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Guidelines for Measuring Relationships in Public Relations

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Published by the Institute for Public Relations
November 1999

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FOREWORD

This is the third in a series of booklets that have been published by the Institute for Public Relations to give guidelines and suggestions on how best to measure public relations effectiveness.

In 1997, the Institute published a 24-page booklet, *"Guidelines and Standards for Measuring and Evaluating PR Effectiveness,"* as a first attempt to begin to find a uniform "ruler" that everyone in the public relations industry might use when it comes to measuring specific PR programs, activities, and events.

Early in 1999, following the formation by the Institute of a special U.S. Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation, a second booklet was published, entitled: *"Guidelines For Setting Measurable PR Objectives."* That particular booklet offered tips, along with selected examples, of how those in the industry might begin to set *measurable* objectives for their various PR programs and activities.

Now, we move into a brand new area, with the publication of this latest guidebook. Since a growing number of PR practitioners see their prime role to be that of *building effective relationships with various constituencies*, members of the IPR Commission on PR Measurement and Evaluation felt it important to prepare and issue a set of guidelines for beginning to measure relationships in public relations.

We believe that all three of these guidebooks will prove useful to you as working documents you can rely on when it comes to assessing the overall value of what it is you are seeking to accomplish through your public relations programs and activities.

Jack Felton
President and CEO
Institute for Public Relations

OVERVIEW

Why is it important to measure *relationships* in public relations?

Basically, because a growing number of public relations practitioners and scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of public relations is to build and then enhance on-going or long-term relationships with an organization's key constituencies.

Tools and techniques for measuring and evaluating the relatively **short-term** *outputs* and *outcomes* of specific public relations programs, events and campaigns have existed for quite a number of years. But up until now, measuring the success or failure of **long-term** *relationships* stemming, in part from public relations efforts, have not existed.

Outputs are usually the immediate results of a particular PR program or activity. More often than not, they represent what is readily apparent to the eye. They measure how well an organization presents itself to others, the amount of attention or exposure that the organization receives. *Outcomes* measure whether target audience groups actually *received* the messages directed at them … paid *attention* to them … *understood* the messages … and *retained* those messages in any shape or form. They also measure whether the communications materials and messages that were disseminated have resulted in any *opinion*, *attitude* and/or *behavior* changes on the part of those targeted publics to whom the messages were directed.

As important as it can be for an organization to measure PR *outputs* and *outcomes*, it is even more important for an organization to measure *relationships*. This is because for most organizations measuring *outputs* and *outcomes* can only give information about the effectiveness of a *particular or specific PR program or event that has been undertaken.*

In order to answer the much broader question -- "*How can PR practitioners begin to pinpoint and document for senior management the overall value of public relations to the organization as a whole?*" -- different tools and techniques are needed.

During the past few years, a number of academicians have been seeking ways of more effectively determining the overall *value* of PR, not only to organizations in particular, but also to society in general. Two academicians who have played a leading role in this area have been Dr. Linda Childers Hon of the University of Florida and Dr. James E. Grunig of the University of Maryland.

Their efforts to date in seeking to develop a reliable *PR Relationship Measurement Scale* are documented in the pages that follow.

They have found through their research that the outcomes of an organization's longer-term *relationships* with key constituencies can best be measured by focusing on six very precise elements or components of the relationships that exist. These are:

Control Mutuality -- The degree to which parties agree on who has the rightful power to influence one another. Although some imbalance is natural, stable relationships require that organizations and publics each have some control over the other.

Trust -- One party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party. There are three dimensions to trust: *integrity:* the belief that an organization is fair and just … *dependability:* the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do … and, *competence:* the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do.

Satisfaction -- The extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. A satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs.

Commitment -- The extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions of commitment are *continuance* commitment, which refers to a certain line of action, and *affective* commitment, which is an emotional orientation.

Exchange Relationship -- In an exchange relationship, one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future.

Communal Relationship -- In a communal relationship, both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other -- even when they get nothing in return. For most public relations activities, developing communal relationships with key constituencies is much more important to achieve than would be developing exchange relationships.

To measure the outcomes of an organization's relationship with key constituencies focusing on these six elements, Hon and Grunig suggest administering a questionnaire form that includes a series of agree/disagree statements pertaining to the relationship. Respondents are asked to use a 1-to-9 scale to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree that each item listed describes their relationship with that particular organization.

A complete list of the statements appears starting on Page 28. Here is a shortened list of some of the items that have been used by the academicians that have been found to be valid measures of relationship outcomes:

Control Mutuality

1. This organization and people like me are attentive to what each other say.
2. This organization believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.
3. In dealing with people like me, this organization has a tendency to throw its weight around. *(Reversed)*
4. This organization really listens to what people like me have to say.
5. The management of this organization gives people like me enough say in the decision-making process.

