teaching and research, as indicated by interviews, promotional material, and the university's website. The university grants baccalaureate degrees, master's degrees, doctoral degrees, and professional degrees and certifications. In total, the university employs over 3,000 faculty members and offers more than 100 majors to its more than 25,000 undergraduate students and almost 10,000 graduate students. Additionally, Park University is an accredited member of the Association of American Universities (AAU). The university's faculty and students have achieved national and international renown for research and scholarship as well as professional accomplishments.

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<sup>1</sup> The university's name has been changed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

Park University is separated into colleges, schools, departments, and academic programs. Interviews and documentation show that colleges and schools operate as separate, autonomous entities in their recruitment, fundraising, and communication efforts, though each unit reports to the university's governing body. As separate entities, colleges and schools also maintain their own administrative staff. Additionally, each college and school maintains its own national ranking, separate from the university itself.

The university comprises several levels of communication. The central department for communication is the university relations department, which works across campus to publicize the university's colleges, schools, departments and programs, and also manages university communication, marketing, and publications. Within university relations are three departments: university communications, which facilitates media coverage for the university, marketing, which leads branding efforts, and publications, which produces and distributes the campus' main newsletters and magazines. The university relations department also directs the institution's website. The chief marketing officer of university relations reports directly to the university president's cabinet.

Outside of university relations, each college and school maintains its own communication function. Communication capacities across campus vary, according to interviews and strategy documents. Some colleges feature a full staff of communication professionals, including marketers and public relations professionals, but in others, marketing, public relations and other communication roles are handled by one person. Additionally, the university also maintains other communication

departments, including campus recruitment and alumni relations, information technology, campus security, and the athletic program's media relations. These departments also operate separately from the campus' central university relations. The following sections feature a description and analysis of Park University's integrated communication, public relations, and strategic relationship management, based on the four research questions.

RQ 1: How is the integration of communication defined, understood, and implemented in organizations?

Park University's communication functions operate separately, resembling autonomous units, according to interviews, observation, and communication material. Whereas university relations serves as the central communication department for the university, colleges across campus maintain separate communication departments, and coordination between functions and departments may be sporadic, at best. The university has recently begun an effort to integrate communication across the campus, led by university relations and, specifically, the chief marketing officer. These efforts were best reflected in the multiple strategy meetings I observed. To institute integrated communication across campus, university relations has gathered insights from internal and external stakeholders to create a central brand promise for the university. These insights, along with the university's recently released ten-year strategic plan, form the foundation of the university's integration efforts.

### *Integration Concepts*

In what discussants referred to as the early stages of integration, concepts and definitions dominated the process, as university relations attempts to promote

integration across campus and spell out what it can and should mean for the university. This theme was consistent in both interviews, as well as meetings and communication strategy documents. Concepts are based on the notions of branding and message alignment. Obstacles to integration include possible threats to autonomy and earning buy-in from communicators across campus.

*Branding.* The university's brand is the central organizing concept for integration at Park University. Branding, which some described as giving a story a "Park spin," is also described as a "corporate model," rather than an academic one, and "a new process" that communicators have not been a part of. The chief marketing officer, who is leading the branding effort, however, explained its importance in academia, "Ultimately, how do we ensure that Park is a strong brand? And by strong brand, I mean, why would Park be the school of choice for a specific student, funding agency, or business partnerships?"

Branding may be underdeveloped at the university. "I'm not sure the University's brand is there," said the director of communication at the university's office of information technology. "I mean, if you talk about the general brand—I'm not sure I could articulate it...and I think that's why university marketing is in a big endeavor to look at the brand and reshape it." University marketing professionals admit they "haven't looked at marketing in terms of the brand as much as we should." This notion that the central university brand is underdeveloped was also reflected in meetings and communication material, which featured inconsistencies from one department or school to another.

Integrating all colleges and schools under one university brand may also raise concerns, especially to units whose national rank exceeds that of the university. The head of communication for the engineering school worried about the effect of alignment under a brand with a lower ranking than the engineering school. For the business school, marketing professionals said they “do not envision ever not doing a separate brand,” because the university’s values aren’t “consistent with the ones that we think relate to our special stakeholders,” as one respondent explained. In particular, the university’s “party school” reputation poses a problem to departments that are trying to maintain an image of academic rigor.

Part of the branding work might entail changing the university’s culture. One marketing executive said, “I think [the university] has typically been very siloed and they don’t like to look at and encourage [branding]—people say they don’t market an institution of higher education.” This concern over the insularity of departments was consistent throughout interviews and meetings, and university communications staff at town hall meetings often questioned whether large departments with a full staff of media professionals would “fall in line.”

*Control.* For others, integration represents a loss of autonomy. Department communicators said they prefer to be in control of the look and feel of communication material. They also worried about losing ownership of school or college alumni—and the funds that accompany those alumni—to a process that might put the attention on the university, rather than the department or school. One communication director said, “We look at it as, ‘You’re taking our guys!’ I

understand that it has to happen, it's going to happen...but do it in a way that the relationship with [our] school is still retained.”

On the other hand, university communications staff consider control a benefit. Many central university communicators struggle with the gamut of initiatives across campus that stretch them in multiple, unrelated directions, and more than one respondent said integration will provide a framework for prioritizing faculty requests. “I think we’re going to be working more strategically and more focused,” said one respondent.

In spite of reservations, the chief marketing officer sees promise in communication integration, as reflected in his instruction at strategy meetings. In one meeting he said, “We have a community of 50,000 people, and if we’re all behind the brand promise and this integration, the power that we would have would just be tremendous.”

### *Implementing Integration*

The university has only recently begun to integrate its communication efforts, as levels of coordination appear to be limited and communication across campus is decentralized. Current integration initiatives are based on an awareness of the need to integrate, and feature varying levels of message coordination and cross-departmental collaboration.

*Decentralized communication.* “This university has traditionally been very happy being very diffuse and everybody gets to do their own thing.” This remark by a director of media relations for the university describes the current state of integration at Park University. Communicators on campus indicated a preference for autonomy

from central university communications efforts, with the caveat that “we shouldn’t be out like renegades doing our own thing.” This theme of decentralization was also evident in communication material and in discussions at strategy meetings.

At best, coordination across campus is on an as-needed basis, for major initiatives. The office of information technology (OIT) communication director said she integrates communication with university relations on major media relations efforts, including press releases with campus-wide significance, major broadcast and print inquiries, and technology-related crisis communication situations.

Though units may not be integrated across campus, separately, units tend to coordinate communication within the school or college of which they may be a part. For example, interviews and documentation reveal that the largest schools maintain full staffs of public relations and marketing professionals, and efforts to integrate communication in those schools are ongoing. University relations is also integrated—media relations, marketing, and publications work together to publicize the university and each division reports into the vice president of university relations, who reports to the university president.

*Integrated awareness.* Though communication may be decentralized at Park University, communicators are beginning to recognize a need to “look for opportunities to explain what we do much more effectively, particularly in times of economic shortfall,” as one director said. Other respondents indicated a need to “take more control over how things are done,” and that “the desire to be fully-integrated is strong because if we are fully integrated, and on message, everybody benefits.”



Integration may also represent a response to an apparent gap in university-student relationships. Research has revealed that “student perceptions do not match up with reality” at the university, according to one university study, and students tend to have higher expectations than the actual experience the university grants them. This concern over student expectations was consistent in interviews as well as meetings.

Integrated communication represents a departure from the status quo. For one, the university hired a new vice president of marketing with extensive experience managing corporate brands for major, billion-dollar companies. The newly hired vice-president, who promptly changed his own title to chief marketing officer, has led the effort to integrate all communication activities across the campus, and create a university-wide brand.

*A promising brand.* Integrated communication at the university is a marketing initiative, as efforts are led by university marketing and the priority is on branding. The notion of creating a central brand may not be a new one, as the university and its units have developed branding initiatives in the past, according to interviews and communication material. However, previous efforts to create a brand for the entire university have either lacked acceptance across the campus, or have been too department-specific to take in the range of identities and communication activities across the campus. For example, communication material surrounding the most recent brand initiative revolved around the university’s mascot, and respondents complained that a sports-themed brand is difficult to apply to the gamut of communication needs across campus.

Current efforts focus on developing a brand promise that unifies campus capabilities, differentiates the university from competitors, and creates expectations about the type of experience that university stakeholders can expect. “A brand is a promise of an experience,” the executive vice president of marketing strategy instructed at a town hall meeting. The brand is “more than an ad, TV spot or brochure,” she continued. Rather, it’s a “declaration of what your organization stands for...so that people know what they’re getting when they come to the university.”

According to meetings and strategy documents, the brand promise features multiple pillars meant to serve as a framework for executing all university initiatives. Still under development, these pillars include considerations of stakeholder value, research impact, and the global reach of the university. Efforts to solidify these pillars involve gathering insights from internal stakeholders (i.e. deans, communicators, etc.), as reflected in surveys, town hall forums, and strategy meetings.

The brand promise is designed to infiltrate everything the university does and requires an awareness of the “thousands of experiences [and] touch points a student goes through,” including recruiting, admissions, financial aid, orientation, and even “your first class to your last class at school,” the chief marketing officer said. He further explained that touch points include any access point between the university and a student in which the student can form an impression of the university based on his or her experience at that moment.

*Images and messages.* Integrating messaging and imaging at the university involves using university colors, logos, and taglines, though it may also entail fitting campus news into the “bigger picture” of the university, as some discussed. Message

and image integration are baseline considerations for integration, and they entail synchronizing images, “ensuring that our message is clear across various platforms,” and that “the way we talk about the University is consistent,” communicators said. This was also evident in communication material.

Integrated communication may even involve making communications look identical. One marketing director said:

“Integration means that when you have a mailer for a speaker series and a website for a speaker series, and an ad for a speaker series, they should all look the same. They should have the same message. They should look identical.”

Image consistency is recognized as a baseline level of integration. One respondent who leads marketing communications at the business school said, “We’re not very integrated yet. We’ve got the colors. We’ve got the logo. And that’s it.” An analysis of communication material shows that university colors and logos are used somewhat consistently, with some variation. One of the major areas of concern has been school and college websites. Though each unit maintains its own website as a sub-domain of Park University’s site, an analysis of department websites shows that images and colors are inconsistent. University relations associates said that one of their biggest initiatives is to ensure that everyone uses the same design for their department sites. The executive director of marketing strategy explained, “If you go down deeper into some of these pages, they all look very different, and it’s very wrong. So, we’ve been really pushing...the web wrap. It’s a simple wrap, but the goal is to get it on every site.”

Message integration is another baseline consideration. “In a very decentralized setting, it’s very important that core messages stay the same,” one respondent commented. The director of alumni relations said her office uses “talking points that enable us to communicate key messages that are important to the university.” Similarly, the executive director of marketing at the business school explained that a message has to differentiate the university from other institutions of higher learning:

“Our value proposition [right now] is ‘we’re a great school,’ and that may not be enough. Everybody would say that...so I’m trying to get our school to at least say ‘Here’s why you should choose the Park University business school.’”

Message integration also involves coordinating department messages with university messaging. For example, media relations associates explained that they often “tag along” on larger university communication initiatives and they “try to take their news opportunity and put it into the framework of a larger strategic message.” The university communications director said, “We may also see a much larger opportunity...and we look in the schools to find a perfect illustration of that, whether it’s in engineering, or sociology, or the performing arts center.”

Message integration may be considered a threat to autonomy. “I’m always mediating between what the university has put forward and is using as their umbrella,” said one department communication director. “I find a way to take it and make sure that [my school] is put well.” This head of communication further explained that his mission is to get people across campus to refer to the school by its

name, rather than by its academic area. As of yet, it is not apparent that this is happening in communication material outside of the department.

*Crossing departments and functions.* One theme that runs through meetings and interviews is the notion that for integration to work, it requires the collaboration of all staff on campus. To this end, the chief marketing officer envisions a structure in which department silos give way to cross-functional teams that meet together (a theme he reverberated in interviews and meetings) and each member, regardless of function, adds his or her own expertise to a group-created strategy. At this point, however, any coordination across functions at the university is situational, and limited to major campus initiatives.

One such initiative is the university's yearly community event, entitled Park Day, in which the university "pulls back the curtain" and invites the community to come to campus and learn about the initiatives of the schools and colleges around the university. Park Day is the university's flagship community event, and involves multiple levels of communication and operational coordination, which was reflected in the meeting I attended, as communicators and administrators come together to coordinate their respective department's presence and activities at the all-day event. Other cross-departmental initiatives on campus include recruiting sessions, in which alumni relations, campus communicators, and admissions work together to hold information sessions or bring promising students to campus.

It is evident that cross-functional coordination may be "reactionary" or reserved for "when it's important." A media relations director explained, "In a reactionary way, we're well-coordinated. We know who [each department's] public

relations person is. We know who to call when something happens on campus.” The director of communication for the office of information technology expects integration to occur as a crisis-response initiative:

“When there is a major crisis on this campus, then it needs to be all hands on deck. And in that way, university relations would take a major role in managing any kind of crisis or disaster for the entire university. And, because I know in some of the tabletop exercises that we’ve done, we would work together.”

Other situations considered relevant for cross-departmental coordination include news announcements that departments want to distribute to a wider community than to their own stakeholders, and that in such situations, they collaborate with the university’s communication team to publicize them. For example, the director of public relations and marketing at the business school said, “Once in awhile we have an announcement that is more appropriate as a University announcement or has an impact on the University. Maybe it has a quote by the President or maybe it just is more appropriate for the central campus. So we would work with them on that.”

The campus also maintains a campus communicators group, in which all communicators on campus meet together to discuss their initiatives. Though the group “isn’t a decision-making group...It’s just to share what’s going on,” as one respondent explained, meetings may lead to informal coordination. One group member explained that communicators who were at the meeting “frequently” end up working together, as was the case at a recent meeting when two communicators

discovered that, unbeknownst to the other, they were both working on energy initiatives. The group member explained, “It was a moment they were like ‘Oh, we’re doing something too!’ So, it was an opportunity for them to partner.”

In this way, cross-departmental collaboration may be informal and self-initiated, as communicators look for opportunities to partner on communication efforts. For example, the communication director for the engineering school said:

“We do everything we can to look for connections between what we do and what [the university] does... We try to take the good things the university does and use them to our advantage wherever we can. Where I feel like I’m really representing the [engineering] school well, the university will ultimately shine, that’s my general attitude.”

University relations may be a hub for cross-departmental coordination. This was not only reflected in the university relations website—which features a conglomerate of news from around campus—but also in interviews. One associate said, “We’ve not always done stories for other publications, but we share ideas, like, ‘I heard this professor at the school of engineering is doing this cool project,’ or ‘I just pitched something to [the area newspaper] and they really liked it, do you want to put the magazine on that?’” Media relations associates explained that they also look for ways to connect departments across campus because “the more interaction they have, the more they see you as a central part of [what they’re] doing.” They also alert departments on major issues or big stories on the horizon, offering their assistance. One head of communication said, “University relations will come to us and say, ‘This

is happening, you should know about it, if you need a release, we've got a thought about how to connect this with something else on campus, let's work together.'"

In fact, university relations associates are commonly called upon because of their expertise in publicity and media relations, though some indicated that departments come to them with a media problem when it's too late. One associate said he often has to fix "messes" that other departments have created. He also said that campus security usually works separately from the university communications department and may not always alert them to issues ahead of time, like the crime reports that are sent via email to students and faculty. He explained that there is a need to build inroads with this group so that greater coordination can take place.

Internal relationships also influence cross-departmental collaboration. Communication staff members often work with people they know best, and university relations staff members value their network of relationships on campus because it gives them "a good sense of some of the strengths in research."

It is apparent that advancing integration is based on increasing these natural connections. In fact, the university's chief marketing officer indicated that advancing integration requires making connections between department activities that "are not done in just one school, but across disciplines" including the "teaching and research that meets with helping to solve some of the high profile issues in the state and the country, if not the world."

Respondents indicated in meetings and interviews that cross-functional initiatives "may be a great idea" but the challenge is getting "buy-in from across campus, and getting marketing communications more closely tied into pieces they



haven't been tied into before.” One media relations associate said, “People tend to work in their areas, and I think it's time for everyone to see that we all have the same goals, and these goals extend to everybody.”

*Managing touch points and stakeholder needs.* Another process evident in the effort to integrate communication is identification of stakeholder experiences interacting with the university, which the chief marketing officer referred to as touch points in meetings and interviews. The process of managing these experiences, discussed as “touch point management” by the chief marketing officer, involves identifying the levels of stakeholder-university interaction and managing those access points for consistency. The chief marketing officer said, “Part of [integration] is defining a great promise, but it's also defining the critical touch points. There are critical touch points in the admissions process, but there are critical touch points in classes.”

Becoming aware of all stakeholder touch points represents “addressing the needs of university stakeholders,” the chief marketing officer said. “It's logical that you start with the stakeholder and you ask, ‘What's our promise to you?’”

Departments seem to seek to align communication strategy with stakeholder needs. For example, the director of communication for the engineering school said, “Whenever we do things that look like they have an angle that the legislature might use, we try to promote to them as well.” In another example, office of information technology built a campaign against illegal downloading around two stakeholder groups—students and their parents—and their campaign website features videos, ads,

and other informative pieces that relate to parents and students. The OIT communication director said:

“We started going to parents and saying, ‘Ok, what will parents need to know?’ Well, for one thing, at one point when the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America) was suing, the parents would need to be the ones coughing up the \$3,000. So, they might have a stake in making sure their young person is doing the right thing. So, we teamed up with the Office of Parent and Family Affairs to do that.”

In this way, touch point management involves recognizing not only the needs of stakeholders, but “creating different strategies for each audience,” as the office of information technology director said. Similarly, the executive vice president of marketing strategy said she “looks at all of the niches to make sure they all understand the university’s strengths.” She continued, “It’s engaging a broader audience on all the different ways they can make their mark on the university—it’s all about engagement.”

Touch point management may also lead to a recognition that university faculty and staff are brand ambassadors. The head of communication for the engineering school envisions an atmosphere in which faculty members recognize their contributions to the branded experience of students and alumni:

“We have an enormous alumni organization. How do you reach it? Until we can get those 200-300 tenure-track faculty members to be the best sales reps for the engineering school, I’m failing. That’s the way I look at it. You have to train every single one of our faculty members, starting with the core people,

who we know are already good at this, every time they go out, every time they give a presentation to start with a one minute [promotion] for the engineering school.”

The notion that faculty members “sell” the university may be based on the loyalties and relationship structure of students and faculty. University marketing professionals explained that faculty “are in touch with a lot of these audiences and closer to them than we are,” and the director of alumni relations explained that graduate students, in particular, “really connect with their department.” Perhaps for this reason, university marketing envisions faculty as “brand champions or ambassadors,” and efforts involve giving faculty the “tools to take [the brand effort] on” and maintaining “two-way communication so they can share insights with us.”

*Top-down vs. bottom-up.* Another consideration in managing the implementation of integrated communication across campus is the direction of coordination. On the one hand, interviews and meetings demonstrate that integration is a top-down initiative based on decisions from the University President, Provost, chief marketing officer, and other campus leadership. On the other hand, however, responsibility for execution falls on the departments to support the strategy.

“I think integrated communication has to come from the absolute top of the institution,” one marketing director said. “It has to have bonding all along the way.” Town Hall meetings and strategy sessions reveal that the strategic direction of integration, including messaging and execution, is developed by university deans and other campus leadership and carried down to the departments. One of the main organizing standards is the university’s recently released 10-year Strategic Plan.

Respondents refer to the plan as a document in which, “university has already decided its core priorities. So, whatever we communicate is going to relate to the priorities that have already been determined,” as one respondent said.

Furthermore, stakeholder objectives are also set by the Strategic Plan, one of which is recruiting high-achieving students. The chief marketing officer said:

“You look at our stakeholders and their needs. You also look at what the mission of the school is...[and] the university’s Strategic Plan. So, in the Strat Plan, our key goal is to continue to bring in a higher percentage of high achieving students and to increase our level of annual donations and endowments. And, to continue to increase our state funding and to continue to strengthen the curriculum, from the general education curriculum to advanced.

In addition to the Strategic Plan, the university’s brand promise is designed to guide communication strategy. “The goal is to integrate the brand promise throughout the entire institution in everything we do, from academic coursework to stopping down at the Visitor’s Center, and interacting on the websites to events on campus,” said the executive vice president of marketing strategy. At this point, however, this consistency around a central brand promise is not evident in communication material.

Whereas integration may start from the top, it requires coordination from the bottom-up, through feedback, according to interviews and meetings. In fact, the ultimate responsibility on execution falls on departments to be “good corporate citizens of the university,” as the marketing director of the business school said. In this effort, university leadership hopes to engage faculty in the integration effort, as

they tap the capabilities of the various programs across campus to create a comprehensive brand for the university. The chief marketing officer explained, “Integration is pulling back the curtain and looking at what ingredients we already have...and then figuring out how you bundle that.”

Student experience and stakeholder expectations also inform integrated communication strategy. “We need to figure out each of our stakeholder audiences’ ... feelings, attitudes and beliefs about us, and tie those into the brand promise,” said the executive vice president of marketing strategy at one of the town halls I attended.

Others described integration as neither top-down nor bottom-up, but “meeting in the middle.” The executive director of university communications referred to the process as “lateral,” and the chief marketing officer called it, “sideways.” The chief marketing officer said, “In a complex environment like this, it’s not top-down/bottom-up, it’s not bottom-up/top-down... There are much more paths, and probably each school has a separate path.”

In conclusion, integration at Park University involves creating awareness of the need to integrate communication and overcoming departmental boundaries. It also entails synchronizing messages and images and building strategy around stakeholder needs and expectations.

RQ 2: How is public relations and marketing differentiated under the context of integration?

At Park University, communication positions, responsibilities, and titles vary across departments, according to interviews and documentation. Whereas large schools and colleges have a fully-staffed communication department, with marketing

and public relations personnel, smaller units may have one person who fulfills all marketing and public relations needs. Furthermore, multiple positions fulfill public relations responsibilities, including professionals in alumni relations, research, campus security, and information technology. Finally, university relations manages central university communications through media relations, marketing and publications. Though public relations responsibilities and titles vary across campus, practitioners fulfill both promotional (MPR) and non-promotional (CPR) responsibilities. Marketing, on the other hand, maintains responsibilities in branding, advertising, and business development.

### *Marketing Public Relations*

Media relations may be the dominant priority for public relations functions across campus. As “the central communication office,” university communications staff members work with the media to promote the university, and communicators throughout campus define their roles in terms of publicity and media relations.

*Media match-makers.* Respondents described their roles as mediators who connect faculty to reporters, publicize university initiatives, and position faculty as experts. “I view my role as a broker,” said the public relations director for the business school. “I understand these individuals who work in the media and their needs as far as information sources and I have relationships with those sources here. So, I’m like a matchmaker and I help bring people together.” Similarly, the assistant dean of communication at the engineering school said he tries to make sure his faculty are on the university’s “experts lists” and when he receives automated

requests by the media on particular topics, he distributes those to faculty members that may be interested.

In working with the media, communicators seek to “raise the visibility of the university and tell the university story in the context of it being a major contributor to the state’s economy,” as one communication vice president explained. Media relations professionals seek to write stories in a way that promotes the university and their efforts revolve around getting professors to publicize their research. For example, one media relations associate said she works closely with departments across campus to put together publicity packages on newsworthy research initiatives, like a recent kit she produced on climate change. The package, featuring a web database of information and faculty contacts, was “a one-stop place for finding all the information on climate change,” she said.

In order to tell “a compelling story” about the university, the university communications department is divided into news beats, and media associates are tasked with identifying research initiatives that match their specialty. One respondent said, “Our job in the communications office up until now has been looking for the stories...experiences we can share, and...looking for opportunities to partner.” These efforts to identify newsworthy campus research initiatives are not without their challenges. One respondent said he has had problems with departments that are “insular” and “Deans and communicators...[don’t know] what’s going on in their department [because] they just focus on their discipline.” This concern was echoed in town hall meetings with university relations staff.

Though respondents indicate that the university recognizes value in their media relations efforts, one director of communication at university communications said that this media relations role limits their access to the President's office and keeps them from having a "seat at the table." He said that interactions with the President's cabinet are limited to "the small things, sharing ideas with things the office is working on for a talk for the President or something." He continued, "If it's clearly media relations, we'll be involved."

A media relations focus may also render university communications a responsive, rather than a proactive, department. The director of communication at university communications said:

"Many times, we get notified about things only when it's like, 'give us talking points about that,' and we're sort of scrambling to find things to talk about. It's not consistent. It's sporadic...and oftentimes, it's too late to make a difference [because] something has already been done...Often, we're in the position where they say, 'Now, we've messed up, you need to put a good face on it!' And I'm like, 'No thank you!'"

*Public relations as branding.* In some cases, public relations takes on marketing roles of advertising, branding, and promotion. In fact, the business school's public relations director considers her job as propaganda, and it's a responsibility that she enjoys. "I still get a thrill out of the challenge of propaganda...and the fact that you can influence public discourse" she said. "It's a really cold-blooded way to view what public relations is..[but] it's propaganda."



In addition to roles in media relations, public relations may be used as a marketing and branding tool. For example, at the business school, public relations “falls under the umbrella of marketing” and is considered “one piece of the toolkit,” as the business school’s public relations director explained. Similarly, the head of communication at the engineering school described his role as one of enforcing the engineering school’s brand, developing talking points and brand communication materials. “I’m on a mission to get more and more people throughout this campus to [use the name of the engineering school],” he said.

Communication professionals also enforce the university’s brand. One university communications director said referred to his department as “the logo police” because university communications has been at the forefront of brand development. He explained that his department was tasked with coming up with “promotional phrases” that would “start to characterize who we are.” These promotional phrases have led to themes around which communication messages are organized. The university relations media website is organized into five sections: culture, science and technology, social issues, the undergraduate experience, and university initiatives.

#### *Corporate Public Relations*

Communicators also fulfill corporate public relations roles for the university, though marketing and media relations roles appear to be dominant. Roles include stakeholder engagement, community outreach, and communication advisory.

*Stakeholder engagement.* Communicators on campus lead relationship-building efforts with multiple levels of stakeholders, including students, alumni,

donors and corporate partners. Not only does communication campaign material demonstrate this emphasis on a targeting multiple stakeholders appropriately, but one media relations associate said her focus is on “the student experience” and she evaluates “issues that relate to every student on campus,” including admissions, scholarships, student affairs and even residence life. Similarly, the head of communication at alumni relations said her objective is to “engage alumni in aspects of the university’s life that’s relevant for them, and ensure that the university is served by its alumni and its alumni served by the university.”

For many respondents, engaging stakeholders is a relational endeavor. The head of communication for the engineering school said, “Part of my job is to make sure that the relationship with [our corporate partner] is a good one...I try to make sure that all things that I do, where appropriate, reflect well on that relationship, and serve the program.” He further explained that in his fundraising efforts, he’s not just “asking people for money,” but rather his objective is to “help [stakeholders] become better by building that relationship.” In this way, he is “always looking for good ways to keep stakeholders aware of what we’re doing here—opportunities that they might have to invest in our research.”

The assistant vice president of alumni relations similarly described her approach to fundraising as one of engagement. “It’s not just about a gift,” she said, “but it’s about involving alumni in the life of the university appropriately so that they’re inspired to provide support, whether that support is reflected through mentoring students, hiring recent graduates, making a gift, rallying the university spirit...It’s all of the above.”

*Community outreach.* “Outreach is really an important part of what the University is doing,” said a senior media relations associate. “It tells them that we care and we’re not just a stuffy university, but we’re reaching out.” Community outreach comprises the university’s efforts to match its resources with needs in the community.

Community outreach includes initiatives in which “the community has a need for services, and we have expertise on campus,” said the executive director of communication strategy. Such initiatives might include providing research to local farmers to help improve their farming techniques, supplying local teachers with resources for their classrooms, or a recent example, refurbishing a dilapidated building in the local community. In each initiative, the vice president explained that he looks for ways in which “we can marry our resources to other resources to accomplish goals.”

*Communication consulting.* Communicators at Park University also serve as advisors to departments that may not put a priority on communication. One media relations professional said departments approach her because “they don’t have the contacts...they don’t know how to execute media relations or a release...so they rely on us.” One department head of communication said that though “there are a few communications professionals out there that are pretty good,” he often works with professors because department communicators’ resources and time are limited.

The university communications director said his role in communication advising is a proactive one. “Communications should be just like any other [member of the administration], they give their expertise to the administration...to me, that

would make more sense.” He further explained that his biggest need is to involve communicators on campus in university decisions so they can “flag the big issues from a public relations perspective,” because “when XYZ happens, we’re going to have to be explaining why we did it this way.” This concern was echoed in town hall meetings with communication staff.

### *Marketing Roles*

University marketing roles run the gamut of traditional marketing responsibilities, including business development, branding, and promotion. Marketing also may be leading the effort to integrate communication across the university.