Trust

1. This organization treats people like me fairly and justly.
2. Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.
3. This organization can be relied on to keep its promises.
4. I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.
5. I feel very confident about this organization's skills.
6. This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.

Commitment

1. I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.
2. I can see that this organization wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.
3. There is a long-lasting bond between this organization and people like me.
4. Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with this organization more.
5. I would rather work together with this organization than not.

Satisfaction

1. I am happy with this organization.
2. Both the organization and people like me benefit from the relationship.
3. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with this organization.
4. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with people like me.
5. Most people enjoy dealing with this organization.

Exchange Relationships

1. Whenever this organization gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.
2. Even though people like me have had a relationship with this organization for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor.
3. This organization will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.
4. This organization takes care of people who are likely to reward the organization.

Communal Relationships

1. This organization does not especially enjoy giving others aid. *(Reversed)*
2. This organization is very concerned about the welfare of people like me.
3. I feel that this organization takes advantage of people who are vulnerable. *(Reversed)*
4. I think that this organization succeeds by stepping on other people. *(Reversed)*
5. This organization helps people like me without expecting anything in return.

Once the questionnaire has been filled out, the negative indicators of each concept should be reversed, and the answers to all of the items measuring each relationship outcome should be averaged, so that overall "mean" scores can be calculated.

Testing of the scales shows them to be good measures of perceptions of relationships, strong enough to be used in evaluating relationships.

In addition to using the items to measure perceptions of representatives of key constituent groups toward given organizations, it also could be beneficial to administer the questions to managers of the organizations under study, to obtain their perceptions regarding a relationship with a specific public. When perceptions of relationships are measured from both sides, one can begin to measure gaps in the way management and publics perceive the relationship. Such a gap analysis will suggest strategies for maintaining or repairing relationships.

Dr. Walter K. Lindenmann,
Chair, IPR Commission On
PR Measurement and Evaluation

DETAILED DISCUSSION

Many practitioners and scholars believe that the fundamental goal of public relations is building relationships with an organization's key constituencies. Yet, most public relations evaluation has focused on measuring the outputs and outcomes of public relations programs, not on measuring relationships. From this point forward, this paper discusses what the term relationship means to public relations, how relationships can be maintained with publics, and how public relationships can be measured.

Information comes from professional and academic literature about relationships and public relations. Also included are the results from a survey about public relationships conducted by graduate students in public relations at the University of Maryland under the supervision of Professor James E. Grunig. And, throughout this paper, quotations from public relations practitioners help illustrate main points. These comments come from interviews done by students in a graduate course in public relations taught by Associate Professor Linda Childers Hon at the University of Florida.

Why are successful relationships important to public relations?

For at least 25 years, public relations scholars have asked two fundamental questions: "How do you measure the effects of public relations?" and "How do you show the value of public relations to an organization and to society?" Communication researchers have known how to measure several effects of public relations for many years. Nevertheless, they know how to evaluate the effects of public relations techniques and programs (the first question above) better than they know how to measure the value of public relations to an organization and to society (the second question).

In 1997, The Institute for Public Relations issued a paper summarizing the state of knowledge on the measurement and evaluation of public relations.[1] The report described several ways of measuring both *processes* and *outcomes* of public relations efforts. Measures of processes indicate whether messages are being sent, placed, or attended to--such as counts of press releases or publications issued, media placement and monitoring, and exposure to or readership of the messages. By themselves, however, process indicators tell us little about the effects of public relations unless we can demonstrate that the processes have effects on the outcomes of programs, such as changes in the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of publics--what people think, feel, and do. The first paper on measurement in public relations described the state-of-the art for measuring public relations processes as well as the short-term effects of public relations programs on one or more publics of an organization. This paper picks up where the previous one left off by discussing the long-term effects of public relations programs on organizational effectiveness and by extending the discussion to effects of public relations on management as well as on publics.

[1] Lindenmann, W. K. (1997). *Guidelines and Standards For Measuring and Evaluating PR Effectiveness*, Institute for Public Relations, Gainesville, FL.

Measures of the effects of public relations techniques and programs indicate whether they have achieved their communication objectives, but they fall short of being able to measure the value of PR to an organization or to society. It's possible, for example, that a public relations program could be based on poor strategic thinking and change the cognitions, attitudes, and behavior of a public that has little impact on the organization. Also, if public relations people function as strategic counselors to management, then we also need to measure the effects of public relations on management as well as its effects on publics. Current evaluative measures also tell us mostly about short-term outcomes of public relations programs but little about long-term effects on relationships between organizations and their publics.

This paper focuses most of its attention on relationship outcomes and how to measure them. However, it is important to recognize that organizations do not need relationships with all publics and to recognize that not all public relations strategies, programs, or campaigns are equally effective in building relationships.

Therefore, this paper also reviews two stages of the public relations process that precede relationship outcomes:

1) Environmental scanning to determine the publics with which an organization needs relationships and

2) Public relations processes that are most effective in maintaining relationships with strategic publics.

The Value of Public Relations is in Relationships

In the research project on Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management conducted for the IABC Research Foundation, researchers searched the literature on organizational effectiveness for ideas that could explain the value of public relations.[2]

They believed it was necessary to understand what it means for an organization to be effective before they could explain how public relations makes it more effective. The search of the literature on organizational effectiveness revealed that effective organizations achieve their goals. However, achieving organizational goals is not a complete answer to the question of what makes an organization effective. Not everyone

[2]See Grunig, L. A., Grunig, J. E., & Ehling, W. P. (1992). "What Is An Effective Organization?" in J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence In Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 65-89). Hillsdale, NJ, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

in or around an organization agrees on what goals are important: There is much conflict within the organization and with outside constituencies over the choice of goals. Over the long term, however, the literature showed that effective organizations are able to achieve their goals because they choose goals that are valued both by management and by strategic constituencies both inside and outside the organization. When organizations choose such goals, they minimize efforts of publics to interfere with organizational decisions and maximize support from publics.

Effective organizations choose and achieve appropriate goals because they develop relationships with their constituencies, which public relations practitioners typically call publics. Ineffective organizations cannot achieve their goals, at least in part, because their publics do not support and typically oppose management efforts to achieve what publics consider illegitimate goals.

Public opposition to management goals and decisions frequently results in "issues" and "crises." As a result, the process of developing and maintaining relationships with strategic publics is a crucial component of strategic management, issues management, and crisis management.

The process of incorporating the goals, interests, and concerns of publics into the strategic decision processes of organizations is never easy, of course, because organizations generally encounter multiple publics with multiple goals.

In addition, most management decision-makers believe that they choose goals and make decisions that are best for the organization and that they, rather than publics, know what decisions are best. However, organizations generally make better decisions when they listen to and collaborate with stakeholders before they make final decisions rather than simply trying to persuade them to accept organizational goals after decisions are made.[3]

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[3]Support for the idea that organizations make better decisions when they collaborate with stakeholder publics can be found in the writings of Michael Porter, a specialist on strategic management in the Harvard Business School. Porter's theory of competitive advantage was the first theory of management to demonstrate that firms may gain economic benefits from social pressures and the first to explain the economic value of collaborating with stakeholders. For example, Porter found that multinational corporations with strong competitors in their home country were better able to compete in other countries because of the pressure to excel at home (Porter, M. E. [1994]. "Toward a Dynamic Theory of Strategy," in R. P. Rumelt, D. E. Schendel, & D. J. Teece, [Eds.], *Fundamental Issues In Strategy: A Research Agenda*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press, p. 451). Likewise, he found that government regulation, traditionally seen by corporate managers as an intrusion on their decision-making, can stimulate changes in organizational behavior that provide a competitive advantage. In Porter's words, "standards for product performance, product safety, and environmental impact contribute to creating and upgrading competitive advantage. They pressure firms to improve quality, upgrade technology, and provide features in areas of important customer (and social) concern." (Porter, M. E. [1990]. *The Competitive Advantage of Nations*. London: MacMillan, p. 647). Porter's idea that an organization can gain competitive advantage from successful relationships with competitors and governments can be extended to relationships with other stakeholder publics. For example, a corporation that successfully solves its environmental problems, usually when

As a result, public relations practitioners need special skills to negotiate relationships with management and with multiple publics because maintaining relationships with one public may make it difficult to maintain a relationship with another public with competing goals. And, management may be reluctant to balance the interests of publics with what it perceives to be the interests of the organization.

Public relations makes an organization more effective, therefore, when it identifies the most strategic publics as part of strategic management processes and conducts communication programs to develop and maintain effective long-term relationships between management and those publics.

As a result, we should be able to determine the value of public relations by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics. And, we should be able to extend our ability to evaluate communication programs by measuring the effects of these programs and correlating them with relationship indicators.

What contribution does achieving short-term communication objectives make to the building of long-term relationships?