The main marketing department on campus is university marketing, within the department of university relations, and comprises the chief marketing officer and the executive vice president of marketing strategy. This two-person team, with the support of other university communicators and leadership, has led current development of integrated communication on campus. The chief marketing officer has instigated and leads strategy meetings throughout campus, gathering input for the effort to integrate communication, and educating staff on the values and importance of integration for the university. And as he oversees the development of integrated communication on campus, he envisions an established role for marketing to lead the effort by establishing the brand promise, which he discussed in interviews and meetings. In our interview, he said:

“What marketing is going to do here is play a much more cross-cultural role in working with others as part of a team to make sure that we have the right

promise, a promise that is actually defined not just overall but in critical touch points across campus.”

He continued:

“If marketing can work with others to define a unique, compelling promise, and develop a blueprint on the deployment of that promise, that goes a long way. How that promise is deployed, many times marketing can’t get involved...but it can engage by saying, ‘Here’s the promise.’”

In this way, marketing’s main responsibility may be to manage the brand.

“My responsibilities have been the overall branding and imagining of the institution,” the executive vice president of marketing strategy said. Under this responsibility, she also leads the campus marketing and fundraising campaigns, and heads campus event marketing, including the university’s flagship yearly event, Park Day. Her role as a communication leader was evident in the meetings I attended. For the chief marketing officer, his branding responsibilities include “repositioning how the university is seen,” and “leveraging programs, curriculum, internships, and scholarships” to match the university’s brand.

Traditionally, marketing responsibilities have been promotional. The executive vice president of marketing strategy said her objective is to “make sure other institutions around the country see what we’re doing...because that really affects our *U.S. News and World* ranking.” The chief marketing officer, however, is trying to transition marketing from promotion to brand management. “I think the idea of marketing and communications...has been ‘How do you get stories in the paper?’

Those are just part of marketing and not the entire framework of marketing.” He reiterated this need in the meetings I attended.

To this end, the chief marketing officer has focused on teaching “the business of the brand” to communicators on campus, as reflected in interviews and meetings. Shortly after accepting the position at the university, he organized a town hall meeting with university relations staff, in which he taught the group of media relations professionals, designers, and publication producers what branding entails. The three-hour meeting featured training and feedback sessions on the basics of branding and creating an image around which the university would position itself as “a school of choice.” He also instructed that this involves marketing and communication becoming “the group that best understands the needs of the stakeholders and can drive the entire campus to focus on [the brand].”

Other roles of marketing include advertising and campaign management. The university relations marketing department features resources to be an in-house agency, according to the executive vice president of marketing strategy, and staff members often “work in a consultant capacity with schools and colleges on major initiatives.”

Additionally, marketing professionals are working to improve marketing efforts from a one-way to a two-way direction of communication. The marketing director at the business school said, “Everything has just been one-way, and we’re trying to change that now and make it a minimum two-way [interaction]—we want to be in conversations with people.” At this point, two-way marketing efforts more closely resemble interactive marketing than relationships marketing, she admitted.

For example, “if you want to be reminded when the next information session is for the MBA program, you can text a certain message and you’ll get an update.”

In conclusion, the line between marketing and public relations at Park University may reflect traditional boundaries between media relations and advertising, but integrating communication may be merging the two disciplines. As integration expands, public relations and marketing professionals at the university take the lead on ensuring brand consistency and collaborating across departments to fulfill communication needs.

RQ 3: How do relationship approaches of public relations in the literature help explain the role of public relations in integration?

Relationship-building at Park University may be considered the most important activity for public relations and marketing professionals. Respondents commonly consider their purpose as engaging stakeholders (i.e. students, alumni, community members, donors, and the media) to engender support for university initiatives. To a lesser extent, communicators may also manage internal relationships between departments, schools and colleges. Relationship efforts focus on engendering loyalty and commitment from stakeholders through stakeholder education on university capabilities and demonstrating the benefits of long-term investment in the university. These themes were evident throughout interviews and meetings.

#### *Relationship Antecedents*

Connections between the university and its stakeholders are based on two main areas—university experience and an overlap in resources between the university and its stakeholders. Respondents discuss antecedents in terms of stakeholder interest

in and benefit to the university, and priority is placed on students as the most important stakeholders to the university. This is also evident in communication material.

*Stakeholder interest.* Relationships start with a student's initial contact with the university. The head of alumni relations said, "It all starts with a relationship and that relationship begins when an individual is thinking about attending the university. And it is formalized when they enroll." Therefore, relationship connections in the recruiting process are a major consideration in building relationships. At meetings discussing integration, the chief marketing officer reiterated an emphasis on understanding the process of inquiry and matriculation into the university to identify student expectations and how they match up with actual experiences. In one meeting he said:

"If there's one piece about the stakeholder study from incoming students it is that their expectation exceeds their experience...the good news is our students like us, but the goal is to make sure that our stakeholders love this school. There's a big difference in emotional engagement going from like to love. Think about your spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, you may like somebody, but you're much more loyal when you love somebody. And so, the question is, what will take for stakeholders to love this school?"

In this way, stakeholder interest, especially among prospective and current students, is a dominant consideration and is evident in recruiting sessions. For example, Alumni Relations puts a priority on building a connection early on in the recruiting and admissions process by bridging stakeholder interest and university



offerings. They often hold information sessions in the homes of alumni, where students and administrators meet with parents and prospective students, and a connection built on interest and expectation is created. The assistant vice president for alumni relations explained:

“So, the relationship starts in earnest when a young person is thinking about attending. And what we’ve been doing is meeting with highly talented admitted students...doing what we call a recruitment session where we talk about why they should enroll at Park University...An alumnus might sit down and talk to the parents because parents want to know what it’s like to send their kids to the university...We talk about practical things. So it’s a real conversation.”

She went on to explain that the relationship starts where parent and student priorities align with what the university has to offer. In this way, antecedents in relationships between the university and prospective students include a recognition of the alignment in priorities between the two parties.

*Stakeholder-university overlap.* Another relational antecedent is the overlap in stakeholder and university priorities and needs. The head of communication strategy for the university said relationships start where there is a “marriage” between the interests and capabilities of the university and its business partners. He offered a hypothetical situation:

“Let’s say that the department of defense wants to create a new catalogue type vest for soldiers, and let’s say we have scientists and researchers on campus who specialize in materials engineering or re-engineering, so the public

defense has an interest in developing that type of product. We have an interest in applying this kind of research and there's a marriage there."

He further explained that this overlap is a major driver of relationships on campus. "We may see on campus that there's a need for something, sometimes because of the valuable resources, and expertise that we have on campus that relationship opportunities come to us," he said.

Interest and capability overlap as an antecedent is also a consideration by other university capacities. For example, the head of communication at one school said he recognizes an as-of-yet-unrealized connection made between university communications and the engineering school. Discussing the potential of creating promotional videos for departments across campus, he said university communications "has some capabilities that we don't have and we can't afford to buy," but the connection has not been made between the two units. He continued:

"Why aren't they coming to us saying, 'Hey, the university's going to make video modules, and the engineering school is going to have a slot...here's the freedom you'll have within it. Ultimately, it's going to also say Park University and be our product, but you're going to have something you can work with...you'll feel good about it."

From a broader perspective, the university's status as a major public university also creates a relationship connection with taxpayers and state residents. A senior media relations associate explained:

"A stakeholder is somebody who has an interest in the university and what it is doing, and that certainly means alumni...but it can be administration, it can

be the students. They all have an interest in number one, seeing what the university is doing, how taxpayer dollars are being spent.”

Indications from this research reveal that antecedents may even be unrecognized, and the university is trying to increase awareness of connections. “A lot of our stakeholders may not know that they have a connection,” said a senior media relations associate, “So [relationship management] is making them aware of a connection as a resident of the state.” To this end, the university conducted a stakeholder study of 17 different stakeholder groups, which was often referenced meetings. The executive vice president of marketing strategy said:

“You look at all the different audiences: students, faculty, staff, parents, prospective students, legislators, business leaders, federal government officials, media... You know, we have got every citizen in the state important to us, because we want them to see and understand the value of the university.”

### *Relationship Strategies*

Relationship building strategies range from developing mutually beneficial connections through interpersonal communication and dialogue to no relationship strategies at all. Somewhere in the middle, however, is a priority on demonstrating the value of the university as a motivation for stakeholders to engage the university in a relationship.

*Promoting relationships.* “I can’t say that I’m in charge or I feel responsible for going out and forging relationships with people.” Though this sentiment from the public relations director of the business school may not be shared by many other

communicators on campus, it is evident that relationship strategies on campus lean unidirectional and exhibit a marketing-orientation. This may be true especially for relationships with external stakeholders, as communicators seek to promote the university's value and capabilities in order to build ties with stakeholders.

The executive director of marketing communications at the business school said, "I just think we've had a one-way conversation with our prospective students and with anybody." Communication materials appear to be unidirectional, and promotion may dominate relationship strategies, as communicators seek to convince stakeholders to get involved with the university. For example, the head of alumni relations described relationship-building activities as promotion in encouraging students to attend the university. "What my group does is try to convince [students] that Park is the choice to make and that effort is what starts the lifelong relationship between an individual and the university," she said.

Promotional strategies in building relationships also involve communicating the strengths of the university, and assuring that the university is a legitimate educational and research institution. Strategies to promote the university in an effort to build a relationship may be the most common—they transcend department and functional boundaries.

Promotional messages in relationship building include demonstrating that the university "is a world class public research institution doing impactful research," with "high-quality education," and "high-level researchers to teach and do research." These themes are consistent in university websites, campaigns, and strategy meetings. The head of marketing communications at the business school referred to this effort

as developing a value proposition for the school, and another head of communication said, “We’re always looking for good ways to keep [stakeholders] aware of what we’re doing here.” Promotional efforts in building relationships also include publicizing sponsorship and investment opportunities directly to stakeholders, and demonstrating to partners that the university “takes communication seriously and that [the stakeholders] will be well represented in our school because that’s part of what we’re selling,” a respondent said.

This focus on proving value in relationship efforts may be due, in part, to the challenge that the university faces, as a land grant institution, to “show value to the state,” as one director said. “Whether it’s to the business community, to the legislature, the areas that fund us, or the non-private donors that help us establish our mission—we have to show value.” A senior media relations associate similarly said, “If we get a big grant of money from somebody, then that’s a message that we want to send to [the Capital], for example, the governor and also to other groups.”

Relationship strategies also involve designing promotional messages that influence stakeholders. The head of communication at alumni relations said that communication materials like “our periodicals are very deliberately designed to convey what it is we hope that alumni and friends will be inspired about...it’s all structured to reflect what’s great about the university.” Communication material reflected this emphasis. The director of communication at office of information technology said she uses message-testing and feedback to ensure stakeholder message resonance to communication efforts because, “If you’re going to put out some advertising, you should test it with the intended audience.” In office of information

technology's latest initiative to curb illegal downloading, communicators tested messages through in class focus groups to assess "how they would react to the messages."

*Expectations and promises.* According to interviews and meetings, the university's recent stakeholder study revealed that expectations of the university experience do not match with reality, and for this reason, communication priorities are on closing this gap. "The biggest part we can influence is start focusing our people on why undergraduates have their expectations above their experience—close that gap."

The results of this initiative will form the university's brand promise. The executive vice president of marketing strategy said, "We have been working to try to figure out exactly what our brand promise is with early insight from what we know about the institution [and our stakeholders]." In town hall meetings with university relations staff, she explained this concept of the brand promise in terms of what students can expect when they graduate from the university. She used examples of Harvard and Stanford, who have recognizable promises born in their educational mission:

"Harvard are leaders, they change the world. Stanford, those are innovators and change agents. People that go there know what to expect, know what they're getting into. You see it filtered into everything they do and become."

She further explained that a brand promise is something that a stakeholder understands or picks up on just by looking at the logo. She said, "You understand Apple's brand promise when you see [the logo]: Cool innovation." The chief

marketing officer added, “Our point of view is that we need to have a consistent promise for the university, one that separates this school.”

The executive director of communication strategy for the university described the importance of identifying and meeting expectations:

“We try to find ways to talk about the student experience, that student expectations coming to the university are matched with their experience on campus and that that translates to a good experience for alums, who leave the university and become successful in their chosen endeavor and help them be really good global citizens.”

The head of alumni relations indicated that her efforts to establish expectations “start with conversations [about] what’s important you” and demonstrating where priorities align with the university. This endeavor may entail humility, as one respondent said. “Most times we have a very high opinion of our self...[but] I think opinions inside are probably higher than it should be for what we’re doing. Outside I believe that our perceptions don’t match up [inaudible] reality. So, we’re working on changing that.

*Needs and mutual benefit.* One step up from filling expectations is university communicators’ efforts to build relationships by working proactively to fulfill the needs of its stakeholders. These efforts may be less-focused on setting expectations, and more-focused on understanding and meeting stakeholder needs regardless of the university’s brand priorities.

This level of relationship building is most evident in recruiting and alumni relations. The head of alumni relations explained that she works closely with admitted

students as well as alumni to meet their specific needs, and often goes out of her way to help out students. She recounted a recent experience in which she met with a promising student at a recruiting session:

“I’ve had two follow-ups from a prospective student who I met yesterday. He said to me, ‘I really would like to come to Park but my parents are really struggling financially.’ ... So I forwarded his email to our director of admissions saying, ‘Listen, I know this kid’s really bright; I know he did really well. If there’s anything that we can do, let’s try to do it. Because I think if we make him an offer he’ll enroll.’”

She went on to explain that she did what she could to help this family out and give the prospective student the opportunity to enroll. “Whether we’re able to meet all of the needs, the fact that we are trying goes a long way in making people feel comfortable,” she said.

The executive vice president of marketing strategy discussed meeting the needs of stakeholders as an opportunity for building relationships but also building the university brand. “There’s a real opportunity to leverage financial aid and scholarships, because it’s such a difficult time right now for students,” she said. She also explained that leveraging financial aid could be a way to retain “some of the best students her in the state,” which is one of the objectives outlined by the Strategic Plan.

In this way, relationship-building at the university also involves building mutually-beneficial situations. For example, the head of alumni relations described her objectives in terms of “engaging alumni in aspects of the university’s life that’s



relevant for them, to ensure that the university is served by its alumni and its alumni served by the university.” Additionally, the head of university communications discussed efforts to offer research that can be beneficial to the poultry industry. “The world-class work that we do on Avian studies can benefit businesses,” he said. “And if we can find a way to create that research and share that, that’s a mutually beneficial goal, and that’s our mission, because we have a land-grant institution.”

One particular area of mutual benefit that communicators work with is networking. The university’s network of alumni is one of the values it offers students, and by so doing, the university hopes students funnel back into its alumni network as they graduate and build successful careers. The business school marketing director promotes networking opportunities available to students. “Having a vibrant alumni community is also really important to students,” she said. “So, when people are looking at the school and thinking about coming in they want to know whether you have a book sitting on your desk that lists 20,000 alumni, and five of them are working at McKenzie and ‘I can call them and they’ll help me out.’” The head of alumni relations explained that she also emphasizes networking opportunities at the university:

“What we do is we show [prospective students] that the university is not just a big institution. It’s a family that you’re becoming a part of and we reflect that in the talks and in the videos and the materials that we present and leave behind.”

Mutually beneficial relationship strategies are also evident in internal relationship-building. For example, the head of communication at the engineering

school said he uses “cajoling, persuading, and gift-giving” by creating communication materials that will properly represent the engineering school’s name and brand, but will also help departments within the school who may not have the resources to produce materials. He explained:

“It’s my way of getting the departments to use our identity...I’ll give them the highest professional piece, which will reflect well on them, and they can customize it, but it’s also going to say my stuff too. So, strategic gift giving is a key part of getting people who don’t work with you, aligned with you, and I always try to do that.”

*Dialogue and interpersonal relations.* Relationship-building for communicators on campus may also involve engaging in conversation and interpersonal interaction with stakeholders. The chief marketing officer discussed this in terms of managing stakeholder touch points, or all the potential interactions a stakeholder may with the university. At meetings he consistently discussed the need to ensure that the university brand is “delivered and deployed” in every potential interaction. “Whatever this brand promise is,” he said in one town hall meeting, “it has to work for all units across campus. Eventually, we hope to see it in all the touch points through the university. Maybe weaved into curriculum and create new programs. It’s not just a saying, ad or tagline—it’s a much truer or real thing.”

This perspective, however, may represent more of a marketing-orientation toward relationships than other respondents considered. Instead, campus communicators discussed the importance of dialogue, conversation, feedback, and engaging audiences on their own terms. One marketing communications director

described this level of relationship-building as “having conversations” and the need to “be there and be responsive.” The office of information technology communication director echoed this idea, and said that in her office, communicators always try to engage audiences on their own platform:

“We’re always trying to keep the lines of communication open, making sure that there’s an open dialogue and that we’re where they are. Whether it’s Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter—everywhere they are, we try to make sure we’re there. ”

Stakeholder engagement is a particular emphasis at university events. For example, in planning meetings for the upcoming Park Day, communicators reiterated the need to use the event to engage the community, by talking openly about campus initiatives and even updating their personal experiences at the event with regular posts on Twitter. In fact, at the final wrap-up meeting for the event, coordinators started the meeting by recognizing a student who had volunteered at every Park Day event during her time at the university, and had made a quilt out of the t-shirts she had gotten as an event volunteer. Meeting coordinators indicated that this student’s dedication was just one example of the type of stakeholder engagement that events like Park Day encourage.

Relationship-building through interpersonal interaction also involves openness. The head of alumni relations said that when she works with prospective students, she wants them “to want Park University, and Park University to want them. If the child really does not want to come, I want them to feel like they can say that

because there's nothing worse than having somebody come, enroll, and not be happy."

She also added that there is benefit in being open with students who do not elect to come to the university. "I would rather be upfront about it, than nice about it and not get the sibling." She also attributed a recent successful recruiting endeavor to the open relationship she built with the mother, who is an alumna, through her willingness to be open about expectations.

Open communication also involves being open about university problems. One media relations associate does not "candy-coat" news. She said, "I'm sure not every story is positive. Yesterday there was a story about drinking on campus, but you can't control everything. So, I think we try to be as open as we can."

Some communicators also try to ensure that stakeholders have a voice in university decisions of the university. The alumni relations assistant vice president said that in the creation of the university's recently-released Strategic Plan, she worked to ensure that "the alumni had a voice in this plan." Negotiation fills a related-role in this effort to ensure that stakeholders have a voice, as a few communicators said that they negotiate with internal stakeholders on messaging considerations and even for outsourcing the production of communication materials.

### *Relationship Outcomes*

"If you can develop good relationships that are sustainable over time, gifts will come, support will come." This perspective on relationship outcomes by the head of alumni relations characterizes what may be the dominant consideration of

relational outcomes among communicators—outcomes reflect investment and engagement.

Relationships are designed to yield stakeholder commitment and involvement. “I’m talking about the distance of the brand—patron image, high pricing premium, stronger loyalty, stronger donations, and more revenue,” the chief marketing officer explained. “With a strong brand, then we should be able to deliver those goals.” For alumni relations, these goals include considerations by alumni to donate or encourage their family to attend the school, and for the business school, that the school is “under consideration when people start to think about what kind of school they want to go to.” Promotional material reflects this emphasis, as some of the material I analyzed demonstrated a focus on making the university a school of choice.

Communicators also value stakeholder involvement in university initiatives. One senior media relations associate said he focuses on “getting stakeholders involved in what’s going on.” He further explained, “Sometimes it’s not just a passive thing, but it’s being involved by coming to the university and taking part in what the university is doing, not just attending basketball games, but it’s getting involved in other events that the university puts on.” Examples of desired stakeholder involvement include mentoring, networking, and contributing to the university’s school spirit by representing the university well in stakeholders’ own career and personal endeavors. A senior media echoed this sentiment, “A lot of alumni are proud that they went here, and they say we’re a top 20 research university and we’re moving to become a top 10 research university.”

Additionally, trust is also considered an important relationship outcome. The university's Alumni Relations department uses openness in communicating with prospective students and their families to create trust. "Parents said to me that we're the first university that they've been engaging with that was up front in acknowledging what's happening with the economy," said the assistant vice president of alumni relations. "And one mother said to me, 'We're looking at other schools, and I don't think that they could care less that we're trying to figure out how to pay for all of this.'" She concluded that, whether the university could provide prospective students like this one financial aid or not, "the fact that we are willing to have the conversation creates the beginning of a trust that is important in any relationship you're building, whether it's with an institution or an individual."

Communicators also seek to understand what alumni get out of a relationship. Considerations include "connection to better careers, better advice, better professions," and the notion that "our students will be hired [because] alumni have a strong professional network." Other considerations include the ways the university's resources "serve the needs of the members of the state." In this way, communicators may consider relationships in terms of exchange. The chief marketing officer pondered, "Just like the American Express Gold Card, what's the benefit of being a member? By being a Park alum, are you getting better things?" In spite of this strategy on student and alumni benefit, I was unable to find much communication material that reflected this theme outside of the admissions and alumni relations websites, and revealing a possible gap in communication.

In conclusion, communicators at the university build relationships around principles of promotion and demonstrating the value of the university in hopes to build a connection between the university and its stakeholders. Critical in this process is identifying stakeholder needs and expectations, and matching communication messaging and other efforts with stakeholder preferences. Interpersonal strategies and seeking the welfare of stakeholders, regardless of university benefit, is also evident in relationship management.

RQ 4: Does the level of integration influence public relations' activities in strategic relationship management?

It is apparent that integrated communication at Park University is underdeveloped, but developing. Notwithstanding the university's low levels of integration, there is evidence that integration influences strategic relationship management. Whereas some of the influences are evident at this early stage of integration in meetings and communication material, other influences are anticipated.

Integrated communication at the university appears to influence technical aspects of strategic relationship management, particularly messaging and crafting communication material. Beyond messaging, integration also frames relationship priorities, and communication positions, like public relations, may be poised to take the lead in managing these priorities.

### *Influencing Messaging*

In a recent town hall meeting, the chief marketing officer asked university relations staff to define the university's brand promise in five words. Answers included, "excellence," "quality education," "location," and "affordable," among

others. His response was: “All great stuff, but you know what? You guys should all be saying the same thing.” He went on to explain that if everyone at the university had different answers, there would be “6000 different messages of what the school stands for.”

In this way, integrated communication may involve filtering messages through a few select themes. For example, recruiting and alumni events feature talking points that enable staff to communicate the university’s strategic messages and fundraising campaigns feature taglines around which to build relationships.

The effect of integration on messaging may be most evident in media relations efforts. For example, the public relations director at the business school said that she makes sure to “tow the university line” when communicating with reporters. For university communications, according to meetings and interviews, integration may influence media priorities, giving staff strategic direction in the publicity campaigns they work on (where such direction currently may not exist), and leading to a 30-day or 6-month story plan in which directors must “increase the number of high impact stories around two strategic messages.” Evidence of such strategic priorities is illustrated on the university’s news homepage, in which news items are categorized under topics considered “strategic” for the university, including science and technology, social issues, and the undergraduate experience.

The university is also considering how messaging can influence the relationship management in the classroom. For example, the chief marketing officer discussed selecting representative course syllabi, materials, or experiences that represent the brand promise and making them consistent throughout the campus.



Though he admitted that “marketing is not shaping the critical role of academic success,” he said that these academic considerations would “help inform what direction you should look at.”

Another consideration is “mobilizing” faculty as brand ambassadors. “You owe it to us at the beginning of your pitch [to mention the school],” one director said. “We’ll give you the materials...but you have to sell the engineering school, it’s going to reflect well on your department and on you.”

Up until this point, however, message influences appear to be anticipated, rather than actual. In fact, at least one communicator on campus does not consider strategic messaging in her presentations. In lectures OIT communicators conduct around campus, sessions are primarily educational, and “don’t necessarily get our messages out, like OIT is wonderful, but it does create and build on relationships with students.” Finally, communication material does not appear to reflect a strategic consistency in messaging.

#### *Setting Priorities and Determining Direction*

Integrated communication may also determine the activities and the direction of relationship-building efforts. “Once you define the messaging architecture, it turns inward,” the chief marketing officer explained. “If part of our promise is providing a gateway to the world, that also informs everybody inside—what are you doing to make your area a gateway to the world?”

According to meetings and interviews, integration establishes strategic priorities for communication staff on campus, and influences not only the messaging they use, but the initiatives that they spend their time on. Whereas current decisions

on initiatives may not be based on strategic priorities, one media relations associate anticipates that integration will allow her to make informed decisions on the initiatives she works on “I think we’re just going to be working differently, very focused on outcomes,” she said. Another respondent admitted, “I help faculty members and there are things that I’ll work on that we need to rethink and say, ‘Does this meet our goals and objectives?’”

Overall, directions and priorities in an integrated structure at the university may come back to the brand promise. The chief marketing officer and the executive vice president of marketing strategy reiterated the role of the brand promise in determining “everything” the university does in interviews, meetings, and strategic documents. “When people have an interaction with us what do we want to leave them with?” the chief marketing officer asked. “Every interaction that we have, you’ll be able to understand what our brand promise is, who we are and what we stand for.” As of yet, this brand promise is not evident in communication material or events.

### *Creating Relationships*

Indications from meetings and interviews are that communicators do not anticipate integration to hinder relationship management, though one school dean worries about losing his school’s group of alumni to university priorities. For others, integration may actually create relationships, especially among internal stakeholders through the concept of cross-functional teams.

As integrated communication develop, the chief marketing officer envisions a structure in which responsibilities will no longer be defined by titles, but by expertise, and initiatives will be planned by “cross-functional teams of doers” composed of staff

from across campus to strategize initiatives for “critical outcomes.” This cross-functional perspective represents an opportunity to “rethink our relationships,” as one respondent said, because “people have been too used to having their own little sphere” and integrating communication will help communicators “find that common goal where you can forge better ongoing relationships and gives you a chance to have a strategic impact.”

In fact, integrated campaigns on campus may already have demonstrated the potential of integrated communication to create relationships. Park Day, the university’s flagship annual event, is an integrated initiative, as staff from throughout the campus meet together to coordinate the hundreds of activities for the 8,000 plus people who come each year. The participant who leads that initiative explained that the event requires the collaboration of 75 “very well-connected people.” She further explained that there are “a lot of relationships in the group, and you learn who to turn to, to get things done.”

#### *Public Relations as Integration Facilitator*

Current integrated communication responsibilities render communication professionals as integrated communication facilitators. As media relations associates comb the campus to find stories to integrate into broader university news, communicators may “see an illustration of that larger initiative where we might sit down and say ‘We’re working on this big issue here, and we think you guys are doing some really great work, that helps us tell this story,’” a communication director said.

As information aggregators, the university communications office is currently strategizing ways to connect campus communicators to the initiatives around campus,

this includes “coming up with a list of all the publications on campus...to get a handle of all the things being said and written about in the university,” one university communications respondent said.

University communicators often perceive their role as motivators to encourage coordination, a theme that was reflected in both interviews and town hall meetings. Whereas on a basic level, this entails serving as “logo police” to remind departments to use the university’s images properly, on a broader level, it’s an effort that involves motivating staff to coordinate efforts by demonstrating mutual benefit. “You try to walk this line,” a media relations respondent said, “because there’s always a give and take. You sell them on [the need to work together], but the more you interact with them, there’s also stuff you do for them.” For example, he said he recently encouraged one department to integrate with the university because “if the university is perceived as a great place with a universal identity that people grasp...it will benefit you.”

In conclusion, integration stands to influence strategic relationship management in several ways, including message delivery and relationship activities and initiatives. Furthermore, integration may put more emphasis on public relations’ roles in relationship management.

#### *Case 2: Defense Inc. – An Aerospace and Defense Company*

Defense Incorporated<sup>2</sup> is a premier global defense and aerospace company that specializes in the full gamut of combat products and services, including defense, security and aerospace systems in the air, on land and at sea, according to its website

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<sup>2</sup> The organization’s name has been changed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

and other communication material. DI also provides services in electronics, security, information technology solutions and customer support. Headquartered outside the United States, Defense Inc. maintains offices and facilities throughout the world. In particular, Defense Inc. maintains six home markets: Australia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sweden, UK, and the United States. DI boasts multi-billion dollar sales and has over 100,000 employees worldwide.

Defense Inc. has organized its business around supporting its six home markets, according to its website, as well as interviews. At the top resides DI's headquarters, which is responsible for growing its home markets and worldwide capabilities and operations. At the next level is DI's US subsidiary, Defense Systems Inc, which oversees US operations and DI's three operating groups based in the United States. Each operating group, formed through mergers and acquisitions within Defense Inc., maintains specialties in defense solutions.

The three operating groups consist of: Land Operating Group (LOG), which specializes in combat vehicles and artillery systems, Electronics Operating Group (EOG), which develops electronic systems for military and commercial applications, and Intelligence Operating Group (IOG), which specializes in intelligence solutions and civilian systems. At a fourth level of complexity, each operating group maintains lines of business that support their operations. Whereas two of the three operating groups maintain lines of business and operations within the United States, one operating group, LOG, maintains business with home markets outside of the United States.

With headquarters outside of the United States, Defense Incorporated is a foreign company, and in order to do business as a defense contractor in the United States, DI's national subsidiary, Defense Systems Inc, maintains a firewall agreement which separates the international headquarters from sensitive information.

Defense Inc. maintains a rigid top-down corporate structure in which the international headquarters maintains oversight of all company operations through the national headquarters, operating groups, and lines of business. Each operating group maintains a different communication structure to the other, and this structure is determined by the vice president, according to interviews and organizational material. Each vice president reports directly to Defense Systems Inc, which then reports to the international headquarters.

Major internal and external communication functions include communication and marketing. Communication includes public relations functions, including crisis communication, investor and philanthropic stakeholder relations, and publicity and media relations. Marketing comprises primarily business development and sales.

The following sections feature a description and analysis of Defense Inc's integrated communication, public relations, and strategic relationship management, based on the four research questions.

RQ 1: How is the integration of communication defined, understood, and implemented in organizations?

True to its military nature, the theme of communication at Defense, Inc. is authoritative control, and integration reflects centralization in a top-down structure of multiple approvals and corporate directives. This theme was consistent throughout

interviews and meeting discussions. Communicators often rely on executive orders to fulfill responsibilities and lead integrated initiatives. This creates a dilemma for Defense Inc., as efforts to advance integration involve increasing self-initiated integration through increased interaction between groups and functions.

### *Understanding Integrated Communication*

Central themes of integration at DI comprise notions of authority, control, and efficiency. Communication approvals and company directives are considered dominant elements of integrated communication, as communicators often rely on headquarters to initiate the integration process. This central theme of control and centralization also translates into integration as “one company” or “one brand,” and the need to coordinate communication activities for a “united front.”

*Control.* Communication goes through a centralized process of top-down approvals, and many communicators explain integration as a “control issue.” In fact, centralization is a dominant consideration of communication professionals when discussing integration. An operating group marketing professional stated, “I would say that compared to a lot of our competitors, I think that we’re ahead of the curve in a big way and I think a lot of the centralization is a reason for that.” She further explained that centralization requires committing to company values and messages. “We are still setting pretty strict rules that you need to comply, you need to jump onboard, you need to help support the cause here.” This rules-based regimen was evident in organizational documents.

In spite of the potential benefit of control, many communicators referred to the communication structure as a hindrance—one called it “a total nightmare of a

process.” One common concern is the approval system for press releases. In order to send out a release, even if for local media, communication professionals have to pass press releases through national and international headquarters approvals. One communication director said, “By the time your press release goes through the routing process...it’s no longer news.” Because of the geographic distance of headquarters, timeliness is ruined, causing missed press deadlines and publicity opportunities. At least one participant indicated the need to sidestep the system and push a press release through in spite of protocol.

Furthermore, this regimented structure of approvals leads to an understanding and reliance on corporate headquarters to lead the process of integration. One director explained, “I think [headquarters] is supposed to lead the process...they own the process to get everybody around the table and say ‘Look, you’ve got to be serious here.’ And that process is called integrated communication.”

*One company.* Due to so many mergers and acquisitions, and the geographic separation of offices, employees are scattered across the globe and may have unsettled allegiances regarding Defense Inc. Several communication directors expressed the challenge to “get to this place where everybody feels like part of one company.” One executive explained, “In my world of what a perfect communications office would look like, you have everything under one umbrella.” Furthermore, this theme of unity was evident in the media relations conference I attended.

In harmony with the central theme of control, the organization may be seeking to build this concept of “one company” or “one brand” through mandate. One communication director explained that he thinks the company is doing a good job



integrating people into a “one company” mentality because “we don’t give anybody choices. You’re going to be this because you have to.” Organizational documents corroborate this finding.

One of the challenges is getting employees to see beyond their department or function, and see the “big picture” of the organization, and many discussed integration in terms of making that change in perspective. “One of the drawbacks is that [employees] get very focused on their little piece of the world and they don’t think about the broader picture of the whole company,” said a media relations director. “That’s something that we really struggle with.”

*A united front.* “As times change, and the war starts going away, which it will eventually, we need to do something to make ourselves relevant,” said one director. Integration represents a united front against these changes and reflect the need to communicate efficiently.

Communication managers consider integration as a process by which the company “prioritizes messages [to] go in a united front” and create synergy and “buzz.” Discussions at a recent media training forum focused on the impact that a united front creates. “When you integrate, you get the synergistic effects of things, and you really see that pay off in spades with some of these trade shows,” one executive said. “All of this stuff happens and—Boom!—you get a really good buzz because of that.”

Respondents often discussed integration in terms of increased awareness and public attention at meetings and in interviews. “When you can put our product in the consciousness of the decision-makers, either sub-consciously or consciously or both,

that's when you can add value," said one executive. Another respondent said a unified front around company priorities helps stakeholders "understand what the company's larger priorities are," and that facilitates sales. "If you're trying to sell twenty different things to one customer and one of those things might be a huge contract worth \$13 billion, while another is worth \$30 million...they understand in context what we're doing in the big picture."

Others saw the value of integrated communication in terms of efficiency. One communication director said integration has reduced an estimated 10 hours per press release to only one, and another said integration would help the company deal with crises. "It's like Whack-A-Mole because it dies down over here and then all of a sudden it pops up over here...and you have to have a coordinated company-wide approach to deal with that." This efficiency mind-set was also echoed in meeting discussions.

### *Executing Integration*

Interviews and discussions at meetings reveal that Defense Inc.'s integrated communication structure may be challenged by contradicting and unmet expectations, misinterpreted directives, and a breakdown of communication between DI headquarters and its operating groups. On the one hand, the company maintains a rigid top-down structure, but it also expects employees to carry out integration through their own initiative, and communicators express frustration with the geographic separation between operating groups and headquarters.

*Top-down directives and bottom-up challenges.* Defense Inc. maintains a rigid, multi-layered approval process, featuring policies and a code of conduct with

which all employees are expected to comply. These documents feature Defense Inc.'s mission and standard operating procedures, helping employees govern their responsibilities. As one respondent said, "No matter what the communications is...you can pick exactly where it falls on the governance map. That's the delivery mechanism for providing shareholder value we always go back to."

Interviews and communication material shows that company programs and initiatives flow down from corporate HQ and funnel through the operating groups. Employee training and promotion programs, like the company's yearly "Chairman's Award," are communicated down through management and distributed to employees. The company also uses its top-down structure to "have the last say" in operating group initiatives, as one communication director said. The company newsletters also reflected this direct line of reporting, as initiatives are bylined by corporate executives.

In spite of this direct line of reporting, communicators indicate that DI's structure of approvals and reporting may be too complicated for communicators to fulfill responsibilities efficiently. In response, communicators discussed "an unspoken understanding that you can get around certain parts of the policy and live with act now, ask forgiveness later." One director referred to it as "a thing that you succeed in spite of yourself."

Layers of reporting can also create allegiance problems. More than one respondent reported dealing with conflicts between Defense Inc. mandates and what the group's president wants, and discussions at the media relations conference also revealed frustration. Although communicators said they try to find a balance between

the two, some recognized that this situation “can absolutely ruin your chances for integrated communication,” because “if you report into your president then you’re going to care about what your president wants, not necessarily what’s good for the whole of the organization.”

This conflict in direction may lead to personal decisions on which directives to follow. In one operating group, a communication director said, “People just do whatever they feel is right, and they aren’t accountable to anyone.” Another communication director at that operating group concurred, explaining that her divisions were “left up to their own free will” to decide on supporting charitable initiatives, and this led to a lack of strategic discipline.

Another outgrowth of DI’s complex structure is the ways of doing things that are undocumented. One marketing director said, “Newly acquired folks say, ‘Tell me the policy, and I’ll follow it to the letter. And in some ways, there really is no written policy—it’s kind of understood.’” Organizational documents may offer general direction, but specifics in communication may not be documented as completely. In order to comply with unwritten standard operating procedures, some communication professionals told me that they have learned to communicate everything back up to headquarters just to cover their bases and stay out of trouble.

Another challenge is the organization’s size and the geographic dispersion of operating groups and headquarters. “When you get a big organization like this, it often becomes a big challenge just to keep everybody informed about what’s going on,” said a communication executive. “You’re busy working on your little project...and you may not be thinking about...other parts of the company that would

be interested in your project.” Organizational hierarchies showed this dispersion, as connections are often limited between operating groups. Other communication professionals discussed the challenges that being in separate offices creates—that because there’s limited face-to-face interaction, there may also be limited integration.

The company’s geographic dispersion may also create problems in which objectives may be lost in translation. “A lot of the direction we get is too specific for the level of where it’s coming from,” said a communication director in the United States. “It should be very broad, generalized guidelines...but instead it often is micro-management, nuts-and-bolts.” Others complained that cultural and geographic discrepancies render corporate headquarters’ priorities insensitive and irrelevant for application in the United States. For example, through the press release approvals process, the company changes United States standard spelling to reflect British standards, and one respondent said, “By the time we get it back down, it’s incredibly filtered and sanitized—it doesn’t even make sense for a United States company now.”

*Interpreting corporate directives.* Defense Inc. leaves interpretation of corporate directives to the operating groups, though they “step in when they have to” or if somebody “raises the red flag.” For communicators, the most common set of directions is the company’s top ten corporate objectives, which it publicizes in corporate meetings and forums, and in internal communication material.

At a recent media relations forum in which all the media relations directors across the United States and throughout the operating groups attended, an executive from corporate headquarters spoke on the current priorities and initiated discussion on these objectives. The executive formed teams at the forum and led brainstorming

sessions on how objectives could be fulfilled from a media relations standpoint. Communicators said that this process in which headquarters “comes up with the overall strategy” and then leaves it up to the operating groups to “provide input” is common, and communicators directors have “the latitude” to enact strategy as they see best.

“There’s a lot of leeway in the sense that once we get someone from headquarters, we need to communicate the company’s strategy this year. They give you some sort of guidelines, but it’s really within our operating group that it’s at my level to come up with specifically how we want to communicate.”

*Integrating communication tools.* One of the base considerations of integrated communication at Defense Inc. is synchronizing communication materials for consistency to reflect a unified company brand and set of values. As such, communication executives have taken the initiative to establish document templates and standardized frameworks for communication collateral.

One key area is press release creation. With hundreds of offices across the country and throughout the world, templates for press releases have been varied, causing inconsistency in presentation. To remedy the problem, the United States director of public relations created a document template on which all press releases were to be created, and he also designed a writer’s guide to facilitate consistency in both presentation and content. “Once we started to synergize so they looked the same, everybody was more comfortable,” he said.

In order to ensure consistent messaging across the company, the corporate headquarters provides key messages for operating groups to incorporate when distributing a message. One communication manager said, “My hope is that whenever we get publicity, at least one of those key messages would be included.” In this way, the company seeks to ensure that messages are the same “across the different facets of communication.” Communication material demonstrates a consistency in messaging.

Some of the consistent themes and messages include being a trusted partner, being a reliable and stable growth company, as well as real performance and unrivaled technical support. Each one of these messages, as well as other message priorities, are distributed through company forums and then conveyed through all of DI’s events, videos, brochures, and communication material. If specific messages are not word-for-word consistent, company communication directors explained that the essence of each message, whether internal or external, should support the larger, strategic messages. One respondent even suggested that the company set up a set of talking points to help direct communicators stay “on message.”

In addition to message consistency, the company also emphasizes image consistency. For one, Defense Inc. “won’t let people start branding—making their own brands. All of our companies are considered Defense Inc. and they have one logo,” said a media relations director. Logos for each one of the operating groups feature the main company logo as a primary graphical element, and any mention of the operating group’s name or imagery is secondary.

The primary benefit of synchronizing messaging and imagery is credibility born in consistency and message reinforcement. A media relations director explained,

“It adds to the credibility of your company. If everyone is saying the same messages...I think it just keeps reinforcing that message and it adds to your company’s reputation.”

*Integrating channels.* “It’s not rocket science,” one communication director said “We use a variety of communication methods to reach our audience, wherever they are.” Integrating communication channels involves strategically coordinating media outlets for the most effective impact on stakeholders. The United States director of public relations described channel integration as “surround sound”:

“We need the positive press out there, we need that drum beat to kind of form the atmospherics. I used to call it surround sound, people are more inclined to believe what they experienced from a variety of channels versus one.”

On the internal side of the business, communication directors are also working to integrate communication across media channels. In a recent initiative entitled, “One Phase,” the company is encouraging all of its operating groups and divisions to abandon their individual internal intranet portals and feed information into the corporate internal portal. Another internal challenge is coordinating offline media with online media, because 40% of one operating group’s workforce does not have access to the Internet.

*Integrating stakeholders.* Another level of integrating communication is targeting communication activities for specific audiences, while striving to keep communication consistent across all stakeholders. One underlying theme that the United States side of the business encourages is the notion of “what you tell one, you tell all.” In other words, “Make sure whatever you tell the Hill, is also what you tell



employees, is also what you tell the local media,” as the United States director of public relations explained. This need for consistency was also reflected in discussions at the media relations forum.

Stakeholder recognition recognizes that though “top level messages don’t change, you just tailor them a bit differently” for each audience. For example being a “trusted partner” is a broad message that applies across stakeholders, but “selling the facts of a particular vehicle to a specific customer wouldn’t be a message that you send to the community.”

At a broader level, integration of stakeholders constitutes targeting a wide-variety of stakeholders who may possibly have a connection with the organization. One operating group’s 2009 Communication Strategy presentation designates top priorities for stakeholder groups as ambassadors, advocates, and supporters, and also lists specific objectives for each audience.

One example of targeting a wide-variety of stakeholders was discussed by the United States director of public relations. Recently, a site in southern state was planning to release its annual report on the economic impact that the site had in its capital city. As they sent the press release up the chain of command, the public relations director noticed that they were targeting only local media, and that they failed to recognize that “up the road in [another city], the company has over 2000 employees that are building vehicles to protect the soldiers.” So, he instructed them on expanding the reach of the piece to consider other state facilities and produce “one single integrated release” reflecting facilities in the state’s cities.

*Cross-functional integration.* In spite of top-down directives, guides, and policies, communication directors admit that Defense Inc. is not as integrated as it could be.

“We’re kind of fragmented and the reason that I keep stressing that is because, even though we’re a top defense contractor, we’ve gone through so many acquisitions and mergers that we are like a brand new company. We’re continuing to try to develop some processes and policies, and standardization within the company that makes sense.”

To that end, the company is working to further integrate communication by encouraging cross-functional and inter-departmental coordination. One respondent said:

“You’re fooling only yourself if you think you can do anything unilaterally, within an organization, because in organizations today...nobody is just haphazardly off on their own...if your marketing team isn’t talking to advertising, your public relations team isn’t talking to advertising or marketing, and marketing isn’t talking to tradeshow, you’re losing a huge opportunity to really do communications right.”

There are several communication events in which communicators and marketers work together. For example, the company uses military-oriented tradeshow to promote its capabilities, and each event requires collaboration between marketing and public relations. One marketing director said, “I might be planning a huge tradeshow and in that environment, there are a lot of opportunities for

interviews, press releases, and media activity. So we tend to work together the most.” Organization newsletters corroborated this coordination.

The company also puts together cross-functional councils for major business initiatives. For example, in a recent product pitch, a client’s interest in the company’s aerial offering began to wane. The director of public relations explained, “I got sat in a room everyday with business development, government relations, supply management, program management, all of these people, and everyday we tried to win this competition.”

In spite of the above-mentioned efforts, collaborative efforts also appear to be situational or limited. For example, one operating group’s internal communication director works primarily with human resources, but has not collaborated with marketing or business development. Another communication director commented that though a lot of people are talking about integrated communication, it is a challenge to make initiatives cross-functional.

Perhaps one of the greatest challenges to effecting cross-functional coordination is the complex structures linking operating groups and the organization. For one, national level priorities are handled by DSI, the United States headquarters, while local level issues are managed by the operating groups and facilities, according to interviews and the media forum I attended. To add another level of complexity, one operating group within the United States also maintains global sites and home markets, making it less relevant to coordinate with the national headquarters, but also making it difficult to side-step the rigid structure and work directly with the international headquarters. One manager explained, “DI does integrated

communication pretty good at an individual site basis, but we're not coordinated as one company." One communication director confirmed this assessment, when she explained that she is more likely to work in unison with her fellow colleagues at her operating group, whose offices are in the same hallway, than she is to coordinate with the national headquarters a few blocks away.

Communicators indicate that this inconsistency in alignment across operating groups leads to inefficient communication. "We have different sites...and they're all doing advertising in the publications that they think are appropriate," said one communication manager. "The problem is, nobody actually knows what any other site is doing...if we all show up somewhere and there's three ads for DI in one magazine, that doesn't make any sense!" This manager further explained that, from a local level, communication may be integrated well, but the company isn't "doing it as broadly as we should."

*Relationship-based integration.* The priority in advancing integrated communication at Defense Inc. is increasing interaction among the company's personnel to improve internal relationships. Company-sponsored communicator forums are one venue the company has pursued to facilitate such interactions.

Forums are more than training sessions. Rather, the company schedules time for operating groups to showcase their successes and lessons learned, as reflected in my experience at the media relations forum. Team-building activities and interactive sessions where participants provide input and raise concerns are also a hallmark of these events. On more than one occasion, the United States public relations director told me that the value of these forums is in their capacity to facilitate relationship-

building. In one illustration, he told me of two colleagues, separated by over 3,000 miles, who met for the first time at a communication forum, and in their casual interactions, discovered a beneficial overlap in their needs and ended up working together.

Corporate communication directors envision integration as a self-initiated process. As the United States public relations director remarked, “Collaboration isn’t: go to headquarters and come back down. It’s talk to each other! Work together!”

Several communication directors discussed integrated communication as relationship-based initiatives that lead to serendipitous coordination. One director admitted, “To be honest with you, I don’t think anyone is leading the effort. I think it’s when you need something, you just take it upon yourself to make it happen.” She further explained, “Because there is not a hugely integrated approach here, I’ve had to build these relationships on my own.” Integrating communication requires communication personnel to “build relationships on [their] own,” “keep plugged into what [others] are doing,” and “connect the threads” of what the company’s departments are doing. The need to remain connected was also emphasized in the media relations forum.

In this way, information sharing is an emphasis in building internal relationships that lead to cross-functional coordination. For example, in one operating group, the communication directors act as liaisons with each of their lines of business to ensure coordination. Some respondents discussed a constant interaction and information-sharing between themselves and their colleagues. One US executive, for

example, explained that his colleague at the international HQ, with her five hour lead time, informs him on emerging issues before they hit the press in the United States.

Even at its most basic level, several respondents discussed the influence of working well with or liking someone has on building cross-functional coordination and integrated communication. One communication director commented, “I feel like we a lot of it has to do with personality...Our group here, we just tend to really get along, and like to work together.”

In summary, Defense Inc. maintains an authoritative structure that influences the level and implementation of integrated communication. Whereas integration from an external perspective emphasizes coordinating the look, feel, and messaging of communication collateral, the greater initiative—and consequently, the greater need—may be increasing internal interactions for a more relational-based integration that is self-initiated, serendipitous, and organic.

RQ 2: How is public relations and marketing differentiated under the context of integration?

At Defense Inc., multiple positions fulfill public relations responsibilities in strategic relationship management. In addition to directors of public relations at both the United States and international headquarters, each operating group houses a director of public relations and directors in other communication fields. According to interviews and organizational hierarchies, public relations directors are primarily tasked with media relations and publicity, while other communication positions fulfill strategic relationship management objectives, but are not referred to as public relations. Additionally, marketing is considered a communication function, but its

roles include business development and sales. Two traditional subdomains of communication and public relations fall outside of the communication group: government relations and investor relations.

### *Public Relations as Media Relations*

Public relations is defined as media relations, and public relations directors comprise a company-wide group of media relations professionals. At a recent media relations forum, the only company members in attendance were public relations and media relations directors. Other communication positions, like marketing, public affairs, internal communication and corporate responsibility were not included (the company hosts forums for each of those communication positions separately).

One manager who is involved in media relations defined his role as “talking to reporters and pitching our stories to them” and an operating group vice president of communication said, “Public relations is predominantly media relations—though there’s a community relations aspect and some reputational management to it.” Public relations forums and company conferences emphasize practitioners’ roles in media relations, and provide practitioners with key strategic messages to weave into their press releases and media interviews.

Public relations directors lead the outreach effort for Defense Inc.’s global company and facilities, connecting company representatives with media practitioners and facilitating interviews and publicity opportunities. One public relations director said, “I meet with reporters everyday and I try to help the media team basically

become better at conducting media outreach so that we can be known as one of the companies that is most responsive to them.”

Media relations responsibilities for public relations practitioners at Defense Inc. span the range of trade, consumer and specialty publications that cover aerospace, defense, and security. One public relations director explained that in working with these media outlets, the company uses a pull rather than a push strategy, in which local and national media pull information from the company for stories. Discussions at the media relations forum also reflected this pull-orientation. To this end, the national Headquarters facilitates relationships between the media and local units or facilities:

“We sometimes play those same kinds of roles as we would when we’re dealing with government relations at a local or state level—we help the public relations team maintain media relationships, make sure that the media are aware of what they’re doing and being a third party endorsement to the media.”

Under the heading of media relations, public relations practitioners also fulfill roles in promotion. “I would say that my goal is to promote our capabilities in whatever form that might be, to keep our programs sold,” said one public relations manager. Another respondent who manages sponsorships and charitable giving revealed, “Our goal for communications...is to assist in promoting the company and winning contracts.” One executive painted a revealing picture of public relations as promotion:



“While marketing and business development knows how to work with their customer in developing relationships with them, they don’t really know anything about how to promote or draw attention to their products. And so, while they may be happy to go in with a Power Point presentation to talk about all the gee whiz stuff, it’s being able to make it look sexy and make it look interesting, and make it attract attention. And that’s another area that has sort of been absorbed into the communication’s role”

### *Public Relations as Strategic Management*

Whereas media relations dominates public relations roles at Defense Inc., according to interviews and discussions at the media relations forum, roles also expand beyond media relations, as practitioners “reach out to constituent audiences, whether it’s media or board members or customers,” according to one executive. Some referred to their roles in terms of involving stakeholders with the company.

Consequently, communication roles are designed with stakeholders in mind. The marketing director of one operating group explained that dedicated roles to employee communication, media relations, marketing, and community relations, mean communication is categorized “by audience, internal, external, and community.” In managing stakeholder priorities, communicators fulfill the gamut of communication responsibilities, or as one executive explained, “You might do internal communications, but you also do media relations.” Another respondent said, “I’m a communications manager. I’ve done just about anything and everything from publication relations, to marketing and advertising.” Discussions at the media relations forum were consistent with this finding.

Other functions that fall under communication include employee communication and internal relations, corporate responsibility, sponsorship and charitable giving, as well as public affairs. One communication director manages volunteer efforts across the company while also managing executive speaking engagements and public access.

Communicators also fulfill communication advisory and strategic counsel roles, though some of these roles appear to be informal. The internal director of

communication indicated that she tries to be seen as a communication advisor to human resources. The media relations director at one operating group similarly described her role as a strategic counselor, and she often provides general managers advice on the public relations implications of their decisions.

In these advisory roles, public relations directors and heads of communication reinforce strategic relationship management as a priority in fulfilling responsibilities. The national public relations director said he often encourages communication professionals at the company to go beyond sending communication material to interact personally with target audiences. “I tell marketing, ‘What is preventing you from going and talking to your customer and laying out your story?’” The director of corporate responsibility at one operating group also described her purposes as relational, as she tries to involve key stakeholders in everything she does.

Overall, from a broad perspective, whether public relations and communication are defined as media relations or stakeholder relations, communication functions are designed to support organizational objectives. One communication director said, “The business objectives exist to provide shareholder value.”

#### *Marketing as Business Development*

Marketing at Defense Inc. fulfill business development and sales objectives, and fulfill responsibilities around external company advertising and brand promotion. One respondent explained that marketing comprises “advertising, tradeshow and events, and coordinating the trade and services media to make sure everything is on brand, and to promote the company mostly externally.”

A dominant responsibility in marketing at Defense Inc. is tradeshow planning and marketing. The communication director of one operating group explained:

“In the marketing apparatus, I have a marketing director here who plans tradeshows—250 different tradeshows all over the world—and all the collateral videos, strategic messaging and everything that goes with that.”

Marketing also leads the business development process, though several respondents indicated that the process of winning contracts comprises both the marketing and media relations functions. Tradeshows and contract bids often include both public relations and marketing, as the two functions tend to work together for the benefit of the event or proposal. One public relations director said that though alignment sometimes leads to a “periphery of friction between business development and communications,” that the two work together in harmony.

In fact, marketing often relies on public relations to add credibility to a marketing message, by setting up an interview or garnering publicity around a promotional endeavor, according to interviews and discussions at the media relations forum. In particular, during the decision-making phase of a government contract, it is common protocol that there will be a “silent period” in which Defense Inc. marketing executives are not allowed contact with the client. In these instances, they seek the help of the company’s public relations function, who can publicize company initiatives and provide positive messages about Defense Inc. and its capabilities in the media that clients read (i.e. trade publications and defense industry magazines).

Marketing also may be network or relationship-oriented, given that the company operates in a highly hierarchical and political industry like military. The

United States public relations director, in describing the marketing function, explained:

“Marketing gets a little corrupted in our industry. We have business development, which is a lot of retired military officers who understand the requirements of the military. The military says, ‘I need a new tanker, I need a new vehicle that will pass fuel.’ And we have marketing people called business development who are supposed to work with the customer and help them understand our capabilities.”

Consequently, the marketing discipline at Defense Inc. may be more relational and interactional than it is advertising-oriented. “As a whole,” said one communication manager, “we focus more on doing public relations and tradeshow marketing than we do on advertising.” Another respondent explained that marketing’s focus on tradeshow puts a focus on relationship-building. “When we go to a tradeshow, it becomes a very useful way of building relationships and communicating about our next generation product, the latest in protective vests for the military, for example.”

In conclusion, differentiation between public relations and marketing is based on sales. Marketing leads company interaction with customers and fulfills business development needs in progressing clients to a purchase. Public relations and communication, on the other hand, fulfill support functions for business objectives. This includes strategic relationship management with stakeholders, serving as communication advisors for internal communication and issues, and providing media relations and publicity for company products and initiatives.

RQ 3: How do relationship approaches of public relations in the literature help explain the role of public relations in integration?

Relationships play an integral role in communication and public relations at Defense Inc., and while external relationships are a priority evident in company directives, forums, and interviews, internal relationship management, though not mandated, may be an emerging emphasis for communication professionals to fulfill their responsibilities. In particular, communication professionals at Defense Inc. are tasked with navigating both external and internal relationships for the benefit of the company, by identifying strategic stakeholders, maintaining an open line of communication with stakeholders, and keeping internal clients satisfied.

#### *Relationship Connections and Antecedents*

Relationship-building is purposeful and strategic at Defense Inc. Communication and marketing professionals are expected to develop and maintain fluid external relationships that bring the company value by identifying the connections between the company and its stakeholders. Internal relationships are equally important, as employees are expected to understand the hierarchy of internal relationships and standard protocol, even though these “policies” are unwritten. In fact, policies in the procedural manuals are general and do not appear to address specifics of communication.

*External connections.* External relationships are built on purposeful, strategic connections between Defense Inc. and stakeholders who may provide value to the organization. This may be most evident in the company’s community relations and corporate responsibility initiatives. “The company really wants us to be in the areas where we live and work,” said the manager of corporate responsibility for one

operating group. Consequently, executives and employees are encouraged to get involved and volunteer with local community initiatives to identify and magnify local community connections to the organization.

In addition to recognition of community connections with the company and its facilities, there is a deeper relational endeavor to recognize connections the company has to its end product users—military personnel—and the people that matter most to that group. The head of corporate charitable giving at an operating group explained:

“We have three areas that we focus on when it comes to sponsorships, philanthropic gifts, and volunteer efforts. Those are charities or non-profits that support our customer—our armed forces—charities or non-profits that support the families of armed forces, and charities and non-profits that support education efforts.”

Identifying the gamut of publics with whom the organization could have a connection, or could pursue a relationship, may be a central theme of relationship-building at Defense Inc. One executive explained, “I think we’re constantly thinking about who else needs to know about [our initiatives].” As such, communicators build relationships with a broad cross-section of media relations professionals, military personnel, non-profit organizations, and those with any connection to the military. This finding was reflected in both interviews and the media relations forum.

To emphasize this importance, the company recently launched “the customer affinity” campaign, in which employees are made aware of the immediate impact and connection to the military personnel they service. One respondent said building this

awareness could be as simple as posting pictures of soldiers walking down the streets in Baghdad with a caption that reads, “This is our customer.” One executive said:

“Customer affinity is for the folks in the cubicles, the HR and the finance and the legal folks who probably have never even seen any of the vehicles we’ve built...How do we get them connected and make them feel that same sense of purpose...that my little cog here is just as important in the overall scheme of things to make sure that that guy has got a vehicle that’s protecting his life or has the right body armor.”

*Internal connections.* Relational connections to internal stakeholders may be just as important as those with external stakeholders, though this importance may be under-recognized. One public relations director commented, “I’ve seen good public relations people create great relationships with the media, but they blur towards their internal customers.” These internal customers include fellow employees, managers, and Defense Inc.’s hierarchy of executives.