Thus far in our discussion, we have said that strategic public relations consists of 1) Identifying the most strategic publics with which an organization needs to develop a relationship; 2) Planning, implementing, and evaluating communication programs to build relationships with these publics, and 3) Measuring and evaluating the long-term relationships between the organization and these strategic publics. We also have said that our knowledge of how to evaluate public relations largely is limited to the second stage: We know how to determine the effects of specific communication programs on the cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors of publics in the short-term. There is a link, however, between short- and long-term outcomes of public relations.

The IABC Excellence study provided evidence that there is a correlation between achieving short-term communication effects and maintaining quality long-term relationships.[4] The research team classified public relations departments as excellent when the CEOs of their client organizations assigned a high value to the contribution of the department. The research also showed that these departments practiced strategic

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pressured by environmental activists, will gain an advantage in the resulting positive relationships with stockholders, consumers, employees, government, and communities that have the ability to support or constrain that corporation. Likewise, a government agency that responds well to pressures from its constituents will be more likely to gain support from those publics as it competes for limited public funding.

[4] Dozier, D. M. with Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E. (1995). *Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. See Chapter 16, "Communication excellence makes a difference."

public relations and contributed to the overall management of their organizations. The CEOs said they valued these departments because of their ability to maintain relationships with key stakeholders. The senior communicators in the excellent departments also reported more often than those in less-excellent departments that their programs had "change-of-relationship" effects such as changes in behavior of a public, greater cooperation between the organization and public, and the development of a stable long-term relationship. They also reported more frequent "conflict avoidance" effects, such as avoiding litigation, fewer complaints from publics, and less interference by government.

At the same time, the excellent communicators more often reported that their departments had defined "outcome objectives" for their short-term programs aimed at the media, employees, community, customers, members, government, and investors. They also reported that their departments engaged in all forms of short-term evaluation more than did the less-excellent communicators—especially scientific evaluation but also "media placement" and "seat-of-the-pants" evaluation.

As a result, the Excellence study provided correlational evidence that public relations departments that set objectives and measure the outcomes of their short-term communication programs also believe that they experience greater success in building long-term relationships with publics. The explanation for this relationship is straightforward: Organizations that communicate effectively with publics develop better relationships because management and publics understand one another and because both are less likely to behave in ways that have negative consequences on the interests of the other.

In-depth interviews of the most excellent public relations departments in the Excellence study showed that good communication changes behavior of both management and publics and, therefore, results in good relationships. If public relations managers help management to understand that certain decisions might have adverse consequences on a public, then management might make a different decision and behave in a different way than it might have otherwise. That is a behavioral change by management that should lead to a behavioral change by a public. For example, the public would be more likely to accept a group home in its neighborhood, buy a product that is now more acceptable, or support a downsizing that takes employee interests into account. There also are times when communication helps a public to trust management and to accept a decision that management wanted to make before communication took place.

The case studies for the Excellence study also showed that there are many times when good relationships do not lead to changes in behavior immediately. Sometimes, good relationships keep publics from engaging in negative behaviors such as litigation, strikes, protests, or negative publicity. As a result, we have difficulty measuring a behavior that did not occur because of a good relationship. At other times, there may be a long lag between the development of a good relationship and a behavior—e.g., when good relationships with university students lead to donations of money years later when they have made their fortunes.

As a result, public relations professionals need a way to measure relationships as they develop and are maintained rather than waiting to observe the behaviors that may or may not occur as a result of communication programs

What is the value of good relationships for public relations and organizations?

Research suggests, therefore, that the value of public relations can be determined by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics. And, communication programs can be evaluated by measuring their effects and correlating them with the attributes of a good relationship.

When public relations helps the organization build relationships with key constituencies, it saves the organization money by reducing the costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, boycotts, or lost revenue that result from bad relationships. Public relations also helps the organization make money by cultivating relationships with donors, consumers, shareholders, and legislators who are needed to support organizational goals. Good relationships with employees also increase the likelihood that they will be satisfied with the organization and their jobs, which makes them more likely to support and less likely to interfere with the mission of the organization.

What are the attributes of the most successful relationships for public relations?

Most public relations evaluation has been one-way, designed to measure the effects of communication on publics. Measuring relationships, however, assumes a **two-way** communication process with effects on both parties in the relationship.

The most productive relationships in the long run are those that **benefit both parties in the relationship** rather that those designed to benefit the organization only. Public relations theorists have termed these types of relationships **symmetrical** and **asymmetrical**, respectively.

A director of public affairs for a county government summarized the link between symmetrical public relations and organizational effectiveness:

> "The main strategy is open communication--by being open, in touch with your various publics, determining what their needs and wants are, how they can best be achieved, and how you can all work together toward common goals. And, I think that's key with any group and organization that you bring together. That's what

> you build trust on, that's what you build relationships on, and that's what you accomplish goals with."