In addition to the rigid reporting structure that Defense Inc. maintains, there are also a set of relationship structures that employees are required to navigate in the realization of their daily activities and responsibilities. More than one respondent described this as a political bureaucracy in which one must ensure that internal connections are identified and that everyone is “happy”. One respondent said:

“We have our internal politics, so we have to keep everybody happy. And it’s interesting at the operating group level, you serve many masters. You have to keep the North America group happy. You need to keep the international group happy. But you also need to acquire businesses and help them do



business. So we have to help those lines of businesses make their numbers, all while keeping all the bureaucracy and politics in order, and keeping everybody happy at the higher levels.”

One communicator explained that not every employee adapts well to this system. One employee the respondent managed had difficulty working within the system, according to the respondent, and found himself in trouble for not using the proper internal relational lines of operation. The respondent explained, “There’s no playbook for this, and that was part of this guy’s problem. He’s like, ‘Where’s this stuff written down?’ It’s not written down, it’s just the culture of the company.”

The importance of recognizing internal relational connections and the unwritten mode of operations is critical to ensuring that projects receive approval. One communicator referred to it as “stakeholder engagement,” a process by which company personnel must engage internal stakeholders early to keep them happy. He explained:

“What you have to do is identify who the stakeholders are, who are the potential naysayers, and get to them early. You go ask for their input, make them feel like they’re involved in the process, do all this upfront work, and then come back, come up with some stuff, incorporate some of their suggestions, maybe go back and re-engage the stakeholders and then as you develop the thing and you progress toward an end state, you have to go back and keep touching base with them. It’s almost like you’re courting somebody.”

*Relationship Strategies*

Managing internal and external relationships requires recognition of the value that relationships pose to the company. One manager said, “The only way that we can compete and grow at a time when defense budgets are likely to go down is by building relationships in a personal way between our business development folks and the customer acquisition community.” As such, relationship strategies reflect an orientation toward engaging stakeholders on a personal level, keeping stakeholders informed, sharing responsibilities, and fulfilling stakeholder needs for mutual benefit. This emphasis on personal engagement was consistent throughout interviews, discussions at the media relations forum, and in internal company newsletters.

*Creating personal connections.* Relationships at Defense Inc. are considered personal and involve an interpersonal orientation toward building and maintaining long-term relationships. One communication manager said:

“Communications has always been about relationships, so you’re managing your personal relationships or you’re managing the relationships of every person you run into and if somebody asks you for information and you don’t provide it, guess what they’re going to do? They’re going to get a perception of your organization, whether it’s good or bad, it’s reality. And you want to manage the best relationships possible.”

Relationship building at Defense Inc. involves engaging external stakeholders on a personal level. One area in which this is particularly evident is the aforementioned emphasis on taking care of military personnel’s most important needs—their families. Strategic outreach in DI’s philanthropy efforts is designed to

create a relationship between the company and its end users through the company's dedication to end users' personal priorities and needs.

One executive explained that by showing that the company cares about customers' personal lives, the company and customer form a personal relationship:

“Because our customers are involved in fighting wars, one of the big needs is taking care of their families...where we can touch that soldier or marine or airman or sailor is by supporting what's important to them back home.

Building the relationships by being involved in things that may mean something to them, that shows that we care not just about the bottom line, but we actually care about taking care of them and their family.”

This personal orientation also translates into a personal and intimate approach to communicating in relationships. For one, many communication professionals preach the value of face-time and interpersonal dialogue in creating a relationship. The national public relations director, for example, encourages media relations representatives to accompany every press release with a phone call or an in-person meeting, putting the focus on the personal relationship building opportunity. The same was said in the media relations forum.

Another illustration of this value on face-to-face communication was evident during the company's recent media relations forum, in which the executives stressed the importance of increasing stakeholder visits to the facility. During most of the conference, earning publicity or media hits was secondary to coordinating a facility visit by a journalist, a military officer, or a client.

Executives emphasize the need for company personnel to meet with the end-user, and, even, accompany field representatives during vehicle maintenance checks.

One executive said:

“It’s not very common that you have interaction with the end user, the guy who’s actually driving the Fighting Vehicle. The number of times that we can reach down and say ‘hi’ to them or help them...is probably not very significant, though we do make a concerted effort to be out there with our field service reps to service the vehicle.”

In relationship-building efforts, respondents discussed the interpersonal communication values of openness, transparency, caring, and listening. One communication manager said that she uses dialogue and open communication to “know what [stakeholder] needs are and how we as a company can meet those needs.” Another communication manager said that in his relations with media, he likes to be “as authentic as possible”

Internal relationship-building also reflects an orientation toward being personal and creating a positive interaction. One public relations director reiterated a number of times that in his interactions with fellow company personnel that he prefers to give positive reinforcement and constructive criticism, rather than make critical comments about potentially flawed directions. In our interview, he illustrated a recent interaction with another department: “They said, ‘What do you think of this idea?’ and my brain was saying, “That idea sucks!” but what my mouth ended up saying was, ‘That’s a great start-up idea and let’s continue to refine it.’”

Listening is another important interpersonal value evident in relationship-building at Defense Inc. One communication vice president explained that listening to everyone's opinion is a beneficial way to create internal harmony, even if the process can be cumbersome: "Everybody wants to have an opinion. You have to listen to everybody. All voices must be heard. All feelings must be considered, and it's very cumbersome."

Perhaps, because of this value on personal relationship-building, the company invests a significant amount of communication funds and effort in a highly personal medium like a tradeshow or a company forum. According to interviews and meeting discussions, tradeshow, in particular, represent an opportunity for communicators to meet with a wide variety of stakeholders, including military personnel, media representatives, combat enthusiasts, and even people looking to build their career in the defense industry.

*Informing stakeholders.* Information sharing is a valued strategy in building both internal and external relationships. Communication professionals express a need to make sure that all internal and external clients are apprised of company initiatives.

Knowledge is a valuable commodity at Defense Inc., especially insider knowledge required to fulfill roles and objectives. One communication manager explained its importance: "Knowledge is the base of what the public relations person does. The more knowledge they have the easier it will be to describe to the reporter or the marketing person why they should do something."

Consequently, knowledge sharing between personnel at Defense Inc. appears to be a priority. One communication representative, for example, said that

sponsorship and charitable giving initiatives should operate on keeping internal DI colleagues informed by “posting or doing a regular update on different charities...just to be able to promote what we’re doing.” This theme was echoed in the media relations forum I attended.

Another respondent said that sharing information between media relations employees about a journalist is a valuable endeavor. He reported that media relations practitioners can put out a message inquiring about a particular news outlet or journalist, and he or she can expect a response, like “‘Yeah, I’ve worked with him extensively, he’s a good guy’ or ‘He comes across brisk on email,’ or ‘Watch out, we’ve been set up before.’”

Sharing information may have an even more pronounced position in external relationship-building, especially with media professionals. Communication managers commonly expressed the sentiment that “because you’re delivering key information that they need, on time, at the appropriate level, they appreciate it.”

Communicators often seek to build relationships by assuring stakeholders of the Defense Inc.’s legitimacy as a “trusted resource for information.” Another respondent said that he often tries to support marketing efforts by sending out information to news media to ensure that a proposal is credible and help potential clients “believe that we’ve done this kind of work before, and that we can do it now.” One line of business has even set up a web portal where artillery enthusiasts can get the latest news on military artillery.

*Sharing tasks.* In addition to engaging stakeholders on a personal level, communication professionals at Defense Inc. also seek to support stakeholders in

their responsibilities and issues. Service and helping were a common theme underlying interviews and observation.

“I reach out purposely to find out how I can be of support,” said an internal communication director, “I just see my role in supporting the other functions at the operating group level. Nine times out of ten, they don’t need anything, but...I like to let them know I’m here.” She further explained that she has built good relationships with human resources because of this supportive way she approaches them. “We’re at a place now with a lot of these groups where they’ll even include me in their staff meetings,” she commented.

Others similarly shared experiences of building relationships by providing support or assistance even when it is not requested. For example, one director in the United States relies on a colleague in the international headquarters who, with a five-hour lead on news, alerts him to emerging issues. A public relations director also explained that he has “built inroads” with government relations staff by offering them advice on their communication efforts. Finally, the company holds communication forums to facilitate such assistance.

Outreach for relationship building even transcends functional boundaries. One marketing director explained:

“Even though I’m a marketing person, if...I see that there are some opportunities, or something [a colleague] could benefit from or help us out with, I always reach out to get [the colleague] involved. And, that’s because not only are we trying to do our own thing, we’re considering the other pillars of communications.”

Building relationships through outreach also applies to external relationship activities. One respondent explained, part of our brand is looking out for our customer's needs and taking care of them and that includes the families...We look at the relationship being a community and a family and taking care of all of them."

*Ensuring mutual benefit.* "For a company of our size, our goal is to do good...but our second goal really is to find out how it is going to benefit the company." Defense Inc. communicators commonly discussed relationship management as ensuring that both the stakeholder and the company benefit in interviews and meeting discussions.

Mutual benefit may be born in strategic overlaps. For example, the company often looks for charitable initiatives that either involve employees or relate to the company's objectives. Furthermore, one corporate responsibility manager said she looks to sponsor charities that can get DI employees involved in renovating playgrounds or other community issues.

Other ways the company seeks to fulfill stakeholder needs for a mutually beneficial relationship include the company's sponsorship of educational programs. In one particular initiative, the company sponsors a high school robotics competition as well as several hundred high school teams to compete in building robots with several levels of functionality. For high school students, it represents an opportunity to further education, earn valuable professional experience, and start teens on a promising career path. For the company, it represents more than just brand recognition and the halo effect of supporting such an initiative. This strategic



objective was reflected in both interviews and newsletters. One public relations director explained,

“We’re not even concerned about our messaging, because it’s already imbued in there...The fact that Defense Systems Inc is mentioned or not mentioned really doesn’t matter to us, because what we’re in it for is the philanthropy in driving interest in the initiative and driving interest in engineering schools, so that our future workforce, which are these kids, will grow up to be engineers.”

The company may also sacrifice for the needs of its stakeholders. The company sponsors a human terrain system initiative which provides military units with cultural anthropologists in Afghanistan, Iraq, and other war zones. This program is designed to “help the military understand the environment they’re working in and how to deal with tribal issues and customs and not make cultural mistakes,” said one respondent. Though the program has been a valuable one for the military personnel, the company has lost three members of their personnel to bombings, according to a newsletter article.

Communicators at Defense Inc. appear to take an approach to building relationships that involves giving before receiving. The director of corporate responsibility said, “I have always been of the mindset that in order to get something you have to give something. So, I know that there are good relationships I have to invest in.”

Another respondent said, “In some cases, we spent our own dime to ship the vehicles to the combat site just because we knew that for every vehicle we got into the country, we were saving lives.”

Meeting expectations is another theme in relationship management. “I think we are a company that really focuses a lot on performance,” said one respondent. “When we say we’re going to deliver something to you, it’s on schedule and it’s on budget. We spend a lot of energy focusing on that and really anguish when we come up short.”

In fact, performance and shareholder value sit at the top of the company’s global strategy, which is “to deliver sustainable growth in shareholder value by being the premier global defense, security and aerospace company,” according to internal company presentations. Throughout company publications and meetings, management reiterates the theme of performance and meeting customer expectations on quality and execution. Language in some of the strategic objectives includes, “embed a high performance culture..,” “further enhance...execution capabilities,” “develop a partnering approach to meet customer requirements,” and “increase sharing of expertise...between our global businesses.”

Additionally, an article distributed in the company’s newsletter explains the company’s current theme of “total performance.” The article, bylined by the CEO, reads, “The focus of the Executive Committee is total performance against every aspect of the way we do business, not just financial and program performance, but also business conduct.”

### *Relationship Outcomes*

One of the underlying goals of close, personal interaction with stakeholders is to engender involvement with the company, and, like a cycle, to encourage further personal interaction. Common throughout interviews and observations was the notion

that good relationships lead to further involvement and face-to-face interaction. One executive said that through personal relational efforts, “We get more media at our site. We get more customer visits. We draw more general public attention to what we’re doing there.”

Another communication manager explained that, in using social media tools to interact and manage relationships with stakeholders, he hopes to encourage involvement in the company’s area of business (cannon artillery).

“That’s the reason we’re out there with this website so that we can get cannon enthusiasts engaged in what we’re doing, and it was argued early on that we wouldn’t get any membership, really how many members are there that are interested in cannon artillery? But we’ve got 2000 members now, and traffic, close to 50K visitors a month, so we’re doing all right.”

Involvement as a relationship outcome also relates to ensuring dependability and gaining trust from stakeholders. The marketing director of an operating group referred to ensuring reliability through communication consistency:

“I think it helps build good relationships and goodwill, and consistency and trust because the more consistent and reliable we are in our messages and the more they spill over into other aspects of communications, the more our audiences are going to be able to recognize us and depend on us and understand us.”

Additionally, involvement may be considered an emotional construct. One communication director spoke of involvement in terms of the feeling the company’s brand engenders in stakeholders. “What does DI stand for? When you hear the

company's name, does it garner a feeling about how you view your customer? Does it garner a feeling about how big you are?"

Involvement also extends to internal stakeholders, particularly employees. Respondents often echoed the theme that "we protect those who protect us." Inherent in this tagline is the notion that everything an employee does contributes to saving lives, and the company often endorses internal initiatives to improve employee engagement on those terms according to interviews and communication material. For example, the company posts pictures of soldiers using company products around facilities and has even passed around a metal fragment of a company artillery vehicle with the words "this vehicle saved my life" scratched into it.

In conclusion, strategic relationship management at Defense Inc. involves identifying stakeholders and relationship opportunities for both stakeholder and company benefit. Relationship building activities include meeting stakeholder expectations and needs, getting involved with the issues that are important to the company's stakeholders, and, overall, engaging stakeholders on a personal level, through interpersonal interactions.

RQ 4: Does the level of integration influence public relations' activities in strategic relationship management?

Integrated communication is an emerging influence at Defense Inc. Though communication material reflects consistent messaging and image elements, internal levels of integration may be underdeveloped, and there is a need to increase cross-functional coordination and internal consistency.

Still, integrated communication appears to have an influence on communicators' and public relations practitioners' roles and approaches to strategic relationship management. Effects are most evident on the surface level of communication—that is, in communication techniques and collateral material like messaging, press releases, and promotions material. Integration may also influence identification of stakeholders and strategic relationship priorities and activities, as well. Additionally, communicators' roles appear to be influenced by integrated communication—as they are often the ones leading the process.

#### *Influencing Surface Level Communication*

One of the main tangible effects of integration on strategic relationship management is messaging and communication material. Integrated messaging is strategic and communication activities are designed to fulfill organizational objectives by including common themes, taglines, keywords, and strategic messages.

In fact, as Defense Inc. moves toward higher levels of integrated communication and greater reach of coordination, managers require more consistency in press release production between operating groups and lines of business. The United States director of public relations who is leading the effort to synchronize press releases explained:

“Everybody wanted to do their own press release—one for Hawaii, one for California, etc.—and I said, we’re not going to do 20 different press releases. We don’t need to do it. We’re going to do one document.”

He further explained that to those employees who complain that one universal press release would strip it of local relevance, he responds, “When you pitch the story

and you follow up, localize the story verbally. Pick up the phone. Talk to the reporters.” In our interview, he told me that he met a lot of resistance, but he had to “force a consistent process on them.” The result: instead of “getting pockets of local stories...[the company] earned top-level national stories and lots of local stories.”

Some said in interviews and meeting discussions that, in spite of the values of consistency, this can also render the press release ineffective and bland. One interviewee said that this process to unify press releases ends up being a filtering process that renders the release ineffective, especially when the release has to go through the international headquarters. “There is no US reference and ...a lot of times it’s so generic it loses its impact.”

Another communication professional similarly discussed some frustration with synthesizing *all* communication material. Her group had been part of several mergers over the last few years, and in order to unify the employees she works with as the internal communication manager, she planned to launch an effort to publicize the values that connected employees in the group. She was rebuffed by the corporate headquarters because the communication material was not consistent with the messaging and branding of the company. She said, “Because we had developed these posters, also some collateral material that would go along with this campaign...that was a little bit too off the company branding, we looked like we were trying to do our own thing.”

The influence of consistent messaging also extends beyond communication material, and is evident in the way the company encourages communicators to interact with clients, customers, and other stakeholders. The marketing director for

one operating group said public relations has to “be right out there with all of the trades and journalists understanding the strategic direction of the company, and clearly communicating the messages consistently. If they’re not doing that then we’re all in big trouble.”

The emphasis for communication professionals to be “on message” also involves representing corporate branding in conversations. One public relations director explained a recent emphasis on re-introducing the Defense Inc. brand to all clients and stakeholders as part of the company’s efforts to integrate communication. To this end, he instructed communicators to emphasize the DI brand and start with “‘Hi, I’m from Defense Inc.’ and when people say, who is Defense Inc.? The first answer is, ‘I’m Defense Inc. Remember, I’m the guy that’s been here for years...we do these cool things.’” This focus on capabilities permeated discussions in the media relations forum.

Integrating communication not only involves maintaining consistency in words, it may also entail synchronizing words and actions. One respondent referred to this concept as “strategic communication” and explained that comprises efforts to “align your individual words and actions and ensure continuity in what you say and what you do and what you’re shown.”

In spite of efforts to keep everyone on message, the company still faces challenges. For one, not all global employees have the same access to the corporate intranet. One internal communication director said, “It is a little bit challenging...our non-US employees can’t access [the intranet].” She explained that the problems may be related to the operating group’s position in the company. Because it operates from

the United States, it reports into the national headquarters, Defense Systems Inc., but it is also the only operating group in the United States that has global operations, and, as she commented, “It’s challenging having the US headquarters in the middle. They handle a lot of benefits...that only affect our US employees.”

#### *Setting Stakeholder and Relationship Priorities*

Integrated communication also appears to influence relationship management priorities, including identifying stakeholders and opportunities, and defining relationship activities so that all relationship efforts reflect corporate priorities. This is particularly evident in community relations and corporate outreach.

*Setting priorities.* The company strategically selects sponsorship and charitable-giving opportunities that reflect the corporate priorities and values. “We’re ensuring that our lines of businesses outside of headquarters are engaged in local community activities that align with our mission,” said one corporate responsibility manager. “We can certainly do lots of things in the community, but if they don’t align with our mission, it really doesn’t make sense for us.”

This is “a new piece for our company,” said the manager, and it represents a cultural sea-change for Defense Inc. Recently, managers would select a charity that he or she favored without much thought to the strategic value of the receiver. In fact, there is some indication that this still happens, as one communicator revealed that the headquarters supports local rugby teams and other initiatives that do not relate to the company’s strategic goals.

Strategic choices for partnerships are required to be “targeted and have an impact from a strategic perspective,” one respondent explained. Partnerships include



educational initiatives that inspire technological innovation, and relationships with the USO and other military-based initiatives. Additionally, the company supports YMCA, Operation Homefront, and Wounded Warrior programs.

*Influencing interactions.* In addition to influencing strategic priorities in relationship management, integrated communication also influences the interaction with stakeholders, themselves. That is, integrated communication leads to working with specific strategic stakeholder groups to advance the company's objectives. A communication manager stated, "Every plan we put together across the board, we have key defined audiences...we understand exactly who we're trying to target, where we're headed, and what we're doing."

Similarly, a communication manager said that integrated communication entails a change from how business has been conducted—where managers work within their personal network of colleagues and friends. Instead, the new order is to network with groups who make strategic sense for the company, and coordinate efforts through the proper channels. The manager explained a scenario she had recently dealt with, in which an individual wanted to give a charitable donation to a colleague's organization. The individual was hoping to coordinate the effort himself through his personal network, but was rebuffed because "there could be six different people around the world trying to talk to that same General, and without running it through one single point of contact, that General might say, 'I'm spending way too much time on Defense Inc.'"

She also explained that relationships are very centralized at Defense Inc. and are managed through a chain of coordination. She indicated that the challenge is reining personal relationships and ensuring that they're coordinated properly:

“[A media relations professional] might be used to saying, ‘Hey, I’ll go call that reporter myself, we’re buddies’...and in some cases, that might be ok, but you also need to coordinate it through this chain, because we might be talking to them about four other things...we’d rather prioritize our messages to them and go in a united front.”

*Creating relationships.* Integrating communication may also lead to more connections between individuals at Defense Inc. than otherwise. One operating group communication vice-president said he has to manage every communication through multiple levels of approvals and interactions before he can fulfill his responsibilities. He said,

“You have to get to anybody who could kill [the initiative]. If you want to do something you have to say, ‘Alright, who can pooh-pooh this?’...It’s not enough to say, ‘Ok, you’re the expert, go do it.’ Everybody wants to have an opinion...you almost have to have an integrated campaign plan just to go do something that should be a part of your job.”

Some respondents indicated that keeping in line with the coordinated relationship structure at Defense Inc. means keeping everyone informed, even if the process is time consuming. One respondent said:

“That’s really the best way for me not to get in trouble—to make sure I coordinate everything through the international HQ, and carbon copy the

national HQ, just so they know what's going on, even though, usually, if it doesn't involve the U.S., they don't care about it.”

Some communication managers revealed that with greater levels of integration come improved relationship-building capacities. In addition to discussions reflecting this theme at the media relations forum, one communication manager bemoaned situations in which communication efforts were not integrated, leading to inefficiency and missed opportunities. In one example he shared, he explained a missed opportunity because of a lack of coordination. This communication manager said he has spent an extensive amount of time building good relationships with military bloggers and may be one of the most recognizable company figures within that community. However, when one line of business outside of his purview sponsored a military blogger conference, they did not inform him. “I was a little frustrated over it because I had worked on those relationships,” he said. “Had we been more integrated, we could have had a different approach in which we may have gotten coverage on the blogs about our sponsorship of that blogging conference.”

This communication manager further explained that sometimes the lack of coordination like the episode surrounding the military blogger conference has led to missing promotional opportunities. “A lot of times, we won't have ads in a magazine because we thought somebody else was doing it,” he said. Another respondent similarly commented, “I think the more integrated you are, the more you make sure you get all your opportunities. There will be missed opportunities if you're not integrated.” Media relations forum attendees expressed a similar concern.

Finally, at least one respondent indicated that integration has no bearing on her relationship-building efforts:

“Regardless of whether there is an integrated approach within the company or not, I think I have tried my best to involve the key stakeholders and integrate things as much as possible. Would I like to see more of a focused integrated approach within the company? Absolutely. Would it make my job easier? One hundred percent. But has it been ok without it? Yeah, I’ve managed.”

### *Influencing Communication Positions*

With increasing levels of integration may come increasing responsibilities for communicators to lead the integrated communication effort. Communicators at Defense Inc. take on an “integrator role” in which they make sure that all the business functions coordinate with communication. The national director of public relations said, “We try to make sure that at the right place and right time we can be invited in, or we sort of force our way in, and understand what they’re doing so we can better help them.” Media relations forum attendees expressed a similar role.

As integration facilitators, communicators fill roles in consulting, message coordination, promotion of the company’s strategic themes, and employee awareness of company initiatives. These efforts include reminding employees of company policy, which is what one media relations director had to do, when a facility employee broke the chain of coordination and leaked false information to the press about the company’s relationship with a government official. She recalled the experience, “[We thought] maybe we need to do another communication initiative. So

we sent out a newsletter article to all our lines of business saying, ‘Hello, this is your government affairs team and your media team, please read our policy.’”

Communication personnel have taken on the responsibility to ensure that initiatives reflect strategic priorities. For example, a corporate responsibility director has had to focus her efforts on ensuring that charitable initiatives reflect corporate objectives, rather than personal agendas. Additionally, an operating group marketing director has taken on the responsibility of documenting unwritten cultural codes and one vice president of communication is trying to improve integrated communication processes by streamlining communication efforts and removing the political barriers to an efficient integrated communication structure.

Communication functions’ roles in facilitating integrated communication may also include supplying the market intelligence and other information to assist in the integration effort. One public relations director described his efforts in this regard: “I pick up a lot of different information from reporters when they’re calling me about stories they’re working on or what they’re hearing in the marketplace, and I synthesize that back to our government relations.” This public relations director also said that in managing public relations across the company, he envisions practitioners as “the point of contact for the full service of public relations and marketing requirements.”

In this way, public relations and other communication functions take on supportive roles to other departments in the company. Communicators consider themselves “partners in management” and they frequently insert themselves into new

business initiatives by offering their services in “advertising, marketing and communications collateral, events, and all the traditional things in the toolbox.”

Leading the process of integration also involves demonstrating the value of communication and getting involved with other departments to do so. For example, the director of media relations has been proactive in working with the government relations team as a communication liaison—a position she has taken upon herself to fulfill. Other communicators have done the same to ensure communication is represented across the company because, up until now communication has been “an afterthought,” as one communication manager quipped. “We really are the communicators of the company, so you would think that we would have a lot larger role.” This concern was shared by media relations forum attendees.

In conclusion, efforts to integrate communication at Defense Inc. have a tangible impact on public relations and communication roles in strategic relationship management. Not only does integration imbue corporate priorities on messaging used in stakeholder interactions and the priorities on relationship targets and activities, but it may increase management responsibilities for communication professionals.

### *Case 3: Adventure Communications Corporation — A Media Company*

Adventure Communications Corp.<sup>3</sup> is a media company with a cumulative subscriber reach of over one billion in over 170 countries, according to its website. The company broadcasts over 100 worldwide networks in both digital and television broadcast formats, and also features a diversified portfolio of consumer products and services.

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<sup>3</sup> The organization’s name has been changed to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.

ACC boasts top-rated cable programming, and maintains several global brands and businesses, most of which are maintained under the umbrella name and brand of Adventure Communications. Several others maintain their own brands, and do not feature the ACC name or logo. In addition to network and corporate websites, the company also maintains websites dedicated to serving consumers on the topics and mission of the organization, that is, providing education and entertainment to subscribers. For example, sites educate consumers on topics such as outdoor survival, health and weight loss, and even domesticating animals.

ACC refers to itself as a global media growth company in its corporate presentations, with the capabilities to build strong brands and leverage content globally. During the previous fiscal year, ACC saw an increase in total revenue of 10%, and it plans to launch several new networks, programs, and services to continue its growth. Its three-fold mission is to strengthen its strategic position of existing assets, expand opportunistically across geographic regions and distribution platforms, and focus on clear return on investments for shareholders.

The majority of employees reside at Adventure Communications' headquarters, though ACC maintains some satellite offices in Los Angeles, New York, and other worldwide locations.

ACC is a publicly-traded company, and corporate governance is divided into two main areas, ACC corporate and ACC's networks, according to company presentations. Corporate headquarters maintains the corporate side of the business, including investor relations, crisis communication, and also maintains oversight over its worldwide networks. Each network operates as its own unit, and features an

autonomous corporate structure of a president, vice-president, and general managers. Network executives maintain primary responsibility for communication strategy and execution, according to interviews and documents, and determine their respective direction, planning, programming, and communication. Network executives also maintain a reporting relationship to ACC headquarters to ensure consistency with the ACC mission and values.

Consistent with the autonomous but connected structures of ACC's networks and corporate headquarters, each entity maintains its own communication team and functions. Major internal and external communication functions include communication and marketing. Communication features public relations functions, including crisis communication, publicity and media relations, promotion, and viewer relations. Marketing comprises business development, advertising, and sales functions, and is considered a separate function outside of communication.

The following sections feature a description and analysis of Adventure Communications' integrated communication, public relations, and strategic relationship management, based on the four research questions.

RQ 1: How is the integration of communication defined, understood, and implemented in organizations?

Adventure Communications Corporation maintains a strategic and intricate integrated communication structure. Execution of integrated communication is led by management priorities on cross-functional collaboration and is based on a culture that values open communication, transparency, and teamwork, according to interviewees. Integrated communication activities are built around fluid internal relationships, a



clear reporting structure and information loops, and recognition of interdependence among communication professionals.

### *Understanding Integrated Communication*

Individually-held concepts of integration are central to understanding the execution of integrated communication at Adventure Communications Corp. Primary among considerations of integration are interdependence, strategic communication, and message unity.

Participants discussed working together for success as a common characteristic of integration. As one communication executive explained, “We’re all still working towards the greater good here and we all want to be a successful company.” Another said, “We’re a small part of the larger picture and we need to understand the larger picture in order to effectively do our job.” Company presentations also showed this collective approach.

Integration involves recognition of “being part of the same team,” and that other functions are integral to completing a project or conducting a campaign. As a network publicity director explained, “We all work very closely because what I’m doing is affected completely by what the other team is doing.” Some even consider it a natural process: “There are a lot of moving parts...and so many networks and businesses, it’s a pretty well-oiled machine. It’s funny talking about it. Sometimes I’m like, ‘Wow! I guess it is surprising that it works as well as it does!’”

Communication practitioners recognize interdependence with marketing and seek to balance the two functions. “You need to balance each other. So, if marketing

is going to go hardcore one way, we might play a little more straight and narrow knowing that we'll balance each other out.”

Integrated communication is also considered a strategic communication endeavor. One publicity agent explained that integrated communication is “very strategic” because it involves the coordination of communication activities for an intended benefit for the organization. Integration involves supporting the corporate brand and “putting a consistent face forward to the media and the public.” This theme resonated through interviews, documents, and participant observation. A network publicity director explained that everything “has to be strategic in terms of all the communications teams working together so that we’re promoting our brands separately but also strategically together at the same time.”