Stage 1: With Whom Does an Organization Need Relationships?

The first expertise that a public relations professional needs consists of knowledge and research tools to identify the strategic publics with whom an organization should have relationships. Theories of the strategic management of public relations and of the nature of publics provide this knowledge needed for environmental scanning. Research techniques also are available that public relations professionals can use in environmental scanning.

Why do public relationships form?

Relationships form because one party has **consequences** on another party. Organizations have a public relations problem or opportunity and a reason to develop a public relations program when management decisions have consequences on publics inside or outside of the organization or when the behavior of these publics has consequences on the success with which an organizational decision can be implemented. These relationships can be called strategic (or necessary) relationships.

What are the different forms of relationships important to public relations?

In public relations, the most obvious example of a strategic relationship occurs when an **organization affects a public** or a **public affects an organization**. But, other forms of relationships also occur. Organizations typically face multiple publics with different interests and conflicting goals. These publics often organize into coalitions and organizations enter into similar coalitions. Sometimes, **an organization and a public form a coalition to affect another organization**. Or, **an organization and a public form a coalition to affect another public**. Still another possibility is when **an organization affects another organization-public coalition**. And, finally, **multiple organizations can affect multiple publics**.

What are the characteristics of public relationships?

All of these different forms of relationships suggest that relationships in public relations can be **two-party** or **multiple party**. And, all of these relationships are **situational**. That is, any of these relationships can come and go and change as situations change. Finally, these relationships are **behavioral** because they depend on how the parties in the relationship behave toward one another. Organizations do not have an "image" or "identity" separate from their behavior and the behavior of publics toward them. Instead, organizations have a "reputation" that essentially consists of the organizational behaviors that publics remember.

How can public relations practitioners measure forms of relationships important to their organization?

All of the different forms of relationships listed above can be identified through formal and informal methods of environmental scanning. Scanning refers to any research technique public relations practitioners use to identify the strategic publics their organization needs to build relationships with. This paper does not explore research methods for environmental scanning in depth because it emphasizes characteristics and measurements of relationship outcomes. It is important to recognize, however, that good environmental scanning is a necessary condition for developing good relationships with publics.

Stage 2: Strategies for Maintaining Relationships

Most of the knowledge that public relations professionals possess has something to do with how to communicate with publics in order to maintain a relationship with those publics. Not all strategies for maintaining relationships are equally effective, however. Therefore, we must recognize that not all public relations strategies, techniques, and programs are equally likely to produce relationship outcomes. Public relations researchers have identified and classified the maintenance strategies that research has shown to be most effective. It is beyond the scope of this paper to describe all of this literature. In this section, however, we provide a brief overview of this research to suggest when relationship outcomes are most likely to occur. We also suggest some "process indicators" of these maintenance strategies that professionals can use to get information on when a relationship process is going well.

How are relationships maintained?

Research on **interpersonal relationships**[5] and **conflict resolution**[6] suggests several strategies that organizations can use to maintain relationships with strategic constituencies. All of the concepts from research on **interpersonal relationships** can be applied to maintaining symmetrical public relationships, or those that benefit both the organization and publics:

Access—members of publics or opinion leaders provide access to public relations people. Public relations representatives or senior managers provide representatives of publics similar access to organizational decision-making processes. Either party will answer telephone calls or read letters or e-mail messages from the other. Either party is willing to go to the other when they have complaints or queries, rather than taking negative reactions to third parties.

Positivity—anything the organization or public does to make the relationship more enjoyable for the parties involved.

An application of this strategy is used by an agency CEO:

> "We want to be a resource to every one of our publics in some way, shape, or form. It's in the way we've set up our web site, the way we've set up everything we do as far as our newsletter, as far as the service we provide, as far as the way we interact with all of these publics—whether they're the media or a client or a not-for-profit organization or whatever—we want them to look at [name of agency] as a resource, as something that has value to their organization in some way, shape, or form. So, what we try to do is operate on the principle of providing something that is of self-interest to every one of our clients…so there is a reason why they should care about us."

Openness--of thoughts and feelings among parties involved.

An associate vice president of university relations at a public university provided an example:

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[5]Grunig, J. E., & Huang, Y. H. (2000). "From Organizational Effectiveness to Relationship Indicators: Antecedents of Relationships, Public Relations Strategies, and Relationship Outcomes." In John A. Ledingham and Steve D. Bruning (Eds.), *Public Relations As Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations* (pp. 23-53). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

[6] Plowman, K.D. (1995). *Congruence Between Public Relations and Conflict Resolution: Negotiating in the Organization*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. University of Maryland, College Park.

> "Much of what public relations in a public university is about is providing disclosure—saying, 'Here is what we are doing with your money. Here is what's going on. This is a public institution. Here's what we do.'"

Assurances--attempts by parties in the relationship to assure the other parties that they and their concerns are legitimate. This strategy also might involve attempts by the parties in the relationship to demonstrate they are committed to maintaining the relationship.

A director of external relations for a university agricultural extension office explained how his organization demonstrates to its publics that their needs are legitimate:

> "The whole land grant system is based on the needs of people. We're not a bunch of bureaucrats or what some folks would call ivory-tower, pointy-headed professors who are sitting in [name of city] and handing down things that we think are important to people. Our programs are developed truly along the needs of people….That's the relationship. People tell us what they need…and we try to deliver that in the form that they want."

Networking--organizations' building networks or coalitions with the same groups that their publics do, such as environmentalists, unions, or community groups.

A public relations director at a mid-sized agency discussed an example of this strategy used with one of her firm's accounts, a project to increase recycling efforts:

> "We tapped into a group that was just emerging in East Boston. It's the Community Enhancement Coalition. They're really directed at making things better in the community. They have an anti-litter campaign that they're going to roll out in the spring. So, it was nice to tap into people who are ready activists."

Sharing of tasks--organizations' and publics' sharing in solving joint or separate problems. Examples of such tasks are managing community issues, providing employment, making a profit, and staying in business, which are in the interest of either the organization, the public, or both.

This strategy was described by a director of public relations at a regional medical center:

> "In the early 1990s, the [name of] county commission put together a task force, which found that the problem in indigent care is that there is no primary episodic care for patients; they end up in the emergency room. So, in cooperation with the county commission and the hospital across the street, we put together Community Health Services, which is an episodic care center for people with limited income. And that ties to an organization called We Care, which is [made up of] the doctors—so that the people at CHS—if it's beyond their scope to take out a gall

> bladder, there is a coordinator who hooks up with a surgeon who will take out the gallbladder at no charge."

Strategies for maintaining relationships that deal with **conflict resolution** can be grouped into three categories:

Integrative. These approaches are symmetrical because all parties in a relationship benefit by searching out common or complementary interests and solving problems together through open discussion and joint decision-making. The goal is a **win-win** solution that values the integrity of a long-term relationship between an organization and its publics.

A director of public affairs for a county government discussed this focus for communicating with publics:

> "An important point is always the win-win. You may have desired outcomes, and your needs and my needs may be a little bit different, but we can still work together to achieve the outcome."

Distributive. These strategies are asymmetrical because one party benefits at the expense of another by seeking to maximize gains and minimize losses within a **win-lose** or self-gain perspective. Tactics include trying to control through domination, argument, insistence on a position, or showing anger. Other forcing strategies are faulting the other party, hostile questioning, presumptive attribution, demands, or threats. Distributive strategies impose one's position onto that of an adversary without concern for the adversary's position.

Dual Concern. These strategies have particular relevance for public relations because they take into consideration the dual role of balancing the interests of publics with the interests of the organization. These strategies also can be called mixed-motive or collaborative advocacy.

Some dual concern strategies are **asymmetrical** because they emphasize the organization's interest over the public or vice versa and will not be effective in developing and maintaining the most positive relationships in the long term:

<u>Contending</u>. The organization tries to convince the public to accept its position.

<u>Avoiding</u>. The organization leaves the conflict either physically or psychologically.

<u>Accommodating</u>. The organization yields, at least in part, on its position and lowers its aspirations.

Compromising. The organization meets the public part way between its preferred positions, but neither is completely satisfied with the outcome.

Several other dual concern strategies are **symmetrical** and are the most effective at building and maintaining a relationship in the long term:

Cooperating. Both the organization and the public work together to reconcile their interests and to reach a mutually beneficial relationship.

Being unconditionally constructive. The organization does whatever it thinks is best for the relationship, even if it means giving up some of its positions and even if the public does not reciprocate.

Saying win-win or no deal. If the organization and public cannot find a solution that benefits both, they agree to disagree—no deal. A strategy of no deal is symmetrical because it leaves open the potential to reach a win-win solution at a later date.

Other research[7] in public relations, which has focused on development or institutional advancement, has presented several relationship maintenance strategies as a final but missing step in popular formulas for describing the public relations process, such as RACE or ROPE. These strategies collectively are called **stewardship** and recognize the strategic value of previously established relationships to future public relations efforts. Stewardship has four elements:

Reciprocity. The organization demonstrates its gratitude for supportive beliefs and behaviors.