Finally, messaging is another aspect of integration, and may be the common denominator in consideration of integration at Adventure Communications. During interviews, participants commonly referred to integration as an initiative for consistent messaging, and the company’s websites and communication material are designed to capture consistent messaging. Being “completely integrated” involves putting out a press release and making sure employees get the same message, as one respondent said, and also involves efforts to align messages for harmony. According to one network general manager:

“You want to have the words coming out through the press so when the viewer comes to read them or see them on TV, that message is in harmony with the marketing messages that we’re paying for. And, you’re much better off if you are in harmony than if you have a discordant message...When you

see that the communications message to marketing message and the message to ad sales are all in harmony and are not conflicting, that's how you know you've succeeded."

These images of integration, as interdependence, strategic communication, and message unity represent a base-level understanding for integrated communication at Adventure Communications. Each of these concepts plays out in the processes and execution of integrated communication, discussed in the following section.

### *Implementing Integration*

Communication integration at Adventure Communications involves several levels of coordination, including, both internal and external processes. Whereas from an external perspective, integration includes message coordination, synchronization of media outlets, and recognition of overlapping stakeholder needs, much of the integration process is carried out through internal coordination, through network and corporate synchronization, cross-functional collaboration between departments and functions, and an organic or natural integration from employee engagement.

*Message coordination.* Adventure Communications' integration efforts are aimed at presenting a consistent brand to all stakeholders, including investors, business partners, the media and viewers. Whereas this effort is based in the coordination of company messages, initiatives also focus on deeper concepts of meeting the needs of target audiences and embodying the essence of the Adventure brand, rather than communicating about it.

Message coordination involves harmonizing messages between departments, networks, and ACC headquarters. The purpose of message coordination is "putting

out a unified message, and this message becomes stronger as more units are given the same message,” said a network vice president. Furthermore, message coordination involves ensuring that different messages are not “at odds with each other.” Some interviewees discussed this concept as “message sharing” among internal stakeholders. As one publicist explained, “We are all sharing the same assets to enable...as consistent and joint a message as we can.” Promotional documents reflect this similarity in messaging.

Message consistency allows room for differences in semantics or word choice, as long as the essence of message is representative of Adventure’s values. A corporate vice president explained, “It’s not that the lines have to be the same...it’s the essence that has to be the same.” In this sense, though “there are some words that are endemic to the company” it does not mean that communicators “don’t layer on other synonyms,” one respondent explained. Message coordination may be more about representing corporate values than it is about using taglines. This was evident in communication material which reflected the same themes, but may have used different taglines. A network general manager explained:

“We’re not big believers in huge tagline dependency, we don’t think that that makes that much difference. What you do is more important than what you say. Tagline is a means to an end not an end in itself. It does help us frame our own communications in our positioning and it’s very useful in that sense...but unless they’re just amazing and you have a lot of money to spend on them, I think they tend to be more important to us than to viewers.”

This network general manager further explained that message integration involves filtering communication to ensure they represent the essence of the brand:

“We have an editorial filter in the company, where we want to say that the Adventure show has to be immersive, engaging and informative at the same time. That brand filter is a way of helping us remember how to frame our projection of ourselves so that when I’m talking to a reporter, I’ll have a lexicon of words that I can pull from.”

Message integration requires employees to be on the same page. “We train ourselves and make sure that we’re on message when we talk to people,” said one network general manager. Another respondent said, “We don’t want to be going out with one message and have other departments going out with another message.” The overall goal of integrating messages is to have “a consistent voice coming out of the network even if it’s being funneled through our CEO’s mouth or through a corporate story.”

To ensure internal alignment, Adventure’s corporate communicators manage message development and distribution for employees and network talent. The director of internal communication explained that she works in tandem with Human Resources to create and distribute messaging to employees. This coordination is most evident on the internal employee website. Furthermore, each network president establishes a list of promotion priorities for his or her respective network, and corporate communication puts together a premier calendar of all the major promotables of each network. Management also ensures message integration informally. One network general manager said, “If I notice that in the course of

meetings and day-to-day work, people are missing one another and are not speaking the same message, then I'll encourage them to get together and do that."

*Channel Integration.* Adventure Communications synchronizes media outlets for a comprehensive reach of target publics by balancing earned and paid-for media, as well as print and online channels.

Channel integration starts with the consideration of message exposure and expansion possibilities. Publicity managers consider all possible media outlets for the same message in order to reach stakeholders from multiple vantage points. In addition to sending out television or print media releases, publicity managers also focus on outlets that focus primarily on their featured topic. For example, when communicating on a topic like global warming, one publicity manager explained, "We might reach out to some kind of newsletter that deals with global warming. We wouldn't reach out to them on all of our programming...just on the day when we have something related to global warming."

Integrating channels entails earning as much media coverage as possible to reach a particular subset of the population. This was evident in my experiences working with the company on a promotional event. My task was to gather as much media coverage before and after the event to assess the event's affect on network viewers. In an interview with a network vice president, this multiple-channel focus seemed critical:

"When we're doing a new show launch we try to get as many different media outlets as possible. We try to get morning shows—because we have a lot of very highly skewed women's audience. The Oprahs of the world are important

to us. National Enquirer is important, the Star magazine, those are things that our audience reads.”

Communicators also consider how much coverage to devote to a specific media outlet or channel. One network general manager explained that sometimes communicators work with a magazine that the ad sales department is also targeting. By combining the efforts of both the media relations department and the ad sales department, this general manager explained that the company can achieve, what he called “the ideal situation” by getting positive editorial coverage and advertising at the same time. Furthermore, communication works with marketing to “double down” and target a particular media outlet together to “own” that outlet

Digital and online media are an emerging focus, as well. “We usually do a lot with the online community because that’s another big part of our audience,” said one respondent. “We reach out to significant blogs, sometimes doing blog media tours along side with maybe a satellite media tour or a radio media tour.” Several respondents reported putting more emphasis on using sites like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube in communication campaigns because such online communities are separated into genre and are beneficial to niche interests, like those of Adventure Communications. Participant observation experiences corroborated this finding, as online channels were a priority.

Many reported that digital and online media are changing the way they conduct communication campaigns because “some people want to do everything online,” like watching show screeners. Others discussed message control because “it’s much more difficult to control messages in the digital realm,” especially in

“forums and the chat rooms.” Still others saw online media as a challenge to relationship management because with so many information distributors “it’s impossible to identify relationships...or prioritize where your relationships should lie,” as one respondent said.

Coordinating online media outlets also involves closer coordination between marketing and communication on scheduling media releases and launches. “We’ll work with marketing to get whatever they want to put on the websites to make sure it fits with what we’re doing and that they’re not putting something out there that we haven’t announced yet,” said one network vice-president.

*Stakeholder integration.* Communicators coordinate efforts around stakeholder needs, their differing ties to the company, and development of one message to reach different audiences. “I think what drives it is what the audience wants,” said a brand director. “A lot of bloggers don’t want a press release, they want a message that’s customized to them...but maybe there’s a large message that’s more important for certain audiences.” Similarly, a communication director commented that she operates from the assumption that “a trade reporter who covers the industry day-in and day-out...probably has a different desire for information than, for example, a consumer reporter.”

For many, stakeholder integration is facilitated by online technology, which has enabled communicators to interact directly with the consumer, rather than work through journalists. “We try to capitalize on the fact that we can do the direct to consumer through all these different media things that we have,” said one communicator. “People are out there listening to us, and it’s good to get it directly



from the network, not necessarily from a reporter.” This was also evident in my participant observation experiences, as the network sought to capitalize on direct connections to bloggers.

Stakeholder integration involves targeting stakeholders according to their needs, or as one respondent explained, “We have to come at the same pitch from five different angles.” In this way, the underlying message may be the same, but way the message is presented differs. For example, one network general manager said he divides target audiences into four groups—viewers, trade reporters, consumer reporters, and advertisers—and for each group, he considers a different message. With advertisers, he emphasizes the quality of his network audience and their penchant to purchase, but with reporters, he emphasizes the value of network programming. The general manager explained, “The messages need to be in harmony and they don’t need to duplicate because you are speaking to different audiences but you want them to be in harmony.”

*Brand consistency.* Communication is also integrated to provide a consistent Adventure brand. One network vice president explained the purpose of integration as fulfilling a brand promise to the network’s stakeholders. “We want to make sure that we all have the same audience in mind, and we have the same brand promise in mind, and that way, we’re all integrated,” she said. This brand promise represents a credo for developing strategy and fulfilling responsibilities as an Adventure Communications employee. As one network vice-president explained, “You have to represent the brand, you don’t have to say what the brand is.”

This brand representation is apparent through programming and events, as Adventure Communications features talent and shows that represent the brand. “The programming group that pulls things together...is definitely very in-tune with the vision of the network and of the company,” said one network communication director. “They know what they’re looking for, they know what to go out and grab, the talent to look for, what shows to watch out for.” Network talent lives the values of the company, by bringing their expeditions and adventures into a real-life setting for viewers to experience. As one respondent explained, “We’ve positioned our talents on our shows as experts in their field, so the shows actually have a purpose to them.” This was also evident in a recent convention one network hosted, featuring the real-life subjects of a hit series.

Furthermore, Adventure Communications measures this external brand consistency by tracking messaging and publicity that influences how the brand is received. Often referred to as a “halo effect,” managers track whether the network shows are talked about, and if they penetrate pop culture (i.e. through late night show monologues, or satires on popular shows like South Park).

*Integrating networks.* As a global media company with hundreds of networks in 170 countries, Adventure Communications houses several distinct network brands, and ACC’s networks operate as autonomously, setting network programming, priorities, and communication as separate entities. Consequently, one of the principle areas for integration at ACC is ensuring that, in spite of autonomy, networks are in sync with the corporate brand and in sync with each other. This is done through a coordinated set of priorities. According to interviews and company presentations,

network priorities are on promoting network programming and corporate priorities are on promoting each network. This puts the bulk of integration efforts on the network level to represent Adventure Communications appropriately.

Network communicators explained that marketing and communication maintain fluid levels of integration, based on a recognition that “we’re both stronger for doing that,” as one respondent said. For example, in a DVD launch of a network series, communication supports marketing and sales by reviewing messaging and planning promotional activities, including setting up an opportunity for a network host to be on a talk show or provide a give away of the DVD. One respondent explained:

“We [marketing and communication] approach every...show together. So, as they [marketing] are building their media bios and we [communication] are pitching, putting together our strategies, we’ll look and figure out where we have crossover, or if marketing is buying media that will help us. For example, does marketing not need to buy a certain publication because we have a feature coming out, so they can put money somewhere else? As things organically change as we’re pitching, they can tweak their campaign.”

Marketing and communication may also approach network priorities separately, and then come together prior to the launch to synchronize efforts. “I’ll watch the show and I’ll put together my own messages,” one publicity manager said. “But at some point, I’m going to sit down with marketing and marketing will have done the same thing...and I might decide at that point that I really like some of their things...A lot of times, we do it separately and then come together.”

Though networks are integrated units, each network also tries to keep headquarters “in the loop” on the press and publicity that the network garners. “Because we’re a public company, they need to know just what kind of press we’re drawing,” said one network executive. “So, we alert them but, most of our work is done pretty much separately.” She, like others who participated in this research, commented that her network is “autonomous but we also understand the need to keep everyone in the loop” and align the network with the company brand. In this way, though each network may have a different brand, all networks are aligned with the company, as evidenced by company websites, documents and presentations. One respondent explained:

“Each of the networks has their own brand promise, but it’s still a dotted line up to what Adventure Communications is. We couldn’t have a message that was off kilter with an Adventure Communications message.”

Network general managers supervise this effort and make sure that networks and corporate communication are “on the same page,” as one network general manager said. At each network, the general manager serves as “the ultimate style guide,” as one general manager said, setting the tone and positioning of the channel, and overseeing both marketing and communication and ensuring that networks are aligned with corporate communication.

Through “share messaging,” network communication teams “tag along with a bigger corporate story” or work in unison with other networks. In this way, sharing messages and is a strategic endeavor, as communication teams “work together to promote [network] brands separately, but also strategically together at the same

time,” as one respondent explained. Network websites confirm this strategic connection, as network websites are sub-domains of the broader corporate site—that is, each network is a “.adventure.com” site—and each site maintains the same framework as the corporate site.

One of the main themes of interviews was the notion that, though separate, networks feel part of the corporate team, or as one publicity manager said, “We’re essentially part of the same team.” The inter-workings between corporate and network communication may be facilitated by a collaborative structure. ACC creates vertical teams between networks, and these teams meet together at least once a week with corporate communication. One publicity manager explained, “It’s very strategic because, essentially from a communications standpoint, we’re putting out messages, and that all needs to be very closely aligned.”

This structure is not without its challenges. In particular, some interviewees revealed undercurrents of competition between networks, which are separate and responsible for meeting viewership goals, but are also tasked with being aligned with Adventure Communications as a whole. One network GM indicated that he develops communication strategies for his network—one of the larger ACC networks—with the central corporation in mind because, “what happens to [this] channel is the single largest impact on what happens to Adventure Communications Corporation.” Other interviews revealed a sentiment of competition and that the larger networks may have priorities over the smaller ones. One communication professional explained, “Larger networks have the bigger priorities, so if [one of the larger networks] is coming out

with this huge promotable, we're all supposed to back down for the greater good of the company."

*Cross-functional collaboration.* Whether integrating communication within networks, across networks, or with Adventure's corporate communication, the dominant theme in interviews and observation experiences appears to be one of cross-functional collaboration and teamwork, which may be both endemic to the ACC corporate culture and encouraged by management. Cross-functional collaboration is achieved through structured meetings, management encouragement, and individual initiative.

Network-wide and company-wide meetings help facilitate integration. Adventure Communications hosts a weekly coordination meeting in which at least one member for each network communication team, along with corporate communication executives, meets and discusses initiatives, programs, and activities going on for the week. Several interviewees referred to this meeting as "the main meeting of the week." During this, and other meetings and company summits, "priorities are set with everyone's feedback" as participants decide on the issues and the processes to put in place, as one respondent said.

One of the results that comes from company meetings is the premier calendar which provides the media priorities for ACC. One respondent referred to this as "a giant calendar...chock-full of the activities that make up the landscape of the company." This calendar features a tier-model of priorities against which decisions throughout the year are made. For example, tier one initiatives comprise ACC's top priorities, like a recent new channel launch, in which the company spent extensive

time and effort to get all employees involved. A tier two or tier three initiative is one that employees should already know about, or should be able to figure out on their own “because they’re part of the corporate culture,” as an internal communication director said, and therefore, messaging efforts are minimal.

The company also uses online tools to facilitate integration. For example, Adventure Communications maintains an internal web portal that is updated daily with company news as well as team accomplishments, goals, and individual anecdotes that help create an ACC community connection for employees. The company also maintains a media relations database for communicators to update with press contacts, purposes and dates of interaction, and feedback on the experience. Though this database is designed to keep everyone on the same page, at least one respondent revealed that there is a level of competition and press-contact ownership that may impede the database’s effectiveness. One communicator explained:

“I think in theory it’s great, and we all love each other and we all work under one umbrella, and our end goal is Adventure Communications, but we’re charged with bringing viewers to our network, so there’s a little competition there. So, there’s a lot of media contacts that don’t make it onto the database, sometimes because of competitiveness and sometimes because we just don’t get to it.”

Reporting structures are also an integral part of ACC’s structured cross-functional collaboration. Communication strategy starts at the network and team level, where managers set up strategy teams to brainstorm and develop strategy, and then report to the network vice-president who approves the strategy. Several ACC

communicators shared the sentiment that strategy creation ultimately relies on the communication team, as vice presidents tend to trust the team's direction and may only offer minor changes.

At the same time, communicators at Adventure Communications recognize executives' roles in facilitating integration. One network communicator commented, "I think [communication here] really works well because the leadership really has made us feel very connected to one another in a tuned way. One communicator called collaboration "a leadership thing" while another said, "Corporate communications does a very good job of understanding what the issues are. They do bring us together regularly to make it work." This was also evident in my participant observation experiences.

Management also takes an active role in cross-functional collaboration:

"I am always encouraging people to communicate with one another. It's my job say, 'see how [one person] does this or see what [another person] in marketing says about what you're thinking, and get some input, because it's valuable.' Part of my job is simply to encourage cross-departmental collaboration."

Executives who participated in this research explained that they prefer to keep strategy original, innovative and fresh and that teams for a specific topic or program are not always comprised of the same people. One network executive explained that although she assembles and inserts people on teams based on team members' interests and expertise, she also likes to shift teams around so that no one person is working on the same show for too long. "We might switch it up and then a whole new group is



going to work on [a network special] with the thought that there is historical learning that they can build upon but also, it's a chance to just breakout into something new." She further explained that she likes to "push people in the direction they haven't been before...and keep things fresh."

Another level of cross-functional coordination comes in the company's consideration of communication functions and activities as tools. In client presentations and new-hire training sessions, the company considers communication roles, such as media relations, publicity, promotion, crisis communications, and others as capabilities to be applied to a project or initiative, rather than as communication departments. This perspective leads to a structure in which network and corporate communicators are exposed to several different communication responsibilities. One network executive said, "Anyone that works on my team is exposed to all of the things that relate to [the network]. There isn't anyone on my team that just does program publicity. There isn't anyone that just writes. We do all of it."

This leads to a communication structure in which employees rely on each other for their expertise and the assets they bring to a team. One respondent explained, "Whatever the case may be, we are all sharing the same assets to enable that work goes out with as consistent and joint a message as we can." Additionally, this structure also leads to multiple levels of leadership in a team that transcend corporate hierarchies, as evidenced in interviews and participant observation experiences. One publicity manager said:

“Even though there is a hierarchy on my team, and essentially the senior vice president is the big boss...I’m the lead on certain accounts where I have vice presidents underneath me. And then, in other cases there is someone else who might be a higher level than me...and I report to them for that campaign. It’s all very strategic. It’s done that way so that no one person is doing too much at any one time.”

Another way the company facilitates collaboration is through inter-department liaisons, which are representatives who attend meetings outside of their department to coordinate communication and stay informed. As liaisons split time between marketing and communication teams, company personnel are “able to be that much more collaborative and in sync, and know what’s going on,” as one publicity manager said.

Overall, participants reported a concerted effort to keep fellow network and corporate communication colleagues in the information loop, and this coordination starts from the early planning process to ensure that everyone is in close communication with each other. In this way, when a network launches a campaign, both communication and marketing know which media have been targeted, and where the overlaps are. “That’s just the knowledge we want to have,” said a network GM. “The guy in the communications department is aware of the ingredients of a marketing campaign and the marketing department is aware of the ingredients of a communications campaign.”

*Organic collaboration.* Collaboration between departments extends beyond what leaders mandate as company or network policy. At Adventure Communications,

collaboration appears to be a natural occurrence or “something that people do on their own,” as one communicator explained. A network vice-president described it as *organic*. “If something works well, it works organically—something that naturally occurs when you’re working on something.”

One element of this organic collaboration comes from the Adventure Communications culture. That is, collaboration may be a cultural value that is an integral part of the Adventure Communications. This collaboration was evident in interviews and participant observation. One publicity manager said,

“Everything is based on communication among every department, every team. Not just [my network] but outside of communication, there is collaboration and coordination between [my network] and the other networks...there is lots of collaboration going on with this company all over the place. It’s something that makes it very workable...and it makes it a really nice place to work.”

Respondents described Adventure Communication’s culture as transparent, open, and fluid. One general manager said, “We like to have transparency...so that nobody feels walled off from information...We want people to know.” A communication vice president similarly commented, “I think there isn’t a great level of tolerance for people who are obstructionist.”

Participants in this research also revealed an underlying sentiment of teamwork that transcends formal structure. For one, employees brainstorm across teams and departments to develop strategy. This was particularly evident in my experience helping one network assess an upcoming promotional event—even as an outsider, I was invited to contribute to the brainstorming process. One network

executive said the network's strategy was developed through brainstorming sessions in which every discipline at the network, including programming, marketing, online and the president of the network, met to decide on the network's strategic direction. Another communicator remarked, "If we have a situation where we think this is completely wacky, we've never dealt with anything like this before...we'll do brainstorms among our group to think how do we repackaging this, what are we missing here?"

Adventure Communications appears to maintain a culture of connectedness that values inter-departmental promotion and interactivity rather than one of borders and silos. One communication director explained the culture in this way:

"It's not that often that something just happens and it's one person that has worked on it. There have been lots of hands in it, lots of cooks in the kitchen and if it's a win from this person over here, it's really a win for all of us. I think that whole idea has permeated, so there is not a lot of time wasting on the proprietary stuff."

One communicator referred to Adventure's culture as a "team spirit and collegial kind of thing," and respondents discussed headquarters' efforts to bring everyone together, doing big events and celebrating program and network successes. Another respondent said, "I think we all understand that we're all gunners...no one is lazy. Everyone is just really excited, really wants to innovate, and really wants to be part of what is going on as the industry morphs." This was also evident in my observation experiences. Finally, a brand director said that collaboration "definitely

has something to do with the corporate culture...when there's a priority, there's definitely a do-whatever-we-can-do-to-make-sure-it-happens attitude."

Organic collaboration also appears to be based on continuous interaction and internal relationships. Several respondents pointed to the open communication between departments, as employees reach out to each other to "keep in mind what teammates are doing" so they do not "step on each others toes," as one respondent said. One communication director illustrated how open communication leads to natural collaboration:

"It's one of those things where you could just be walking down the hall and say, 'Hey! What do you think about this?'...We are all on one team. If I'm getting my ideas from a support staff person or a supervisor, they're all probably really good ideas and should be considered"

Another communication professional remarked,

"A lot of it is the people—if you've got a good solid team that has worked together for a pretty good amount of time....It's a collaborative partnership. There are some folks who have a better relationship with one reporter than others, and you have that sort of insider knowledge to say, "Hey, can you help me out on this?" and vice-versa."

Other communication professionals said that team members "just really work together well" and "percolate ideas together." They also demonstrate high levels of respect and friendship. "When I get a big hit, like a *New York Times* story, or an interview on the Today Show," remarked one communicator, "everyone knows about

it before it happens and I'll get congratulations or nice messages before it even airs."

One publicity manager discussed the influence of interpersonal relationships:

"I think it all goes back to everything is influenced by the way that I have those relationships. If an episode isn't delivering on time, I need scheduling and production to help me with that. I need marketing to help me with things involving clips...I need all the stars are aligned for the show."

Finally, organic collaboration comes from tapping into the expertise and brainpower in the team and throughout the company. One executive said, "I think you have all this brainpower around you, why wouldn't you use it? It doesn't mean your idea is not good, let's all layer on and come up with an even better idea." Another network communicator said, "It's important to tie into the wealth of experience we have in the building."

RQ 2: How is public relations and marketing differentiated under the context of integration?

At Adventure Communications, company communication is divided into two functions: marketing, which comprises paid messaging and advertising, and communication, which includes both marketing public relations roles (i.e. publicity and promotion) and corporate public relations roles (i.e. internal communication and crisis communication). The difference between marketing and communication is based on the direction of communication (one-way vs. two-way) and the nature of the media produced (earned media vs. paid).

*Marketing Public Relations vs. Corporate Public Relations Roles*

One of the dominant roles of communicators at Adventure Communications is that of promoting and publicizing the company, its networks, and shows. Interviewees often described their roles in terms of “driving traffic, network buy, getting press hits, checking reporters to see what they’re writing about, tuning in, and brand awareness,” as one publicity manager explained. One network communication director explained that her job is to “direct the story across every facet of the channel...whether that means helping implement scheduling, [analyzing] competitive data...or getting shows reviewed by reporters.”

For many, managing publicity requires an integrated approach. One publicity manager explained the process for promoting a show:

“I have to be able to send a screener so that I can send it to reporters in advance. So, that means that I need to talk to scheduling to find out when it is going to come in and when it is going to air. I need to talk to production. They need to be able to tell me if the show is changing. Really, everything I do is directly dependent upon every other team and I would tell you that every other team would tell you the same thing.”

Communication professionals mediate the connection between the company and its stakeholders. “We’re the ones who have to be the voice for the network,” one publicity manager said. In this role, participants reported using networking sites like Twitter “to get consumer messages out there that aren’t just press messages.” Messaging in online forums appears to be two-way, as one director said, “We’ literally have a dialogue and [using social media sites] helps us see who is following

us.” Other respondents indicated working directly with bloggers and other new media distributors.

Another marketing-oriented role for communicators is promoting the Adventure brand. In addition to driving publicity, respondents also described their objectives in terms of “communicating the brand message,” “building the brand of the network, broadening it, changing it,” and even “infiltrate[ing] pop culture” by getting network mentions on popular media.

In addition to driving publicity and viewership for network shows, communication professionals also fulfill the gamut of corporate communication responsibilities, including crisis communication, investor relations, and business partnership relations. One network communication director explained:

“My responsibilities are extensive and go beyond what is normally communications. We do everything from brand management...to crisis communications, brand building, program publicity, trade and business, strategic planning—kind of little bit of everything. We also end up picking talent sometimes for shows. We bring in story ideas.”

For the most part, however, CPR responsibilities rest on communication directors, and those specifically tasked with corporate communication. Publicity managers, for example, work specifically on the promotion and publicity of network shows and talent.

#### *Differences between communication and marketing*

Adventure Communications differentiates communication roles from marketing in a number of significant ways, the most common of which may be on the



line between paid vs. earned media, though digital media and communication styles also produce differences.

*Paid vs. earned media.* The basic differentiation between communication and marketing is whether a media hit is paid for or earned through promotion or media relations activities. Earned media includes interviews, reviews, and articles, while paid media includes advertisements and promotions. One network communication vice president explained that communication and marketing are two different functions: “We speak for the network to the press—anything which involves executives responding publicly. Whereas, marketing is advertising. They do the paid media and we do the free media.”

In this way, communication is often used as a cost-efficient alternative to marketing. “Because we have a lot of new shows, we can’t afford to do marketing for all of them,” said one network vice president. “So, they always say, ‘Don’t worry about it, public relations will just handle it.’ That happens a lot.” This was also discussed in my participant observation experiences. Additionally, cost-efficiency translates into communication covering lower-level priorities. This network vice-president further explained that shows differ in importance, and that with a lower-tier show, marketing often counts on communication to “pick up the slack.”

In spite of the distinction between paid and earned media, the difference between marketing and communication “gets murkier” in the digital world. One communication director explained, “With things like Twitter, the marketing and communications lines are even blurring more, where traditionally you’d have this very rigid, ‘I’m working with a reporter, and the marketing guy is doing the ad buy.’”

One emerging area of differentiation is on the line between where media requires an editorial decision or not. One communication director explained:

“If there’s something that requires an editorial decision, it’s communications.

Blogs are an excellent example, you can provide content to a blog, but that’s still somebody making an editorial decision. Posting something on our Facebook, even though it doesn’t cost money to create the page, it’s something that so far has been handled by marketing.”

Others said the division is not as clear. “We have a rival marketing team and there are communications members on that team,” said one respondent. “So, when we’re talking about Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, while marketing may take the lead on that, we contribute to that piece as well.”

*Communication styles.* Marketing and communication “tell the same story in different ways.” Whereas marketing’s approach is unidirectional and emphasizes message control, communication’s approach is two-way and operates with less message control. One network manager said:

“Marketing messages are always going to be a little bit different because of the different audience with dealing directly with consumers to try to motivate them to basically buy the product when they watch it than it is to reporters, which is ‘This product is interesting to your readership.’ The message we’re trying to sell is different.

Another respondent further explained that marketing deals in taglines, while communication emphasizes description. For example, in discussing a show about a real-life adventurer, marketing devised a one-sentence descriptor to grab viewers’

attention, while communication built a bio of the program's host and explained the type of experiences viewers could expect. In this way, the difference between marketing and communication may be "sauce and spice vs. cerebral," as one respondent described. Marketing provides spice through quick taglines, while communication engages audiences with content rich pieces.

Some believe that marketing can take more risks than communication because of the nature of communication's engagement with publics. While marketing may be granted flexibility with the nature of its paid messages, communication has to take "a more pure approach," as one communicator described it.

Communication and marketing may also differ on semantics. "We don't really use media, we try to place media. That's a very big difference," said one executive. "Marketing uses media. Communications and public relations try to place stories in the media. We have less control. We're not paying for it. We have to beg for it." This perspective was evident in my discussions with a network vice president during participant observation experiences as well. In this way, communicators said they are limited because they "work with press most and don't have as much public engagement as marketing does," as one executive said.

Communicators and marketers may also differ in the audiences they work with. At least one respondent indicated that communication as public relations and marketing maintain separate audiences. "We do a separate public under communications and marketing, so now our goal is: Who is responsible for what?" she said. Whereas marketing often works with advertising and sales clients,

communication takes the lead with media providers, non-profit partners, viewers, and employees.

RQ 3: How do relationship approaches of public relations in the literature help explain the role of public relations in integration?

With near unanimous agreement that relationships are critical for success, relationship management at Adventure Communications comprises both internal and external relationships, and reflects the themes of two-way relationships based on dialogue, feedback, and mutual benefit. Furthermore, relationships are also strategic—practitioners build relationships with audiences upon whom the company’s success or failure depends.

#### *Relationship Antecedents, Connections and Indicators*

Relationship linkages between Adventure Communications and its stakeholders include an array of both internal and external antecedents, including interdependence, stakeholder relevance, and stakeholder value to the company. Consistent with the other two cases analyzed in this project, the priority on internal relationships in strategic relationship management was an unexpected finding.

One of the dominant antecedents of relationships at Adventure Communications is interdependence, especially in internal relationships. Respondents recognize an interdependence with fellow professionals, or as one network publicity director said, “I keep saying the same thing, we’re really very dependent on one another and I really need everyone else to do their job so I can do mine.” As such, communicators recognize connections with “people across all different departments, from programming, to scheduling, to production, to online.”

This sense of interdependence may be enhanced through the company's transparent culture. Internal communication, whether formal or informal, is open and fluid. "We can all hear what the other department is saying, and see what they're doing, so we can give one another feedback on how to do it," said a network general manager.

From an external perspective, relationship connections arise from a recognition of the various audiences who influence the company. "I think that my job requires working with lots of different personalities," said one publicity manager. "For me, relationship management is having open communication with whoever it is—the press, with talent, whoever." This open relationship with talent was evident in a recent promotional event, as event coordinators appeared to have an open, ongoing and natural interaction with the show's real-life subjects.

Relationship-building at Adventure is based on creating the connections that lead to long-term relationships. These connections begin with identifying and targeting audiences, and then creating awareness of a connection between the company and the public. Whereas journalists have been a staple of relationship activities at Adventure, many respondents explained that with the changing media landscape, bloggers and other digital media practitioners have increased in importance. One publicity manager explained that she has begun treating bloggers like network talent, recruiting them according to their expertise in topics that overlap with the network and showcasing them as part of the network. The company's websites corroborate this sentiment.

Respondents also consider relationships with business partners, non-profits, and employees. Adventure Communications has established over 100 educational institutions in underdeveloped countries, as evidenced by corporate documents and interviews, and maintains long-term relationships with non-profit organizations whose mission coincides with that of Adventure Communications. Additionally, Adventure communicators build partnerships with organizations that support causes related to their respective networks. Some respondents describe relationships with these organizations as longer than those they build with reporters in a fleeting and changing news industry. One respondent revealed, “I’d say our partner relationships are probably longer especially given that there are a number of animal organizations that are out there that are really high profile.”

Relationship linkages are based on the overlap between company brand and stakeholder interests. One network publicity manager explained this connection:

“We work with people who have a connection to domestic, who have a connection to wild, who have a connection to the broader environment that impacts our wildlife and creatures. So, I think there has to be at least a touch point.”

Working with connections and overlaps of interests as “touch points,” communicators at Adventure networks seek to maximize awareness of touch points. This begins with identifying the nature and perception of the stakeholder connection or experience.

One network vice president said she works with the ratings department to find out “who our target is, who we’re hitting, who we need to hit...we always want to know what’s going on.” The internet facilitates this stakeholder identification, as

communicators use sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube to track who is following Adventure networks, and who has marked themselves as fans or friends of the organization.

#### *Relationship strategies and activities*

Once a connection has been identified between the company and a stakeholder, communication professionals build relationships around principles of open communication, dialogue and interpersonal engagement, as well as shared tasks, needs fulfillment, and mutual benefit.

*Interpersonal engagement.* One consistent theme throughout interviews and observation is the notion that Adventure communicators value face-to-face communication and interpersonal engagement with stakeholders. This was especially evident in my participant observation experiences with one network.

One Adventure network recently hosted a convention for enthusiasts to launch the new season, with the goal to engage bloggers, reporters, and fans on a personal level. On a blog post, the company explained its reasoning for the conference:

“Something special happens when a television series stops just being words and pictures on a screen and becomes a community...so it is with [this show]. You have embraced the [show’s subjects] as if they were your closest buddies. To show our gratitude for your support, we have created this unique one day fan experience...Those in attendance will get a behind-the-scenes look at the making of your favorite show, the opportunity to get an autograph and much, much more.”

In meetings to plan the event, discussions reflected the need to build connections and relationships with fans, media, and others, and brainstorming sessions involved expanding evaluation beyond the traditional media hits to assess the effect of personal engagement and face-time with fans. For example, the network provided attendees with cameras and digital media equipment to chronicle their own experiences at the event.

This priority on “face time” is also relevant for internal stakeholders. Adventure Communications values employee involvement with the company, and often hosts events like town halls, brown bag luncheons, and instructional sessions to “bring employees and executives together more often than not.” One brand director explained:

“We will take the opportunity to get executives doing one-on-one luncheons with employees around certain topics...so the employees have an outlet or can hear more about them....We have Town Halls where we have the CEO speaking directly to employees. And those have happened all over the world.”

When Adventure Communications went public, the company hosted sessions with the head of human resources to discuss how the move would affect employees and to provide an opportunity for employees to ask questions and provide feedback. ACC also hosts a competitive edge series in which internal speakers instruct employees on how to stay competitive in the market. They even bring network talent in to interact with employees. For example, in commemoration of the Miss America pageant, the network brought in some finalists and had employees pose for pictures to be



considered for a faux-pageant. “We actually had a Mr. Adventure crowned!” reported one director.

Adventure also uses its intranet portal to create personal connections. Available to all employees, this online site is a repository for news, events, and even employee anecdotes. For example, through the portal’s “field reporter’s program,” the company has provided a section for employees to upload photographs and journals of their own travel experiences and adventures. “We’re constantly trying to elicit points of view from the different offices,” one network director explained.

In working with both internal and external stakeholders, Adventure communicators indicate that they seek to maintain “consistent and open” dialogue. One communication director explained that being open and honest means being forthright with negative company news. “All the news on the intranet portal isn’t always fantastic. We’re not going to bury a story that’s hard on Adventure...people should know—it’s not all rose-colored glasses all the time.” Another explained that being authentic, responsive, and clear are “the big three” principles of relationship management.

Feedback also plays an important role for building relationships, as communicators often conduct focus groups, gather viewer feedback and anecdotes, and distribute global employee surveys in which employees have the opportunity to “talk about all the dimensions of their work, [including] the tools they have, career opportunities, and the leadership and company,” as one director explained. Additionally, the company obtains feedback from business partners. “We’re good about assembling the feedback we get from advertisers who work with our ad sales

department to see what our advertisers are saying about us,” said a network GM. He further explained that the network assesses both the negative and the positive reviews, “so that we can work to address the negatives and enhance the positives.”

Adventure also maintains formal research and viewer relations departments for gathering input and feedback. One network GM explained he consults audiences to “give substance, credibility and backing to the things we say,” and also to “reflect back to the audience what the audience is saying about us.” A network director said that through sites like Twitter, the network is “slowly but surely learning what people want,” because stakeholders, like reporters, talk to them on their Twitter page and tell them what they need. “It has definitely opened communication in a different way than we ever have before,” she concluded.

*Sharing tasks.* Communicators at Adventure Communications share “an understanding” as one director explained. “We’re all working towards the greater good here and we all want to be a successful company.” In this way, ACC communication professionals consider sharing the workload as a critical element of relationship-building.

“Every department [here] is integrated to further promote every other division.” This statement by a network communication manager illustrates respondent priorities on sharing tasks—relationships are built through collaboration across roles and functions.

A publicity manager at Adventure explained that because press lead times are further out than advertising deadlines, the communication department tries to make sure they provide any insights or information that may help the marketing group. “If

we have any knowledge that we've culled because we're working earlier in the process than they are, we share that with them," she said. This collaboration was corroborated in documents.

Sharing tasks as a relationship strategy is also evident with external stakeholders. Communicators commonly consider the relationship between the network and journalists as an "open, working relationship" that involves working together for a common goal. "Our job requires working with media so closely that...before you know it, you're talking to them on a regular basis," explained one publicity manager. "When I want to pitch a new show, I call them directly...when they're working on a story, they call me and ask, 'What do you have going on?'"

For some, sharing tasks involves "being a valuable asset, whether or not it gets you something," one publicity manager said. "If someone just calls because they have a question for me, and it doesn't get me an interview, I still want to be helpful and assist them, because they remember that...when they're looking for an expert on something that might be my arena." This sentiment was consistent in observation experiences.

Networking is also a consideration in managing relationships, or as one respondent declared, "All public relations is networking. It's what we do all the time." Many discussed networking in terms providing colleagues access to stakeholders who may help them fulfill their responsibilities. "It helps to build on the strength of other colleagues, when somebody has a stronger relationship and can make that introduction," a brand director said. He continued, "There are some folks who have a better relationship with one reporter than others, and it helps when you

have that insider knowledge to say, ‘Hey, can you help me out with this?’ and vice-versa.”

*Ensuring mutual benefit.* Communicators also seek to build relationships by fulfilling stakeholder needs en route to mutual benefit. As one communication director said, “I think what drives it is what the audience wants.”

Adventure Communications seeks to fulfill the needs of viewers, media, and other stakeholders in relationship management. For viewers, the company educates viewers on non-fictional, real-life issues in an entertaining way. This is especially evident in network websites which are dedicated to the issues that relate to the viewers of each network. For example, a network focused on animals has a pet adoption and rescue service on their site. A communication professional from Adventure’s online and emerging networks division explained that her task is keeping up with the expanding niche-interests of viewers. “You can go find networks for exactly what you’re looking for anymore,” she said. “We’re required to really try to stay up with that.”

Education is an underlying theme in building viewer-network relationships. Networks select and position program talents based on their expertise in the subject matter. For example, on a survival-based show, the network describes the host as “an extreme adventurer who faces some of the most adverse conditions to help you learn information that might save your life.” One network director explained:

“We always want to get to information being imparted...so that you’re walking away with information. You’re having an experience and you may

not even know that you ever wanted the information or needed that information, but you're walking away with information."

For relationships with media distributors, communicators emphasize audience customization. "A lot of bloggers don't want a press release, they want a message that's customized to them," said one respondent. "It's basically customized based on what each audience wants." This was also evident in the way communicators interacted with bloggers for an upcoming convention I helped assess. A publicity manager similarly commented, "We're careful about not giving people information that they don't need."

In seeking to meet the needs of stakeholders, communicators also consider company benefit. One publicity manager explained her relationships with media:

"It's really give and take in the sense that we're all benefiting from it. If they cover our show, we get publicity. If you do something unprofessional, it might ruin your relationship with them forever. And, I think that they're looking to us to get information that we can give them so that they have more exciting things to write about."

Another publicity manager described mutual benefit between the company and its non-profit partners. While Adventure Communications reaps value from being associated with a cause that relates to its mission, "the fact that [non-profits] are associated with [the company] builds their brand and gives them more recognition," she said.

*Relationship outcomes*

The success of a relationship between Adventure and its stakeholders is often assessed on each relationship's outcomes. Common considerations include trust, relational satisfaction, engagement and involvement, and commitment.

*Trust.* Relationships at Adventure Communications suggest trust and reliability, especially internally. In one example, the network created an online simulator of a recent catastrophic event in order to put viewers as close to the situation as possible. Before the online simulator received major consumer publicity, a trade publication reported on it and criticized the effort for being insensitive to the victims. The communication director who oversaw the project said she immediately received a call from a fellow employee alerting her to the potential crisis, and she immediately had the simulator taken down from the site. "There's a lot of trust and a lot of dialogue that happens—people are very good about that," she concluded.

Trust is often born in communicators' efforts to keep people informed, in the loop, and updated on issues and events. One network publicity manager said that in her collaboration with other functions, she relies on her colleagues to keep her on top of everything. "We have to know what is going on so we can appropriately communicate," she said.

Finally, many respondents discussed interdependence as an outcome related to trust. Through the internal relationships created, communication practitioners come to rely on personnel outside their department (i.e. in programming, scheduling, and marketing) to launch a promotion or communication campaign. For one communication professional, trust equates to a family atmosphere at the company.

“We work very closely...we’re working in step with our [corporate] brothers and sisters.”

*Involvement and engagement.* One of the main indications of a functional relationship at ACC is involvement—especially among employees. Company communication efforts are designed to motivate and encourage employee engagement. For one, the employee web portal, as has been discussed earlier, features sections that highlight successful projects and employees who make a difference at the organization. Additionally, the company ensures employees are granted open access to all events.

The director over internal communication explained that she and her team try to “make all of the company news personal or human to people all around the globe...so that communications have a human element.” She further explained that the online portal features external news about the company so that employees are knowledgeable and up-to-date on the issues that affect them and the company.

Communicators also seek to elicit stakeholder engagement through feedback because “all voices need to be valued,” as one professional said. Through the anecdotes, focus groups, and employee surveys, executives strive to represent the concerns of their stakeholders. This was particularly evident in the network’s request that I gather and evaluate blog posts and online commentary regarding one of the network’s shows. The coordinator explained that they would use the information to assess how well they connected with the network’s stakeholders. The company also recognizes unsolicited feedback, whether positive or negative, as a valuable relationship outcome. One communicator said, “We just have people who have very

passionate relationship with [us] and if they feel like we've gone too far either way, they're vocal about it, which is a wonderful place to be."

*Commitment.* The goal of relationship management is "to get people to watch our network," one network vice president admitted. In reality, commitment may go deeper than viewership or ratings levels.

In fact, many discussed commitment in terms of brand resonance or stakeholders' connection to the Adventure Communications brand. One network vice-president said the value of relationship-building is "having a unified message [and] people knowing what your brand stands for, then they're more likely to use your brand or relate to your brand." Another respondent referred to commitment as a "halo effect," or "whether [the network] is talked about" and includes "people's recall or what they talk about when you say Adventure Communications."

Communicators also consider employee loyalty. "We're not here to make employees feel great for no reason," quipped an internal communication coordinator. "We're here to make them feel engaged and knowledgeable so that the brand can be the best that it can be."

Other outcomes discussed by communication professionals are personal. For example, one respondent said she values the "personal growth...and wealth of experience" that her involvement with the company provides. Another communication executive exclaimed, "I feel like I have the coolest job in the world and so that's personally satisfying for me besides being professionally satisfying."



Overall, relationships at Adventure Communications may be interpersonal, as communicators seek to engage stakeholders and fulfill their needs. Furthermore, outcomes reflect a dedication to mutual benefit, commitment, and trust.

RQ 4: Does the level of integration influence public relations' activities in strategic relationship management?

Any communication structure inevitably influences the way that public relations or any other communication function operates. Consequently, integrated communication at Adventure Communications is not without its influences on public relations.

Primary among its influences is the effect that integrated communication has on messaging and communication tactics. On a deeper level, integrated communication bestows a focus on managing internal relationships for communicators.

#### *Messaging and Branding.*

The most tangible effect of integrated communication on Adventure Communication's activities may be the way in which it influences the content and tone of communication. At Adventure Communications, all messages are aligned internally and externally, as evidenced in websites, promotional material, events, and even in interviews. One communication coordinator explained:

“I think about integrated communication in terms of communications with internal alignment, to make sure we're communicating what we have to our employees...and to our partners, providing them the messaging that they then need to message back to their clients. And then it's the messaging to the press.”

In ACC's integrated structure, all communication professionals work from the same message and the same brand promise. This does not mean that all communication messages are the same, or even that each network uses the same phrases. Rather, "it's a message within a message" as one network executive said, and each network has its own brand promise that relates to the corporate brand promise. For example, one executive said her network brand promise is in line with the company dedication to non-fiction entertainment. Her brand promise is: "We provide a look at ordinary people living extraordinary lives. You can live vicariously through our people without having to live their lives."

In this way, the Adventure brand has an influence on all network communication messages. One publicity manager for a large Adventure network said, "The message changes for every campaign, but our underlying message is always to get across the brand—that it's the number one non-fiction network, that we produce quality programming." As such, communication messaging passes through a brand or editorial filter that helps communicators "remember how to frame communications."

The brand may also serve as a framework for behavior and decision-making. For example, network talent is selected because they represent the brand promise, and they are encouraged to represent the brand, rather than talk about it. "We have them be themselves, and who they are represents what our brand promise is, or they wouldn't be on the air," said one publicity manager. In this way, the brand "is always part of what we promote, whether it's obvious or not," as another communicator said.

Maintaining consistent brand messaging is an important part of communication at Adventure Communications. Networks often host “off-the-shelf” training sessions on brand values for new employees. In fact, the internal communication department for Adventure has developed online programs that recognize employees who are active in the brand, and spotlight accomplishments on the employee web portal. The internal communication director who participated in this research explained:

“We try to make sure that as we build communications campaigns, we build internal awareness of corporate things. We’ll try to highlight people or teams that coincide with a new show or theme. For example, ‘Here is an HR person that worked on this project that can tell you why this is so important.’ So, it tends to reinforce some of the things that you are seeing here.”

In spite of this emphasis on the brand, ACC’s brand messaging may not infiltrate every element of relationship management. In particular, messaging may be less influential in more personal relationships. One publicity manager said:

“With the public, the brand has more influence because it’s an overall brand positioning that we all have to agree to. I think my personal relationships with reporters are not influence by that really at all because it’s my personal interaction with them.”

In this way, messaging influences relationships on the surface level—the introductory messaging and promotions level—rather than on deeper levels of personal relations.

#### *Internal Relationships and Communicators Roles*

Integrated communication may also create relationship opportunities. “We all love each other and we all work under one umbrella,” said one network vice-president. With an emphasis on collaboration and cross-functional coordination, integration bestows priority on internal relationships. Furthermore, communication professionals may lead the effort to manage internal relationships and advance integration. Respondents commonly discussed their responsibilities in coordinating activities across departments, and keeping everyone on the same page.

One way communicators fulfill this responsibility is serving as liaisons between teams, functions, and corporate partners. One network publicity manager explained, “I help liaison with the non-profit partners that we work with from the communication’s side of things, and I’m our team liaison with our marketing team as well.”

The internal director of communication explained that her job extends beyond informing employees about corporate policies. In addition to communicating on corporate programs, she said, “I’m tasked with working with other communications folks around the globe and making sure that employees here are engaged and knowledgeable about the brands and businesses that we have.”

Employee knowledge and engagement also translate into employee promotion of the company and its networks and programs. Part of communicator roles at Adventure networks is to provide employees with resources to be brand ambassadors.

“I think our employees are the first line of ambassadorship. With thousands of employees around the globe, they, in turn, have thousands and thousands of friends. So, they get on Facebook and say ‘Watch this tonight.’ So, I trust you

and you have great television judgment and hey why don't I tune in because my friend says this is a great show? So, we try to arm them to get them out there talking about things, being engaged."

In efforts to ensure integration, communication professionals also have to manage the challenges of integrating communication across the gamut of Adventure networks. Getting "buy-in" from employees and overcoming department silos are two considerations discussed in interviews. One respondent explained, "People are doing their jobs and sometimes they think they don't have time to communicate with one another, so we try to figure out why—help formal and informal communications to occur between departments."

Another challenge is navigating network competition. "We definitely make an effort to make sure we're not competing against our own selves at times," one communication director said. This includes making sure not to apply for too many of the same awards or pitch the same reporters. One communication professional admitted, "It's pretty easy to navigate. If *New York Times* covers [one of our network affiliate shows], I should probably not pitch them with the channels I'm over, it's kind of a common sense thing."

Additionally, several respondents indicated that they fulfill an advisory or consulting position, in which they use their expertise in communication to help guide an integrated communication initiative. One network director said, "Oftentimes, we're a sounding board for standard practices within our shows because people know that ultimately we'll have to deal with it." Part of this responsibility includes ensuring that network messages are in-line with the corporate brand.

Overall, integration may influence communication roles at Adventure Communications, though the effect may be limited to surface level and tactical communication practices, including press releases, and other communication collateral. Interpersonal relationships between communication professionals and stakeholders may not be influenced, though integrated communication does render communicators as relationship and integration facilitators, as they lead the internal process of integration.

### Case Summary

In this summarizing section, I will outline some common themes that lead into the concluding chapter that follows. This section features a summary of all three case organizations.

The cases outlined in this chapter were positioned according to level of integration, with case one being the least integrated organization and case three representing the highest level of integration among the three cases. It is my contention that of the three cases, only the third case features a fully-integrated communication structure.

This research revealed distinct themes around what integrated communication involves. Almost consistently, integrating the messages, look and feel of communication is a common consideration among practitioners in all three cases. However, where the three cases diverge is the extent of integration beyond messaging considerations. Whereas data from the first case shows that messaging is a top priority, the second and third cases reveal priorities on communicator alignment. In the second case, emphasis appears to be on getting all communicators on the same

page. In the third case, integration is born in fluid internal relationships at the company.

Communication roles appear to be consistent throughout the three cases, with a priority on public relations as media relations and promotion, and marketing roles on advertising, sales, and business development. Throughout the cases, it appears that differences between public relations and marketing become both more pronounced and more coordinated as integrated communication develops. In particular, public relations functions move from strictly media relations in the first case, to increasing levels of strategic relationship management in the second and third cases, especially with internal stakeholders.

In this way, it appears that relationship management is a critical part of integrated communication, and I was hard-pressed to find a respondent across all three cases who did not talk at length about the importance of relationship management. Research results reveal that integrated communication may, itself, be a relational concept, rather than one of message coordination or image synchronization. Integration requires coordinated relationship management among departments and functions. In this way, it does not appear that integrated communication threatens public relations roles in strategic relationship management. Rather, it may actually enhance its roles in relationship management, as respondents commonly discussed efforts to facilitate internal relationships.

This emphasis on relationship management in integration reveals an under-explored understanding of integration. Regardless of the level of integrated communication development at an organization, integration operates as a natural,

organic process built on internal relationships, interactions, and self-initiative, rather than on company mandate. Furthermore, public relations-based perspectives on relationship management (i.e. two-way symmetrical communication, dialogue, openness, etc.) may facilitate integration, granting public relations practitioners management roles in integration.

In the next chapter, I will discuss the themes and patterns of the three cases, and outline the implications of these studies. The section is separated by research question, and includes implications for both practice and academic purposes.



## Chapter 5: Conclusion

When I set out to explore the role of public relations in integrated communication, my original intention was to gather research to test or illustrate the theories of integrated communication, public relations and marketing. Throughout my review of the literature, I had discovered that perspectives on public relations and integration were either prescriptive or opinion-based, and did not sufficiently establish a research-based understanding of the influences of integrated communication on public relations. In particular, I wanted to address an assumption in the literature that integration would inhibit the strategic role of public relations and would subsume public relations to marketing. What is more, the literature did little to dispel this assumption, as much of the integrated communication literature depicts public relations as a tool, much like advertising and direct selling are tools, for accomplishing marketing objectives.

Perhaps for this reason, Hallahan (2007) called for an investigation into integration and Grunig (2006) called for a merger of marketing communications and public relations theories. These calls to action were the context for this dissertation, and I took as my framework the definition of public relations in the literature as a strategic relationship management function and assessed whether varying degrees of integration (based on Caywood's [1997] work) would influence that role.

What I discovered was integration does, in fact, influence public relations' roles in strategic relationship management, but not in the way that scholars might anticipate. Rather than limit its roles, integrated communication advances public

relations roles in strategic relationship management, and this study demonstrates that higher degrees of integration may lead to more emphasis on public relations as a management function.

In the following section, I will discuss the results of the research questions for this study, including the implementation of integrated communication and its influence on public relations as strategic relationship management. I will also discuss the implications of these results on theory and practice, and will propose new directions for implementing and conceptualizing integrated communication.

### *Integrating Communication*

Each of the three cases displays varying levels of integration based on Duncan and Caywoods (1996) and Caywood's (1997) framework. In fact, the ordering of the cases represents a progression from low levels of integration in the first case to high levels in the third. Whereas the results of this study corroborate Duncan and Caywoods (1996) and Caywood's (1997) concepts of the development of integrated communication—that it moves from awareness to message integration and ultimately integration of strategic relationship management—the results of this study also showed gaps and overlaps that lead to a need to revisit the levels and concepts of integrated communication. In particular, these cases demonstrate varying levels of integration within the same case organization, and for this reason levels assigned to each case represent a general fit for analysis purposes. Case one represents image integration, case two represents functional integration, and case three represents relationship management integration.

### Case 1: Image Isn't Everything

Park University demonstrates formative and early stages of integrated communication. Respondents admitted to as much in interviews. Indications from the data are that Park University falls somewhere in between stage one integration, awareness, and stage two, image integration, though some processes demonstrate levels of stage three, functional integration.

Integration at Park University may be a process that has yet to be initiated. Current communication practice reveals levels of spontaneous and natural coordination, but, at this point, the university is formalizing the process for the first time. Town hall forums and other meetings are designed to gather input for the university's integrated strategy. Throughout meetings with communication staff, leaders reiterated the need to integrate because the market conditions require it—citing “waves of change,” the economic downturn, and the university's new strategic plan as variables necessitating a new approach to communication.

This emphasis on change mirrors what Caywood (1997) labels as the first stage of integration—awareness. Data gathered through interviews, observation, and documentation show that change facing the university “reinforces the opportunity for developing an integrated management and marketing system” and that “the basic shifts in market power, taste, access, and diversity will demand new organizational strategies and tactics to communicate with the customer and to establish new relationships with customers and other stakeholders” (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 24).

Furthermore, the data confirm opinions in the literature that decreasing message impact and a changing media environment lead to integration at the university. Among other things, Park University's situation corroborates the proposition that "the greater the degree of change on the existence of specific market pressures, the greater the likelihood that integrated marketing communication will emerge" (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 23).

However, categorizing Park University under stage one integration would be short-sighted, even though leaders admit that the process has only just begun. The university demonstrates higher levels of integration even before structured coordination has been implemented. In particular, it is evident that stage two—image integration—may be more appropriate because the university efforts are dedicated to building "a consistent message, look, and feel" (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 25). Emphasis on "developing and deploying" the university's brand promise reflect this level of integration.

Though formal efforts to integrate communication at the university may be in their earliest stages, indications are that the process was already occurring naturally. Major campus events and communication efforts reflect higher levels of functional integration, and communication departments throughout the university demonstrate processes that "permit each form of communications to contribute to the success of the [department's] mission" (Duncan & Caywood, 1996, p. 23). It is apparent that without formal mandate, integration may be a naturally occurring response to a need to improve efficiency and impact.

## Case 2: Functioning in Spite of Itself.

Defense Inc.'s level of integrated communication is challenging to assess. On the one hand, senior leaders paint a picture of a coordinated integration effort. On the other hand, communication managers and staff indicate otherwise. For them, Defense Inc. "succeeds in spite of itself" as one manager indicated. The company's rigid top-down structure may be too specific to apply to local needs, and communicators struggle to work around directives and approvals processes. In the end, operating groups and lines of business demonstrate varying levels of integration with the company.

Integration at Defense Inc. may also be influenced by the number of mergers and acquisitions over the last few years, as processes to get new companies "on board" may be keeping levels of integration lower in relevant parts of the company. It may be for this reason that respondents indicated that integrated communication vary by location.

Overall, the data collected in this study mark Defense Inc. under the third stage of integration—functional integration. Caywood (1997) refers to this stage as the first steps to overcome functional silos, based on management pressure to work together and recognition that limited resources makes cooperation is necessary. These perspectives are represented at Defense Inc., where conferences and other meetings encourage cross-functional collaboration across communication and marketing functions.

Under this level of integration, functional coordination happens on a case-by-case basis, as marketing and public relations work together on specific campaigns or

activities, but not on a regular basis. At Defense Inc., defense industry tradeshowes represent functionally integrated endeavors, as communication and marketing work in tandem for the benefit of the company.

Furthermore, at this level, companies conduct SWOT (strength, weakness, opportunities and threats) assessments, and analyze the contributions of marketing and public relations to strategize based on functional strengths (Caywood, 1997). At Defense Inc., emphasis in the research is on understanding the external threats to the company, and the need to integrate communication to provide a united front against such threats as perceived unethical practices, layoffs, and support for the war effort.

At the same time however, some processes at Defense Inc. slow or even stifle integration. Research with company communicators reveals that the complex chain of approvals, along with the tendency for the company to step in and change the direction of a functional endeavors may limit communicators' self-initiative to integrate. This is also reflected in interviews and meetings in which communicators discuss the importance of letting headquarters lead the process. The result is a level of integration limited to campaigns or projects, as opposed to company-wide integration. On any given project, integration may vary, based on expectations of communication staff or actions by corporate headquarters.

### Case 3: Fully Integrating Communication

Duncan and Caywood (1996) proclaimed that a "fully integrated strategy will permit each form of communication to contribute to the success of the corporate mission" and that the greatest degree of integration emerges from the cooperative efforts of the traditionally separate fields of advertising, public relations, promotions

marketing, personal selling, and direct marketing” (p. 23). In this way, integration is ongoing and continuous, and does not differ from one company project to another. Of the three cases evaluated here, Adventure Communications may be most representative of a fully-integrated strategy.

Adventure Communications represents the highest level of integration because communication professionals participate in the strategic management of the company. At this level of priority, communicators are brought “in direct contact with the full range of management functions and businesses and other complex organizations” (p. 32) for the strategic management of the company’s stakeholders.

Furthermore, this level of integration requires that communication takes on the responsibilities of managing the full range of relationships, both internally and externally. At Adventure Communications, public relations and communication professionals commonly report that they manage relationships, externally, with the media, consumers, and network viewers, and, internally, with employees and business partners. They also manage contact points to ensure stakeholder experiences with the company are consistent and represent the company’s values and mission.