Responsibility. The organization acts in a socially responsible manner to those who have supported it.

Reporting. The organization meets legal and ethical requirements of accountability.

Relationship nurturing. The organization accepts the importance of supportive publics and keeps them central to the organization's consciousness. Providing information and involving publics are key to the organization's work.

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[7] Kelly, K.S. (1998, June). *Stewardship: The Missing Step In The Public Relations Process*. Paper presented to the First Annual International, Interdisciplinary Research Conference, Public Relations Society of America Educator Academy, College Park, MD.

How can relationship maintenance strategies be measured?

The most meaningful evaluation of relationships involves measuring the **outcomes** of relationships, which is discussed later. But, public relations evaluation can be done by measuring **process** indicators as well. **These process measures provide meaningful information for practitioners who need evidence in the short term that their programs are leading to desired long-term effects**.

For example, public relations managers can measure disclosure by publics to the organization by counting suggestions, complaints, inquiries, and other contacts that members of publics, the media, government, or leaders of activist groups make with the organization, rather than to regulatory bodies, regulators, or the media.

Public relations practitioners can measure their effectiveness in counseling management by keeping a count of the times management seeks them out for advice or is willing to disclose its intentions, decisions, and behaviors to outside publics or the media through the public relations function.

Other process indicators of effective maintenance strategies include counts of what management has done to show publics that their interests are legitimate, of contacts with networks of activist groups, or in social responsibility reports showing the extent to which management has worked on problems of interest to publics.

Stage 3: Outcomes of Relationships

Public relations professionals who have used environmental scanning research to identify the strategic publics of their organizations and effective strategies for maintaining relationships with those publics can expect to develop long-term positive relationships with those publics. This paper now turns to research to determine the characteristics of such relationships and ways to measure them. The measures to be developed provide a first step for developing an ongoing audit of organization-public relationships.

What are the outcomes of successful relationships?

Research in interpersonal communication and the psychology of interpersonal relationships shows that the following four outcomes are good indicators of successful interpersonal relationships. Public relations research shows that they apply equally well to organization-public relationships[8]:

[8] The chapter by J. E. Grunig and Huang (2000), cited in footnote 5, reviews much of the research on

Control mutuality--the degree to which parties agree on who has rightful power to influence one another. Although some degree of power imbalance is natural in organization-public relationships, unilateral attempts to achieve control by one party are associated with decreases in perceptions of communicator competence and satisfaction with the relationship and increases in the level of activism. For the most stable, positive relationship, organizations and publics must have some degree of control over the other.

A public relations officer at a community college talked about this aspect of relationships:

> "Input is tell me what you think. Involvement is come in and get to work with us and let's figure out what the right answer should be…get on this task force and help us figure things out. That's where you would like to see the relationships between publics and the organization taken to."

Trust--one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party. Trust is a complicated concept, which has several underlying dimensions. One of these is integrity, the belief that an organization is fair and just. A second is dependability, the belief that an organization will do what it says it will do. A third is competence, the belief that an organization has the ability to do what it says it will do. In the context of the public-organization relationship, the value of a trustworthy reputation is so great that it becomes rational not to try to seize any short-term advantage.

A director of news and public affairs at a private college emphasized the link between trust and effective public relations:

> "One of the principles that underlies [public relations] strategies is the development of a sense of trust, and I think that is something that needs constant attention, constant vigilance. If we can start trusting each other, there is a lot we can do. And, trust breaks down all sorts of barriers that have hindered the relationship over the years….It is all built around trust….You can develop all kinds of strategies, but if you do not have trust, you are not going to get very far."

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interpersonal relationships. A longer review can be found in Huang's dissertation (Huang, Y. H [1997]. *Public Relations Strategies, Relational Outcomes, and Conflict Management Strategies*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.). A similar review can be found in Broom, G.M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (1997). "Toward a Concept and Theory of Organization-Public Relationships," *Journal of Public Relations Research, 9,* 83-98. Additional research on organization-public relationships can be found in the chapters in Ledingham, J. A., & Bruning, S. D. (2000) (Eds.), *Public Relations as Relationship Management: A Relational Approach to the Study and Practice of Public Relations* (pp. 23-53). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. A dissertation by Manuel Becerra, a former doctoral student in the Maryland business school and now an associate professor at the Norwegian School of Management, reviewed the extensive literature on interpersonal trust and trust among managers (Becerra, M. [1998]. *Nature, Antecedents, and Consequences of Trust Within Organizations: A Multilevel Analysis Within a Multinational Corporation*, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, University of Maryland, College Park.)

Satisfaction--the extent to which one party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced. Or, a satisfying relationship is one in which the benefits outweigh the costs. Satisfaction also can occur when one party believes that the other party's relationship maintenance behaviors are positive.