In this way, communicators at the company are leading formal and informal processes behind integration by building brand-specific initiatives and by facilitating connections between employees en route to natural and spontaneous collaboration. Additionally, Adventure Communications fulfills the requirements for relationship management integration because communicators at the company offer strategies, tactics, and experience that “marketing or other organizational functions alone cannot provide” (preface, p. xx).

### *Public Relations Roles in Integration*

One of the purposes of this research was to answer the criticism that integrated communication is a threat to public relations, and stands to subsume it to marketing and limit its roles in strategic management. Going into this project, my assumption was that these claims were unconfirmed and based in opinion. I believed that any conclusion on the matter could not be made without an investigative study evaluating the roles of public relations in integrated communication. Though this study is hardly conclusive on the matter, its insights reveal that integration may not render public relations a marketing support function, but rather, it leads to a more defined emphasis on strategic relationship management.

Across all three cases, public relations fulfills roles in strategic management. At Park University, communicators serve as integration facilitators, encouraging coordination between university departments. Similarly, at Defense Inc. and Adventure Communications, directors in communication and public relations are leading the integration effort. Additionally, public relations and communication professionals across all three cases fulfill roles in strategic relationship management, while marketing professionals fulfill roles in business development and advertising. In fulfilling these responsibilities, it appears that communication operates based on two-way dialogue, and marketing, on one-way advertising initiatives.

Furthermore, there is evidence that greater degrees of integrated communication lead to more emphasis on relationship management in public relations and communication functions. At Park University, though public relations professionals help facilitate integration, their dominant responsibilities fall on media



relations and mediating interactions between media professionals and university faculty and staff. At Defense Inc., media relations is also a primary responsibility, though there are recognized roles of facilitating integrated communication and building internal relationships towards effective integration. Finally, at Adventure Communications, media relations appears to be one of many tools used in the communication toolbox, as professionals consider their responsibilities from a relationship management perspective, both internally and externally.

One area of growing overlap, however, is in the area of stakeholder engagement. There is an emerging recognition that traditional marketing audiences, like consumers and customers, may be served best by public relations activities, and throughout the cases, there is no clear distinction on which function “owns” a stakeholder group. At Park University, marketing and public relations both target students, alumni, and donors. At Adventure Communications, both functions focus efforts on viewers and consumers.

The main differentiation may be that public relations functions manage relationships with a broader array of stakeholders, as the marketing function does not appear to be involved with employees, non-profit organizations, media professionals, community members, or government stakeholders. This difference confirms Kitchen’s (1999a) claim that in the corporate balancing act of profits, consumer satisfaction, and public interest, public relations plays a role in each—in the form of marketing public relations (promotion and publicity) for the first two, and corporate public relations for the last.

This also demonstrates the flexibility of the public relations function within an integrated communication context, that communication tools available to public relations practitioners include marketing tools and strategic relationship management tools. Furthermore, it appears that integrated communication does not limit public relations' use of these tools to merely the marketing-type, but rather, with higher levels of integration, companies recognize and utilize the gamut of public relations tools in strategic relationship management.

#### *Strategic Relationship Management in Integration*

The purpose of this research was to evaluate strategic relationship management strategies and assess to what degree integrated communication influences those strategies. This study found that strategic relationship management is a priority within an integrated communication context, and that as organizations progress from low to high levels of integration, relationship management becomes more complex and may take on a higher priority, especially among internal relationships.

This study illustrates the general theory of relationship management as each of the three organizations builds relationships “around common interests and shared goals” in order to enable “mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics” (Ledingham, 2006, p. 190). It is also evident that companies engage in relationship management for mutual benefit (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000b) and communication functions seek to fulfill organizational objectives and prove value through strategic relationship management (Grunig & Huang, 2000).

## Relationship Management Across the Cases

Each case demonstrates that integrated communication involves a priority on strategic relationship management, as all three organizations “engage in behaviors that benefit [their] publics as well as serving the interests of the organization” and build relationships to “inform[ing] key publics about the organization’s behaviors” (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000b, p. 66). Relationship management at each organization involves 1) identifying constituencies with which to build a relationship, 2) communicating organizational activities that foster connections, and 3) engaging in activities that will build trust, support and commitment between parties (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998). These three relate to the concepts of relationship antecedents, strategies, and outcomes, as reflected in the literature (Grunig & Huang, 2000). Furthermore, a cross-case analysis reveals that relationship antecedents, strategies, and outcomes vary based on the level of integration of each company.

*Relationship antecedents and constituencies.* Antecedents are defined in the literature as contingencies or causes of a relationship formation, and include the properties that lead to a relationship. The literature outlines a broad array of relationship connections (Grunig & Huang, 2000), though each seems to be reactive. That is, organization-public relationships arise out of a response to an issue, crisis, or situation. In this research, however, antecedents appear to be strategic. Organizations target stakeholders, build linkages, and plan interactions for the mutual benefit of the organization and its publics. Relationship antecedents, then, are strategic and reflect the overlap between company offerings and stakeholder needs.

Park University's early efforts to integrate all communication activities are based on identifying strategic publics and their connections (current or potential) to the university. As such, target publics at the university include students, alumni, potential donors, local government officials, and the surrounding community—though a priority is placed on students because of their intimate connection to the university and potential to contribute to the university once they graduate. At Defense Inc., relationship antecedents are also strategic, as communicators seek to build relationships with clients, end users of their products (military personnel), and media professionals. Finally, at Adventure Communications, strategic relationship antecedents include connections to the company based on entertainment needs (i.e. viewers and critics), issue or topic overlaps (i.e. non-profit organizations that support animals or environmental practices). In this way, it is also important to note that stakeholder considerations include the gamut of publics upon which the organization depends, including customers, consumers, employees, community members, and others.

Communicators at each of the three companies also recognize interdependence with internal stakeholders, especially employees, though recognition varies. At Park University, departments are described as “insular” and “siloed” and cross-functional connections tend to be limited, though University Communications staff is trying to increase connections between departments by sharing knowledge and increasing employee access. At Defense Inc. and Adventure Communications, employees may maintain more recognition of interdependence. At DI, communication conferences and standard operating procedures requiring approvals

appear to instill an approach that requires employees to work together across functions, and at ACC, connections appear to be fluid, and are based on several levels of information-sharing and employee connections.

In this way, access may be a critical antecedent for relationship building that relates specifically to integrated communication. As pointed out in the previous section, integrated communication operates from the interconnectedness of employees who must work cross-functionally to produce a coordinated and consistent communication campaign. The higher the level of integration, the more cross-functionality must exist. It may be natural, then, that higher levels of integration may feature higher levels of interconnection between employees and more recognition of interdependence. In fact, the three cases taken together represent a progression. As the level of integration increases, so does recognition of interdependence among employees and other internal stakeholders.

*Relationship strategies.* This study illustrates Ledingham's (2003) perspective that relationships are based on interpersonal perspectives and that they are built on common interest between both parties. Each of the three organizations analyzed in this study consider relationships as a necessary component for the organization to "enjoy a license to operate" (Heath, 2001, pp. 2-3). Furthermore, relationship management is a strategic endeavor, revealing a need to reconsider the conceptualization of organization-public relationship categories as outlined in the literature.

This study demonstrates that organization-public relationships are proactive—relationships are strategic and interactions are purposeful. Consequently, referring to

relationship-building activities as "maintenance strategies" (Grunig & Huang, 2000) may not be appropriate. In this study, each company approaches relationship cultivation and management strategically—relationships are built around common interest as all three organizations seek to match their company offerings with the needs or desires of their stakeholders, and communicators seek to accentuate that overlap. There is evidence, however, that in spite of this similarity, relationship strategies become more symmetrical as companies engage in higher levels of integration.

Relationship strategies at Park University appear to lean asymmetrical, as communication involves promoting the strengths of the university as a value proposition to engender stakeholder loyalty. As the university develops its branding, relationship strategies appear to reflect a dedication to creating an emotional connection between stakeholders and the university brand, which is reflective of marketing literature (Keller, 2003).

Cases demonstrating higher levels of integration, however, feature an emphasis on symmetrical strategies. At Defense Inc., relationships appear to be communal, interpersonal and based on task-sharing. Communicators' efforts to support the families of military personnel are one example of this perspective. Similarly, Adventure Communications emphasizes symmetrical relationship strategies through encouraging dialogue and interpersonal engagement.

There is also evidence that relationship strategies vary based on the type of relationship—whether external or internal. Results from all three cases show that communicators use interpersonal and two-way symmetrical strategies with fellow

employees and other internal stakeholders, regardless of the level of integration. Park University communicators emphasize sharing tasks in their internal relationship efforts, especially in situations in which media relations works across schools to publicize departmental news. Adventure Communications emphasizes face-to-face interaction, knowledge sharing and dialogue between the organization and its employees through brown bag luncheons and instructional sessions.

These differences in relationship strategies reveal two possible conclusions. First, with higher levels of integration, relationships may be more interpersonal and symmetrical. On the other hand, emphasis on symmetrical relationship strategies between internal stakeholders throughout the three cases demonstrates that type of relationship, rather than level of integration, has a more direct influence. Considering both scenarios, it is likely that both conclusions may apply. On the one hand, integration involves interpersonal connections, and thus higher levels of integration require higher degrees of two-way symmetrical relationship strategies. On the other hand, personal relationships may be more symmetrically-oriented by their nature, and may not be affected by brand priorities associated with integrated communication.

Hon and Grunig's (1999) work may shed light on this issue. They proposed that "most relationships begin as exchange relationships and then develop into communal relationships as they mature" (p. 21). In this way, integrated communication appear to be a process by which communication and relationship-building mature at an organization, as company communicators recognize interdependence and work together for the benefit of the organization. With advanced levels of integration, then, comes a maturity in relationships, as they progress from

exchange to communal relationships, and from asymmetrical to symmetrical communication strategies.

This point is particularly evident among the three cases. In fact, moving from Park University to Defense Inc. and Adventure Communications, it is possible to track the progression on Hung's (2005, 2007) exchange and communal relationship continuum. Relationships at Park University appear to be marketing-oriented, and reflect Hung's notion of manipulative relationships—that is, the organization uses asymmetrical strategies to influence its publics (Hung, 2005, 2007).

Relationships at Defense Inc. and Adventure Communications appear to be more symmetrical. At Defense Inc., relationships between employees and headquarters reflect a contractual agreement, while communicator recognition of the need to collaborate reflects "symbiotic interdependence" and the company's efforts to work with non-profit groups for the common good of military personnel border "covenantal". At Adventure Communications, internal relationships are covenantal, as communicators commonly indicated that they enjoy working together for the common good.

*Postmodern relationships.* As noted above, relationships appear to be purposeful and strategic—especially external relationships—as each organization uses public perceptions of trust, commitment, mutual benefit, and organizational involvement and behavior (consistent with the work by Bruning and Ledingham [2000a, 2000b]) to manage relationships and design communication strategies. At the same time, however, postmodern considerations are also relevant and expand understanding of integrated communication.



Postmodern models of relationships, like the dialectical model—which considers relationships formed by contradiction, conflict, and competition (Holtzhaue, 2007, p. 365; Hung, 2007, p. 450)—apply to internal stakeholder and employee relationships. In particular, the cases demonstrate that employee relationships may be based on the dialectical principles of autonomy vs. connection, change, and other relational tensions.

As integrating communication leads to new relationships, tensions define the experience. Examples of relational tensions can be found across the three cases, and include Park University communicators' concerns about losing ownership of their departments' alumni, communicator concerns at Defense Inc. about working through the complex political structure (and choosing alternatives for efficacy), and the concerns by some Adventure Communications communicators that larger networks will receive a higher priority. In each of the cases, relationships were forged out of these tensions.

Another postmodern consideration that applies to internal stakeholder relationships is the notion that relationships are spontaneous and unplanned (Stroh, 2007). Each of the three cases demonstrates scenarios in which coordination arises out of unplanned interactions (i.e. at informational meetings). In each scenario, it appears that these unplanned interactions are based on interpersonal access—that is, with increased face-time, relationship opportunities increase. In fact, recognizing the benefit of these unplanned and spontaneous interactions, organizations with higher levels of integration in this study are focusing on increasing interactions through forums, events, and meetings.

These considerations call for a postmodern perspective on integration, and may fulfill the need proposed by integrated communication scholars to advance scholarship beyond pre-paradigmatic levels of understanding. Current integrated communication scholarship is based on a modernist approach to understand the interplay between communication effects—that is strategic management of communication and relationships leads to greater efficiency, brand equity, and revenue for an organization. This study, on the other hand, demonstrates the need to consider integrated communication from a postmodern perspective because interactions happen spontaneously. This leads to a theoretical proposition that higher levels of integration leads to more relevance of postmodern perspectives on relationships.

*Online relationships.* This study also provides insights on online relationship strategies. Using online and digital technology, public relations roles in strategic relationship management may be magnified, as practitioners interact directly with the public through social media tools like Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and others. What is more, online relationship strategies appear to be interpersonal and conversational, invoking dialogue and feedback, rather than promotional or marketing-oriented. In particular, online relationship building at the highest level of integration appears to confirm research findings by Sweetser and Metzgar (2007). Online relationships at Adventure Communications are conversational and are based on responsiveness, listening, and customer service. Furthermore, Kent and Taylor's (2002) findings are also representative here, that relationship management online requires interpersonal orientation, including the skills of listening, showing empathy, identifying common

ground, and being able to contextualize issues within local, national, and international frameworks (p. 31).

*Relationship Outcomes.* Relationship outcomes across the three cases demonstrate a focus on building and enhancing corporate reputation, consistent with Yang and Grunig's (2005) work in which they propose that active communication with an organization leads publics to hold a favorable impression of the organization. Beyond reputation, however, it is apparent that, as integrated communication develops, relationship outcomes move from reputation to stakeholder benefit.

Communicators at Park University define relationship outcomes in terms university-benefits, like reputation, investment and stakeholder involvement. Defense Inc. communicators discuss relationship outcomes in terms of stakeholder loyalty that facilitates sales, but data also reveal levels of stakeholder benefit (i.e. sacrificing company personnel for the benefit of the military). Finally, at Adventure Communications, relationship outcomes are defined in terms of reliance and trust between ACC communicators.

Overall, it appears that relationship management follows integration and that the highest levels of integration lead to symmetrical relationship concepts. This leads to the hypothesis that integrated communication influence strategic relationship management and public relations roles therein, which is discussed in the following section.

#### Does Integration Influence Strategic Relationship Management?

The short answer to this question is, "Yes, Virginia, integrated communication does influence public relations," but not in the way scholars anticipate. Rather than

sublimate public relations to marketing and threaten its roles in strategic management, integration aligns public relations with marketing and facilitates public relations as a strategic relationship management function.

Integration influences communication in three ways critical to public relations. First, it creates internal relationships where they otherwise may not have been recognized. Across all three cases, development of integrated communication has led to more recognition of cross-functional interdependence and higher levels of collaboration, internally, among public relations, marketing, and other communication functions.

Second, integrated communication increases public relations roles in strategic relationship management. With increased interaction among departments and functions, relationships become more important, and public relations appears to fill in the need of managing these internal connections. Furthermore, public relations and its emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication is also recognized for its value to the organization and communication initiatives. It is apparent that with higher levels of integration, comes more use of public relations as a strategic relationship management function.

Finally, integration may lead to higher levels of strategic relationship management based on public relations values of dialogue, interpersonal communication, and two-way symmetrical communication. Furthermore, though the marketing concept of exchange relationships appears to be evident in relationship management, advanced levels of integration show that communal relationships are also a priority, especially among internal relationships. Integration appears to move

relationship considerations from transaction-based, customer exchanges, to the broader consideration of the gamut of stakeholder publics that may be influenced by an organization, and the relationship needs of these publics.

Overall, evidence suggests that integration may transfer public relations from a media relations or marketing support function to a strategic relationship management function. Therefore, the appropriate understanding of public relations within integration may be as a relationship management function.

Furthermore, it is also evident that relationship concepts may represent public relations models of relationships than they do marketing models. Though relationship management across the three cases reflects an exchange and even marketing-orientation towards relationship building, there are several levels of marketing concepts that do not apply. First of all, the marketing literature advocates segmenting publics into customer-characteristics and product-related elements (Aaker, 2008). Whereas it is possible that the marketing functions at each of the three cases may engage in this type of analysis, there was little indication that public relations professionals conduct relationships in this way. In fact, even at Park University, where integration is led by the chief marketing officer and VP of marketing strategy, relationship considerations appear to be based on the access points and experiences of stakeholders with the university, instead of demographic or product-usage variables. Public relations relationships also extend to symmetrical considerations of working together for the common good and helping others without expectation of return.

### Implications for Theory and Practice

This study adds insight to both the theoretical development of integrated communication, and the practical implications of integrating all company communication. First, this study reveals a need to reconsider integrated communication as a spontaneous and naturally-occurring process. Second, the study also holds practical value, as it demonstrates that successful integration requires self-initiative and inter-departmental relationship-building.

#### Implications for Theory: Organic Integration

This study adds insight to the ongoing development of the concept of integrated communication. Over the last two decades, integrated communication scholars seem to have added complexity and complicating the concept of integration. Perhaps the worst offense of this complication is the definition I chose as the framework for this study:

“An audience-driven business process of strategically managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results of brand communication programs” (Klitachko, 2008, p. 140).

This definition seemed to encapsulate all of the main considerations of integrated communication in the literature, and also represented a clear framework for building a research project—data collection surrounded the separate notions of managing stakeholders, content, channels, and results. What I found, however, was that the definition was too complex to accurately portray the execution of integration. In fact, I was even told that in my interviews. What I discovered was that the concept of integration in a professional setting was simpler than the concept debates in

scholarship represent—integration is coordination of communication functions for efficiency and impact.

Integration takes on many forms—top-down, bottom-up, lateral—and also features varying levels of coordination, varying from simple message coordination to cross-functional collaboration of company communication. However, the bottom-line of integrated communication is the notion that a company coordinates communication functions, and this process may occur naturally.

Throughout the three cases, levels of company coordination vary—from message synthesis to cross-departmental coordination. But in spite of the company's degree of integration—per Caywood's (1997) framework—integration appears to be a natural process based on internal relationships and connections—a process I refer to as “organic integration.”

One of the surprising findings of this research was that integration appears to occur naturally regardless of formal company structure. For example, at Park University, varying levels of collaboration between departments have existed even before the university began the effort to integrate communication. Similarly, collaboration occurs at Defense Inc. in spite of a top-down structure that may inhibit it, and Adventure Communications relies on the process to be self-initiated.

Therefore, integrated communication, as reflected in this study, is a cross-functional process that may or may not be managed, but that occurs naturally as communicators seek to build relationships with stakeholders. In other words, mandates and directives may serve to initiate the process, but integration *works* as an organic process. One respondent described this natural or spontaneous element of

integration as “organic integration” and I believe that it has relevance across these cases, and perhaps beyond.

Duncan and Caywood (1996) may have uncovered the basis of a natural or organic integration process in their original conceptualization of integrated communication stages:

“The greatest degree of integration emerges from the cooperative efforts of the traditionally separate fields of advertising, public relations, promotions marketing, personal selling, and direct marketing...as each step of integration is mastered and accepted, the elements begin to work together” (p. 23, 29).

Gronstedt’s (1996) also introduced concepts that relate to organic integration—his stakeholder relations model prescribes a process based on dialogue, interdependence and partnerships that lead to mutually beneficial relationships. This study and the concept of organic integration advance these relational perspectives of integration.

Organic integration recognizes that integrated communication are a spontaneous and natural process based on self-initiative, interdependence, and internal relationships. This is a departure from the literature, which considers integrated communication from a modernist perspective—that proper management of communication functions results in communication unity, which in turn yields an impact on stakeholders, which in turn leads to successful communication and organizational benefit. Integrated communication, as an organic process, includes several factors:



*Access.* Organic integrated communication require and operate on inter-departmental access of organizational personnel. In other words, employees need to have face-time and access to each other in order to collaborate. This may appear to be a common sense consideration, but it is one element of integrated communication that is not equally-shared across the three cases. In fact, getting employees together to spur integration appeared to be one of the main priorities of management in furthering integration efforts.

At Defense Inc., corporate leaders have begun to conduct company-wide forums for each of the communication functions. Though these forums act as training sessions on company strategy, corporate leaders admitted that communication forums have been invaluable for granting employees access to each other, leading to coordination that would not have happened otherwise.

Similar experiences were recounted in the other cases as well. Park University hosts a campus communicators group that meets on a regular basis and members of the group include every communicator on campus. Though these campus communicator meetings are meant to be informal sessions where members have the opportunity to discuss their projects and initiatives, respondents indicated that on more than one occasion, these meetings have led to informal and spontaneous coordination across department boundaries. Up until this point, however, it is evident that these campus communicator meetings are, as of yet, untapped potential for organic collaboration. During interviews, respondents indicated that coordination that comes out of these meetings is more of an unanticipated outgrowth than a recognized purpose. Finally, Adventure Communications also conducts meetings in which

communication and marketing meet to discuss projects and plan potential collaboration. Hosted by corporate communication group, the recognized objective of these meetings is to facilitate collaboration.

This principle of access also requires that communicators have informal interaction outside of meetings. This may be achieved through geographic connection, as is the case at Defense Inc. For one Operating Group, most of the communication offices are located in the same hallway in one of three buildings the company owns in a half-mile block. Discussions with communication managers who work in the same hallway indicated that they naturally work together because their offices are so close to each other, but that they rarely interact with other communicators at the organization—including their boss—whose office is a few blocks away.

*Organizational support.* Organic integration requires the organization to provide a context that lends to interaction. Successful integration depends on an open and fluid company structure.

In this way, organic integration is influenced by company culture. Respondents who said that integration happens naturally pointed to an organizational culture that is flexible, encourages openness, and is not resistant to change. For example, Adventure Communications' staff commonly attributed the ease of working together as an aspect of the company's flexible and open culture. On the other hand, Defense Inc.'s rigid structure stifles collaboration, and communicators work around the system to integrate efforts. In fact, corporate efforts to step in and take control of

operating group initiatives, as reported by some respondents, appear to discourage collaboration and impede integration.

*Knowledge.* Information-sharing may be a key component of integrated communication, as coordination may not function without a shared-knowledge across functions. For Adventure Communications, knowledge sharing is a priority. The company regularly conducts information sessions for its employees, like brown-bag luncheons with senior executives and even global events featuring interactive sessions with network talent and celebrities. Additionally, employees have access to daily information-updates through the intranet employee portal. As discussed in the results section, this portal features company news (from both external and internal outlets), information on initiatives and performance standards, and even features employee interaction sections, like team and staff highlights and sections that encourage employees to share videos, pictures, and journal entries about their travel experiences.

Taken from another perspective, a lack of knowledge-sharing may inhibit integration efforts. This may be the case at Defense Inc., where access to information is limited in some operating groups. For example, the director of employee communication in an operating group with employees both inside and outside the United States expressed frustration with an online structure that only grants access to the company intranet site by U.S. employees, leaving the international employees without access to information that may be critical for integration.

Another way organizations may facilitate knowledge-sharing is through the use of inter-department liaisons, which are representatives who attend meetings outside of their department to coordinate communications and stay informed. At

Adventure Communications, inter-department liaisons are a common fixture of integrated communication, as several respondents indicated that both communication and marketing departments designate a representative to split time between departments and attend the other department's meetings to ensure that the two functions "are that much more collaborative and in sync," as one respondent said. Though networks can ensure consistent messaging between marketing and communication, these inter-department liaisons also facilitate synergy in the form of one department providing the other with an added lift to a promotional launch. For example, one respondent at Adventure said that she might include samples of products that marketing may be trying to push in goody bags distributed at an event.

*Self-initiative.* A hallmark of organic integration may be the propensity for an individual to interact with others and seek out opportunities to integrate communication efforts. Organic integration is a self-initiated process, and is reflected in efforts by both Park University and Adventure Communications.

At Park University, media relations associates dedicate their time to going out and finding initiatives, research, and stories that relate to university objectives. Several respondents said that their responsibilities involve talking to people across campus about what projects faculty may be working on. Respondents often described their jobs as self-initiated integrated efforts to investigate campus initiatives and aggregate the information together for the benefit of the university.

Adventure Communications also recognizes the importance of self-initiative in facilitating integrated communication. Several respondents indicated that if communication personnel did not support the ideas of constant teamwork and initiate

collaboration, they would not have been hired. In fact, one network general manager told me that the process starts at hiring—Adventure Communications looks for people who are good at involving others and initiating collaboration.

*Brand essence.* Whereas one of the base-level considerations of integrated communication is message consistency, integrated communication may not operate naturally based on copying messages from one medium to another. Rather, it operates based on matching the essence of the company's brand rather than matching the words.

Perhaps the best illustration of this variable is Adventure Communications' communication efforts around its network shows. One show depicting a real-life survival enthusiast features several levels of communication all dedicated to the same theme—that the television show's host experiences extreme survival conditions to teach viewers how to survive in adverse conditions. In the show's integrated communication efforts, marketing and communication functions produce materials with different messages in different formats (i.e. marketing uses a tagline and communication publishes the host's bio online) but the message theme is the same. This idea was also reflected in my discussion with a network GM on the use of taglines. He told me that he does not "believe in tagline dependency" because a tagline is a "means to an end, rather than an end itself." Instead, he explained the value of building around common themes and that as a large organization, Adventure has "to coalesce around a few simple ideas" rather than repeat the same tagline throughout its communication efforts.

From examples at Adventure Communications, taglines and other messages are not as important for their words as they are for their contribution to the theme of the communication effort. In other words, communication should reflect a consistent theme, feeling, or essence. This may be what facilitates message synergy—rather than communicating the same message in multiple media outlets, communicating different messages based on stakeholder needs and the media outlet selected provides a 360 degree impact of organizational messaging in which different messages reinforce the same themes.

*Internal relationships.* That integrated communication is, itself, a relationship-management process, is something I had not considered coming into this set of case studies, but it is apparent that fluid internal relationships are an important factor of integrated communication, and they enable the process to work organically.

Internal relationships are a key value at Adventure Communications, as several respondents pointed to the relationships they have built with other communication and marketing team members as a contributing factor to the success of their integrated efforts. In fact, the internal relationships may be such an important part of Adventure Communications' company that one respondent said, "It's one of those things where you could just be walking down the hall and say, 'Hey! What do you think about this?'" Multiple participants at Adventure Communications also told me that public relations and other communication functions are relationship-driven functions, and that it is natural that integrating communication would work based that concept.

Another research result that advances the notion that internal relationships are a key component of organic integration is the tendency at Defense Inc. for communicators to work together because they get along. For example one respondent explained how integration works at her Operating Group: “I feel like a lot of it has to do with personality. I think that our group here, we just tend to really get along, and like to work together.”

*Autonomy.* One dominant theme throughout the three case studies was the importance of an autonomous working environment. Departments, teams, and individuals may need an open and autonomous organization environment in order to carry out integrated communication and ensure that it is a natural and organic process. Of the three case studies, Adventure Communications and Park University feature autonomous work environments, but it may be Defense Inc.’s challenges to autonomy that reveal more insights on this variable.

That Defense Inc. maintains a rigid, top-down structure has already been discussed. However, the implications of its structure spell challenges to organic integration. Communicators at Defense Inc. commonly express frustration with the complexity and rigidity of communication processes at the company, especially the approvals process for communication material. Once drafted, a communication piece will pass through the national headquarters and the international headquarters multiple times, and will undergo several revisions before it is ready for distribution—revisions that, some respondents said, render the piece irrelevant or ineffective. In fact, multiple participants indicated that they had to bend the rules and pass something through without the layers of approvals in order to be effective.

Furthermore, respondents also indicated that cross-functional initiatives are often revised or replaced by corporate directives. In such situations, challenges to autonomy can stifle integration efforts.

Park University, on the other hand, maintains a more autonomous integrated communication structure. Though communication departments in the schools and units throughout campus operate as university entities, they are given the autonomy to build communication initiatives and platforms according to their departmental and stakeholder needs. In these efforts, departments demonstrate greater levels of integrated communication than does the university, on a whole. And, autonomy may contribute to departments' higher levels of collaboration. In fact, one of the concerns expressed by participants was the potential loss to autonomy that a university-wide integrated structure might entail.

*Innovation.* Beyond supporting an organizational culture that values collaboration and teamwork, it is also apparent that an innovation cultural value or mindset may be a contributing factor to organic integration. Whereas respondents in each of the three cases indicated that their organization encourages innovation, only one—Adventure Communications—demonstrates a dedication to innovation in the way projects are managed.

One network head of communication said that she likes to mix and match team members to projects, to keep things “fresh” and ensure that no one person spends too much time on one initiative. This approach represents a dedication to innovation, which may be characteristic to organic integration.



### Implications for Practice

Practical implications of these research findings follow the above-mentioned theoretical insights on organic integration. In demonstrating that integration operates as a naturally-occurring process based on self-initiative and interpersonal relationships, companies that hope to develop integrated communication should do so based on increasing the access and recognition of interdependence among company personnel. Company initiatives should emphasize interaction, brainstorming, and collaboration, and training meetings should demonstrate a priority on

Companies should also be cautious in mandating integrated efforts. That is, setting up processes which require approvals or cross-functional involvement may hinder integration efforts, as was illustrated at Defense Inc. Rather, company efforts should focus on instilling the values of collaboration, and company communicators should highlight successful collaborative efforts. Adventure Communications does this by showcasing successful projects on their internal web portal.

Finally, the public relations function may be in the best position to lead the integration effort. With emphases on strategic relationship management and a holistic understanding of the gamut of stakeholders that stand to influence a company, public relations practitioners may be the most appropriate to lead integrated communication. In this way, practitioners should focus on facilitating integration, by sharing information across departments and through internal knowledge-sharing and increasing the awareness of interdependence between personnel across the company.

### *Strengths and Limitations*

In spite of these conclusions, this research is admittedly exploratory, as it represents some of the first research-based conceptualizations of public relations in an integrated setting. Several confounding variables may have influenced the results of this research, not the least of which is the type of organizations I studied.

Media companies, the defense industry, and education may represent what Kotler and Mindak (2000) refer to as class two enterprises—they feature a formal public relations function, but a weak marketing function. It is possible that in organizations with a strong marketing function, but a weak public relations function, the results may be different, and public relations may fulfill marketing support roles.

Another related limitation was the availability of companies willing to participate in a comprehensive qualitative case study. It was evident that economic downturn may have influenced willingness to participate. In fact, two companies with which I originally started research, dropped out before I could complete data collection. With greater access to a broader array of companies, the results could have been different.

At the same time, however, company type and availability may not be valid limitations for this study. Inasmuch as this study was qualitative, the purpose was to introduce possible conceptualizations of public relations in an integrated context. Within this framework, the notions of public relations as a strategic relationship management function in organizations with advanced levels of integration represents a possibility in professional practice, and the purpose of this research is to raise that

possibility. Future research should assess the extent to which this model of public relations is consistent across companies with high levels of integration.

One limitation for this study that may not be immune to that rationale, however, is the nature of the study and the participants involved in the study. This study was recognizably designed to assess integrated communication and relationship management at the organizations that participated. Prior to beginning the study, organizations requested, and were given, an executive summary of my study, which outlined the perspectives on integration. It is possible that through this, and other preconceived notions of the values of integrated communication, that interviewees sought to position their company and their own work in the best possible way.

Whereas there is evidence to the contrary—some respondents used interview sessions as opportunities to complain about their company—it is possible that interviewees may have been biased in trying to portray themselves or their company in the best light. On more than one occasion, it was evident that respondents may have been “towing the company line,” and I tried to look beyond platitudes about the company and its processes by asking follow-up questions about interviewees’ own personal experience. I also sought to compensate for these limitations by triangulating my research results against other data sources, including documentation and observation. Where possible, I also included negative and even contradictory or disconfirming responses in the results section.

Time and access also represented limitations in this study. As is the case with many research studies, there may never be enough time to collect and synthesize all the data one would like. In particular for this study, nine to eleven interviews in each

organization, several pages of documentation, and a total of 20 hours of observation may not be enough time to fully comprehend all of the processes behind integration at an organization. In my own professional experience, I was commonly counseled to spend years learning my role and understanding the inter-workings of the organizations for which I worked. To compensate for this limitation, I tried to immerse myself in the context and data of each case, through interviews, document analysis, and observations.

Though I was granted access to interviews and some company meetings and documents, access was still limited compared to the level of access I requested. I constantly requested company presentations, memos, and documents, as well as access to company meetings, strategy sessions, and even intranet portals. On several occasions, I volunteered my services as a marketing communications and public relations professional as an unpaid intern and even promised confidentiality, indicating that I would pass anything I report on through company executives. However, many of my requests were denied, and I was grateful to receive the access to company meetings that I was granted.

Finally, an underlying limitation of this study is my own bias. This project was designed to evaluate public relations within varying levels of integrated communication, and my purpose was to ascertain whether integrated communication helps, rather than hinders, public relations roles in integration. As a graduate student in public relations, I may be biased toward public relations—though in my professional experience, I worked in marketing. On both accounts, it is possible that my biases may have led to the conclusion I was expecting, that integrated

communication benefits public relations, and that public relations is the more appropriate function to lead the integration effort. That being said, my pre-conceptions going into this research were more than merely based on my own opinion; I was evaluating public relations practice against concepts proposed in the literature, which were also similar to my own opinions.

I sought to use Kvale's (1995) three levels of validity to compensate for my own biases. First, to ensure craftsmanship validity, I tested my research instrument through preliminary interviews with communication professionals, requesting feedback and making adjustments where necessary. Second, to ensure communicative validity, I sought to establish knowledge claims through discourse, by following-up with interviewees in situations in which insights appeared unclear and bringing up issues from previous interviews in further interviews. Finally, to ensure pragmatic validity, I have written the research results in a way that is applicable for practitioners, emphasizing understandings that may lead to an improvement in practice.

### *Future Research Directions*

This study demonstrates that integration facilitates public relations roles in integration, and that an understanding of public relations in an integrated context involves public relations as a relationship management function. Future research should address the three main hypotheses that this research yields, and which have been discussed in this concluding section:

1. Higher levels of integration lead to more recognition of interdependence

2. Higher levels of integration lead to higher levels of strategic relationship management for public relations
3. Higher levels of integration lead to more emphasis on two-way symmetrical relationship strategies.

Furthermore, there is a need to further conceptualize the notion of organic integrated communication. In this concluding section, I have explained integration in terms of self-initiative, interdependence, and relationship management, and have outlined several characteristics of organic integration. Future studies should assess the transferability of these principles to other situations, especially those in companies in which public relations is not the dominant communication function.

Additionally, much of the public relations literature on relationship management appears to be designed to assess the quality of a relationship between an organization and its public. The purpose of this study was to assess relationship strategy against differing levels of integrated communication. Future studies should focus on the quality of organization-public relationships based on an organization's level of integrated communication, by expanding data collection to a broad selection of stakeholders, both internally and externally

Finally, this study fulfills Schultz's (2005) call for integrated communication studies that "focus on identifying the interactions that [integration] creates" (p. 7). Rather than explicate external relationship-building, through relationship marketing concepts of brand management and customer response, this study shows that internal relationships are perhaps more relevant interactions created through integration. As discussed earlier, this opens up the need to consider integration from a postmodern

perspective. In particular, the notion that integration happens organically or naturally, calls for a postmodern approach to understanding integrated communication, and future research should address this phenomenon.

### *Concluding Statement*

Overall, this study has demonstrated that integrated communication facilitates public relations roles in strategic relationship management. In this way, this research confirms claims that public relations is in the strongest position to lead the integration process because of its emphasis on strategic relationship management (Kitchen, et al., 2007; Grunig, et al., 2002; Caywood, 1997).

Hallahan (2007) called for research that provides a better definition of integrated communication, and that conceptualizes communication and department structures. This study has illustrated that integrated communication is a relationship concept, and that it operates organically, based on natural coordination, internal relationships and cross-functional collaboration, hopefully meeting both of Hallahan's research needs.

# Appendices

## Appendix A

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Initials \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### **CONSENT FORM**

<b>Project Title</b>	<b><i>PR, Integrated Communication, and Relationships</i></b>
<b>Why is this research being done?</b>	<p><i>This is a research project being conducted by Dr. Elizabeth L. Toth and Brian G. Smith at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a communications professional at your organization involved with integrated communication. The purpose of this research project is to understand your organization's communications goals, processes, and relationship strategies.</i></p>
<b>What will I be asked to do?</b>	<p><i>You will be asked to participate in an interview (either in person or over the phone) lasting between 60 to 90 minutes; we will conduct the interview by phone if this is what you prefer. The interview involves open-ended questions about your communications activities, goals, and processes, as well as your perspectives and concerns. For example, you may be asked, "What are your organization's public relations and marketing roles?" or "How does your organization integrate its communications?" Your name and organization (including companies with which you interact) will remain confidential.</i></p> <p><i>For the sake of accuracy and completeness, we will ask permission to make an audio tape of the interview, but you can, of course, decline permission. The principle investigator and student investigator will be the only people who have access to the responses.</i></p> <p>____ <i>I agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.</i></p> <p>____ <i>I do not agree to be audio taped during my participation in this study.</i></p>
<b>What about confidentiality?</b>	<p><i>We will do our best to keep your name, personal information, and the companies you discuss confidential. To help protect your confidentiality, following the interview, the recordings and/or e-mail responses will remain in the locked offices of the researchers, who will be the only people who have access to them. All data will be destroyed (i.e., shredded or erased) when their use is no longer needed but not before a minimum of five years after data collection. If we write a report or article about this research project, your name, identity, and companies with which you've interacted will be</i></p>



	<p><i>protected to the maximum extent possible.</i></p> <p><i>Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
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<b>Project Title</b>	<b><i>PR, Integrated Communication, and Relationships</i></b>	
<b>What are the risks of this research?</b>	<i>Because your interview may be audio-taped, this project presents some risk to you as your responses can be associated with you. Nevertheless, in all cases, your name, identity and affiliations will remain confidential. Your participation is voluntary and you can decline to answer specific questions or end your participation at any time without penalty.</i>	
<b>What are the benefits of this research?</b>	<i>This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may improve the ways your organization conducts its communications activities, and may help communications practitioners improve their strategies and skills. We hope that in the future, practitioners might benefit from this study through improved understanding of integrated communication and relationship strategies revealed in this research. Furthermore, your organization will receive a complementary analysis of its communications structure, strategies, and activities, thanks to your participation and others in this research project. At your request, the researcher will provide you with a copy of that report.</i>	
<b>Do I have to be in this research? May I stop participating at any time?</b>	<i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i>	
<b>What if I have questions?</b>	<p><i>This research is being conducted by Elizabeth Toth and Brian Smith, of the Communication Department at the University of Maryland, College Park. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact Elizabeth Toth at: 301-405-8077 or <a href="mailto:eltoth@umd.edu">eltoth@umd.edu</a>.</i></p> <p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research subject or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i>  <b>Institutional Review Board Office, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, 20742;</b>  <b>(e-mail) <a href="mailto:irb@deans.umd.edu">irb@deans.umd.edu</a>; (telephone) 301-405-0678</b>  <i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
<b>Statement of Age of Subject and Consent</b>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that:</i>  <i>you are at least 18 years of age;;</i>  <i>the research has been explained to you;</i>  <i>your questions have been fully answered; and</i>  <i>you freely and voluntarily choose to participate in this research project.</i></p>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b>	

	<b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	

Appendix B

Subject: Research Inquiry from UMD Ph.D. student

I am a doctoral student at the University of Maryland, planning to conduct research on how various communication functions work together to achieve organizational goals.

I am writing to inquire about the possibility of conducting an analysis of [COMPANY NAME]'s communication functions.

My doctoral dissertation will explore integrated communication and relationship management, and I would like to talk to you about [COMPANY NAME]'s communication process.

My research is meant to build theory. I will not be revealing [COMPANY NAME]'s competitive information or any confidential activities. I will guarantee confidentiality throughout the research process.

In return for your time, I will provide [COMPANY NAME] with an analysis of your organizational structure that might help contribute to the understanding of your strengths and where improvements might be made. And of course, your help in this endeavor will contribute greatly to the growing knowledge base in public relations.

May I have an opportunity to speak with you briefly about my research project at your convenience?

If you would like to contact my adviser regarding this request, please contact Dr. Elizabeth Toth either by email ([eltoth@umd.edu](mailto:eltoth@umd.edu)) or by phone (301-405-8077).

Thank you for your reply. I am also happy to answer any further questions by email.

Brian G. Smith  
 Department of Communication  
 University of Maryland  
 (c) 801-420-8891  
 bgsmith@umd.edu

## Executive Summary of Dissertation Research

Brian G. Smith  
University of Maryland  
801-420-8891  
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### *Overview*

Integrated communication has been a hot topic in business lately. Organizations across industries are now coordinating communications efforts from marketing to public affairs and human resources to present a unified message to the audiences that matter most.

Through integration, organizations create and communicate a central message across a diverse set of audiences and constituencies. For example, an organization may create a central brand message, and that message will be used to build commitment with the organization's various audiences including consumers and customers, employees, and investors.

Communication integration often leads to the coordination of communication departments that have traditionally been separate. For example, public affairs and corporate communications departments may now work in tandem with marketing, advertising, and even sales departments, crossing traditional organizational lines and dismantling company "silos".

This coordination of departments raises questions about the roles of public affairs, media relations, and corporate communications, which have traditionally differed from the goals and process of marketing, advertising and selling. In particular, research has suggested that the most excellent organizations use public affairs and corporate communications departments separately from other communications functions, like marketing and advertising, leaving corporate communications to focus on corporate relationship building with constituencies like investors, government regulators, employees, and the media, while marketing and advertising focuses on consumers and customers. Integration has even been considered "a threat" by some of the leading scholars in public relations, and the trend to integrate communications has led to a major debate on the future of public relations, public affairs and corporate communications, and the structure of communications at organizations.

In response to this growing debate, scholars have called for research addressing how public affairs and corporate communications departments work in tandem with marketing and advertising departments. In particular, there is a need to see how

corporate communications departments and practitioners seek to fulfill their role in communicating with and building relationships with investors and other traditional audiences, while coordinating their efforts with marketing and advertising departments.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this project is to fulfill this research need to explore the coordination of communications functions at organizations. This research will investigate how various communications functions work together to achieve organizational goals. Topics this research will cover are the coordination of communications functions, messages, and roles, and company efforts in relationship management.

### *Research Outline / Method*

To fulfill this project, I will be conducting case study research, and the research report will include blind case studies of organizations. All individual and corporate identities will be kept confidential, and interview responses will not be linked in any way to the organization or individuals who participate in this research.

In particular, this research will involve interviews with communications practitioners and executives at your organization. Interviews will last about an hour and will be conducted at the convenience of the individuals who participate in the research. In other words, interviews can be conducted over the phone or in person, whichever is most convenient. Once again, the identities of interviewees will be kept confidential.

Interviewees will be asked questions about communication goals, as well as their efforts to fulfill with these goals. A few examples of the questionnaire include, “What do you do in your position?” “What are your main goals?” and “What audiences do you tend to work with?”

### *Compensation*

Though I do not have research funds to pay for your participation in this research, I am offering to provide a comprehensive analysis of the organization’s communication structure and processes in return for participation. This analysis will be research-based and include some of the latest learnings from the fields of communications and marketing.

### *About the Researcher*

My name is Brian Smith, and I am a doctoral candidate in Communication at the University of Maryland. Prior to beginning my doctoral studies, I worked in marketing and communications, including positions in brand management, research management, and editorial and publication management. I welcome all inquiries about this research. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me via email ([bgsmith@umd.edu](mailto:bgsmith@umd.edu)) or on my cell (801-420-8891).

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

Hi, my name is Brian Smith, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Maryland conducting research for my dissertation on the coordination of communications at organizations. I'd like to thank you for participating in this research. Not only will it be highly valuable for my research and further academic study of public relations, and through the free analysis as a result of this, you may be in a position to improve your organization but it may also help improve the ways your organization conducts its communications.

This interview will last 45 - 75 minutes, and, with your permission, I'd like to record this interview so I can accurately represent your responses. Your responses and your identity will be kept confidential. Anything you say will be kept anonymous and will not be linked to you or to your organization.

In this interview, we will discuss your organization, its communication processes, and your role in those processes.

**First, I'd like to know a little bit about you.**

- 1. What is your position, and what are your responsibilities?**
- 2. How long have you been in that position?**
- 3. How did you get into your line of work?**
- 4. What do you like most about what you do? What do you like least?**

**Now, I'd like to know about your organization...Tell me a little bit about communication at your organization...**

- a. What do you do for communications?*
- 5. How does the organization define the role of communications?*
- 6. In your opinion, what are the purposes of communications at your organization? What are your goals and objectives*
  - a. How do you fulfill those objectives?*
  - b. What functions do you consider part of your organization's communications?*
- 7. Please describe the approach your organization takes in conducting communications programs or campaigns?*
- 8. What elements are a part of your communications processes? What about...*
  - Environmental analysis?
  - Setting formal objectives?
  - Strategy-development?
  - Tactical planning?
  - Evaluation?
  - Continual refinement?
- *Tell me about your communication structure at your organization.*
- *If you aren't directly overseeing communications within your organization, what is the title of the person who does?*
- *What department(s) does that person oversee along with Comms?*
- *How many layers exist between that person and the CEO?*

- Which department is in charge?

*Thank you for your participation so far. During this interview, I'd like to talk about your communications strategy, and how you target and build relationships with audiences who are affected by the organization, or who affect the organization. Audiences could include employees, distributors and suppliers, financial stakeholders and investors, consumers, the media, and others.*

**1. In your communications efforts, what audiences do you tend to work with?**

- a. Which audiences do you consider most important for your company's success? For your own success in your position? Which audiences are your top priorities?
2. What are your goals for these audiences?
3. How do you fulfill these goals?
4. What processes or programs do you use to fulfill your goals for these audiences?
5. Thinking about these audiences, I'd like to discuss how you build relationships with these groups. But first I'd like to know what you think about the terms "relationship" and "relationship-building".
  - a. In your capacity, what do you think about the term "relationship-building"? What does it mean?
  - b. In your opinion, what is a relationship? What constitutes a relationship?
  - c. In your experience at the organization, what does the organization consider a relationship?

*In this interview, I'd like to discuss relationship-building as the efforts practitioners take to ensure that both parties benefit from a relationship. This could include build trust, commitment, involvement and satisfaction with the audiences that both affect the organization and are affected by the organization. Relationships happen in a variety of ways, but the relationships I'm most interested in are the ones that occur through the marketing communications of an organization, which can include advertising, pr, customer service and marketing.*

**6. Thinking about the audiences you work with, how do you seek to build relationships with them?**

7. What benefits do you offer them? What benefits do they offer you?
- 8. What are your goals in building relationships with publics?**
9. What are your audiences' needs regarding your organization? How do you ensure that your audiences' needs are met?
  - a. How do you ensure that your audiences are satisfied with their relationship with your organization?
  - b. Can you offer an example?

**10. What strategies do you use to build relationships?**

- a. How do you initiate relationships with audiences over which you have responsibility? How do you get groups and individuals interested in a relationship? What do you do to get them interested?
  - b. In instances in which you work with groups that already have relationships with the organization, how do you maintain these relationships?
  - c. What about relationships which may not be proactive between the organization and groups (i.e. activists, community members), are there any differences in how you build relationships with these individuals?
11. How do you seek to build trust with these groups?
12. How do you seek to engender commitment from these groups?
13. How do you seek to involve these audiences with organization activities and decision-making?
- i. How are they a part of the decision-making process?
  - ii. How do you gather these audiences' perceptions and what role do they play in the decision-making process?

Now, thinking more broadly about your organization's relationship efforts...

- b. How does your organization pursue relationships with:
  - i. Industry Opinion leaders and Scholars
  - ii. Employees
  - iii. Interest Groups
  - iv. Distributors and suppliers
  - v. Government officials
  - vi. Community members
  - vii. Financial stakeholders
  - viii. Investors
  - ix. Media
  - x. Customers
  - xi. How would you characterize your organization's relationships with these groups? What types of relationships do you have with each group?
  - xii. How do you evaluate relationships with audiences? How does your organization evaluate relationships?

*Thanks. So far we have talked about communication and building relationships with the various audiences that influence organizational decisions, and that are influenced by those decisions. Some organizations are trying to make their communications and relationships with audiences more efficient by coordinating and unifying their communications activities. This has often been referred to as Integrated Marketing Communications. This integration, also known as IMC, has been a popular subject in the field, and I would now like talk about your organization's approach to integrating communications....*

- **Thinking about your organization's communications strategies, what does integrated communication mean to you? What does it mean to your organization?**



- **For the purposes of this discussion, let me define integrated communication as the coordination of communications activities including marketing, public relations, advertising, and even human resources and customer service. This includes coordinating messages and communications channels, evaluating communications functions, and coordinating communications for the gamut of audiences and publics with which affect or are affected by your organization. For example, how you communicate with employees, customers, shareholders, and other groups.**
- **How does your organization seek to integrate communications?**
  - To what extent do they seek to integrate communications?
  - Tell me a little bit about integration at your organization? Does your organization integrate or coordinate communications functions and activities? How?
- **Which functions are integrated? How are they integrated?**
  - Does one function get more share of the investment than the other? If so, which one? What do you think about that?
- What do you think about your organizations integration efforts? How successful are these efforts?
- What things, if any, do you think should be changed?
- What factors do you think your organization takes into consideration when integrating communications functions?
- Can you give me an example of an integrated communication campaign you have conducted?
  - How was the campaign developed? Was research conducted?
  - What were the main messages developed, and how were the messaging plans set?
  - Which communication vehicles are preferred by the target audiences (i.e. public relations or advertising, etc.)?
  - Who led the project team?
  - How was it implemented?
  - How do you evaluate the campaign?

*Earlier, we talked about the audiences and publics you communicate with in your position. I'd like to talk more about these audiences, and, in particular, in the context of integration. For example, how you and your organization target specific publics and coordinate the communications for a unified message with these audiences.*

**14. In your efforts to integrate communications, how do you coordinate communications for your varying audiences?**

- a. How do you prioritize these audiences in your communications efforts?
  - b. How do you target your audiences? How do you customize communications for your various audiences?
15. How do you decide which department will be in charge of each of your target audience groups?

- Which groups are you responsible for? How do you decide which groups you are responsible for?
- How do you evaluate audiences you use? How do you decide which are most important?

*Now I'd like to talk about the channels, media, and communication platforms and outlets your organization uses.*

- **What types of communications channels and platforms do you use (for example, newspaper, radio, the Internet and TV)?**
  - How often do you use each of these channels?
  - Which channels do you consider most important?
  - What about digital media?
  - What about broadcast media (radio and television)?
  - What about print media?
  - Are there any other types of channels I missed?
- **How do you use these media channels to build relationships with the groups over which you have responsibility in your position?**
- How do you evaluate each media channel? How do you prioritize each media channel?
- How do you coordinate your communications messages across communications channels? How important is it to coordinate your communications across channels?
- I'd specifically like to know about your use of new media and communication technology
  - What types of communication technology do you use in your communications efforts?
    - (PROBE for each not mentioned) How do you use the following communication channels in your internal and external communication efforts:
    - Email?
    - Your corporate website?
    - Your organization's intranet?
    - Online social networks (i.e. facebook, myspace, linkedIn etc.)?
    - Other websites?
    - Online advertising (i.e. banner ads, promotions)?
    - YouTube or viral videos?
    - Twitter?
    - Search-engine optimization
    - Corporate/brand blogs
    - On-line price promotions/special offers

*Let's talk specifically about integrating your organization's messages and content ...*

- **What types of messages does your organization distribute?**
  - How about external communications messages?
  - What about internal communications messages?

- What types of messages does your organization seek to send with marketing? How are these messages developed and communicated?
  - What processes are used to develop the messages?
- What types of messages does your organization seek to send via public relations? (If they are the same as marketing) Are there any situations where PR, advertising, or direct marketing are seen as the primary driver of communication? What situations apply best to PR?
- What other functions at your organization distribute company messages? What types of messages do they convey?
- **Which messages do you think are most important in building relationships with the audiences over which you have responsibility in your position?**
- **How does your organization integrate these communications messages? In your opinion, how well do you feel these messages are integrated?**
- Is there a central theme or main message for your communications?
  - If so, what is that theme?
  - How is this theme or themes adjusted for your audiences or communications channels?
- How is your message content determined and produced? What research is used to determine messages? Who makes the decision on message content? Who determines message content at your organization?
- How do you evaluate message content?
- To what degree are marketing's messages integrated with other message-delivering departments?
- **IF NEEDED FOR SPECIFICITY:** I am now going to ask you questions about the role each of your organization's departments play in determining and sending message content...
  - What role does the Marketing department play in determining and sending messages to all publics?
    - Who is the primary decision-maker in this department or function?
    - What role does he or she play in determining message content?
  - What role does the Public Relations or Corporate Communications department play in determining and sending messages to all publics?
    - Who is the primary decision-maker in this department or function?
    - What role does he or she play in determining message content?
  - What role does the Human Resources department play in determining and sending messages to all publics?

- Who is the primary decision-maker in this department or function?
- What role does he or she play in determining message content?
- What role does the Customer Service department play in determining and sending messages to all publics?
  - Who is the primary decision-maker in this department or function?
  - What role does he or she play in determining message content?
- What role does the Sales department play in determining and sending messages to all publics?
  - Who is the primary decision-maker in this department or function?
  - What role does he or she play in determining message content?
  - What about this department's staff, what role do they play with regards to message content?
- [Add any other Departments the respondent discusses]

*Now I'd like to know about how you evaluate your various communications. By evaluation, I am referring to the ways in which you measure the effectiveness of your communications.*

- **How do you evaluate your communications efforts? (i.e. awareness, attitudes, behavior, sales and, in the case of PR, media coverage)**
  - How do you evaluate your communications departments?
  - How do you evaluate your communications messages?
  - Do you evaluate your departments and messages separately, or do you evaluate them together? Why?
  - What variables do you consider when evaluating communications efforts? How do you measure the results?
  - What processes do you use to evaluate or measure your communications efforts?
  - Benchmark performance within industry? Among leading companies?

*Now I'd like to discuss your marketing and public relations activities specifically...*

- **How does your organization define marketing communications?**
  - What activities does your organization include under its marketing activities? What are your organization's marketing communications roles and responsibilities?
- What audiences does your marketing communications department target or focus on?
  - How does marketing influence customer/public perceptions?
  - How does marketing seek to build relationships with consumers and other publics?

- **How does your organization define public relations? What are the purposes of public relations?**
  - What activities does your organization consider under public relations? What are your organization's public relations roles?
  - What does your public relations department do?
- **What are your organization's public relations goals?**
- **What publics does your public relations department consider under its responsibilities?**
  - How do your public relations communicate with these publics and what are your organization's goals with them?
- How important is public relations in the integrated communication process?
  - To what degree is it integrated?
- How are marketing and public relations similar? How are marketing and public relations different at your organization?

Thank you very much for your participation today. Your insights will be very valuable for my dissertation.

**Is there anything about your organization's communications processes that we haven't discussed but that you would like to discuss?**

I will follow up with a "thank-you" email with my contact information. Should any additional insights come to mind, please feel free to contact me. If I have any further questions, may I contact you again?

Thank you again.

## Appendix D

### Category / Coding Sheet

<b>RQ 1</b>										
IC-DEF:	Coord.	Control	Max Imp	Cross-Function al Teams	IC Camp	IC Org	Branding	To fill in comm. gaps	Part of big picture	Corporate model
IC-LEV:	Tactical/Comms Tools/	Org Int/ Funct.	Top-Down	Bottom-Up	Awareness	Image/Content Int	Stakeholder Int/Consumer Int	Rel MGMT	Informal / as needed	Situation based on importance
	Start with unifying concept	Organic/ Natural	Univ. vs. Dept.	Autonomy						
IC: CPT	Effectiveness/Efficiency	Mess. Imp/ Res./ Consis	Synergy	Branding, Brand Ambassador	Comp Adv	Relationships	Reputation	Int. Involvement, Align, Corp Cit	Prioritize, Impact	For ineffective Comms
	Identity	Everyone Sell	Behavior	Align w/ Stkholder needs						
IC-IMP	Stakeholder Int	Results/outtakes/outcomes	Channel Int/TouchPoint Int/Media outlet Coord	Message Int	Info Control	Challenges	Spontaneous, Organic	Autonomy vs. integrate	Only for major initiatives	For ineffective Comms, effective comms independent.
	Leader-driven	Structure	Top-Down Dictated	Top-Down: Guide, Bottom-up Involve	Bottom-up Dictated					
<b>RQ 2</b>										
PR-MPR	Promotion	Prod Supp / MKT Supp	Media Rel Pub/ Unpd	Adv	MGMT	Brand	IC-specific Roles	Journalist-Find story		
PR-CPR	Relationship	Sponsorship / Charity/ fundraising	Comm Rel/ Outreach	Stakeholder Rel	Exec Promot	Int Rel	Reputation	Corp Comm	Env. Scan	Mediator, Partnership, relationships
PR-OTH (Other Roles)	Intern. Coord./ Lead Int; Ambassador	CSR Watchdog	Info Provider	Unassigned vs. Assigned	MGMT Function : Dypmnt	public relations vs. Mktg Diff	Service?	Advisor/ Comm Council	Educate	Comm. ambssdr
public relations Styles	Proactive/unassigned	Reactive	Tactics	Mgmt						
MKT-RL	Sales/Sales Promotion	Publicity/Advertising	Cust-Sat	MGMT advisor / Comp Adv / Consumer Trends/	Biz-Dev/Mkt Analysis /Biz Strat/ Biz Growth	Branding / Brand Relationships	Direct Mktg	Rel Mgmt / Brand Relationships	Positioning	Touch point mgmt
	Lead Intgrtr									
PR-AUD	Media	Community Stakeholders	Investors	Gov.	Partners	Students	Donors			
MKT-AUD	Customers		Students							
<b>RQ 3</b>										
REL-	Expectatio	Res Exch	Mut Ben	Negative	Soc. Cap	Mut	Collaborat	Interpers	1-way,	

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