A director of public relations and marketing for a radio station described a relevant example:

> "Big Brothers and Big Sisters needed to collect $25,000 to meet their budget. We got the media involved; we got people to put teams together. We got them talking on the radio and had public service announcements running. They grossed around $40,000. Well, that meets their budget, even though they were hoping they would gross about $50,000 so that the actual net would be larger, but they were still very satisfied. Since we made the effort and followed through, I think we got satisfaction, even if we did come up short."

Commitment--the extent to which one party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote. Two dimensions of commitment are *continuance* commitment, which refers to a certain line of action, and *affective* commitment, which is an emotional orientation.

Both kinds of commitment were discussed by a campaign director for a non-profit organization:

> "Our donors and our volunteers have a vested interest in our organization meeting our goals. We can't do it without them and they certainly understand that. The undercurrent of that is it's for their own good that we meet our goals so they become personally committed to reaching them."

How are outcomes of public relations relationships different from other public relationships?

In addition to these four indicators of the quality of an organization-public relationship, a fifth pair of relationship indicators—exchange vs. communal relationships—defines the kinds of relationships that public relations programs attempt to achieve, in comparison with the nature of relationship outcomes produced by other fields such as marketing.

In an **exchange relationship,** one party gives benefits to the other only because the other has provided benefits in the past or is expected to do so in the future. In an exchange relationship, a party is willing to give benefits to the other because it expects to receive benefits of comparable value to the other. In essence, a party that receives benefits incurs an obligation or debt to return the favor. Exchange is the essence of marketing relationships between organizations and customers and is the central concept of marketing theory. However, an exchange relationship often is not enough. Publics expect organizations to do things for the community for which organizations get little or nothing in return.

In a **communal relationship**, both parties provide benefits to the other because they are concerned for the welfare of the other—even when they get nothing in return. The role of public relations is to convince management that it also needs communal relationships with publics such as employees, the community, government, media, and stockholders—as well as exchange relationships with customers. Theorists of relational marketing also point out that organizations also need communal relationships with customers. Psychologists Margaret Clark of Carnegie Mellon University and Judson Mills of the University of Maryland, who developed the concept of communal relationships, have pointed out that communal relationships are not completely altruistic.[9] People achieve broader goals from communal relationships with their families, friends, and acquaintances. Organizations, likewise, benefit by building a reputation for being concerned about communal relationships and encounter less opposition and more support over the long term from their publics.

Public relations professionals add value to an organization when they develop communal relationships with all publics affected by organizational behaviors—not just those who provide the organization something in return. Communal relationships are important if organizations are to be socially responsible and to add value to society as well as to client organizations. They also greatly reduce the likelihood of negative behaviors from stakeholders mentioned above—litigation, regulation, strikes, boycotts, negative publicity, and the like. Exchange relationships are necessary for customers, stockholders, and suppliers. However, exchange relationships never develop the same levels of trust and the other three relationship indicators that accompany communal relationships. Therefore, public relations can enhance the relationships with these stakeholders by using their unique expertise to produce communal as well as exchange relationships.

This is not to say, however, that exchange relationships are bad for an organization or that public relations professionals do not attempt to develop them. The psychologists, Clark and Mills, who developed the concept of communal relationships have pointed out that most relationships begin as exchange relationships and then develop into communal relationships as they mature. Often mutually beneficial exchanges can begin to build trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. Then, a public relations professional can help to build a long-range communal relationship where the level of these four indicators will become even higher and remain stable over time.

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[9] For more information, read Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1993). "The Difference Between Communal and Exchange Relationships: What It Is and Is Not," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 19*, 684-691.

At other times, public relations professionals may need to build a communal relationship with a public before an exchange can occur. For example, fundraisers need to cultivate a communal relationship with potential donors before they can ask for money. Likewise, community relations specialists need to build a communal relationship before they can ask to build a new plant or ask for trust in disposing of toxic waste.

All in all, however, it is the expertise needed to build communal relationships with publics that distinguishes public relations from similar professions such as marketing. And a measure of the degree to which a public perceives that it has a communal relationship with an organization is perhaps the purest indicator of the success of the public relations management function.

Relationship Outcomes in Public Relations Practice

What are some practical examples of relationship outcomes in public relations?

A County Housing Authority. A suburban county housing authority has responsibility for developing and maintaining subsidized housing for low-income residents and for requiring a certain percentage of low-income housing in each new housing development. Neighborhood residents typically oppose such housing. They believe that they lose control of their neighborhood and of the value of the property to the housing agency. They do not trust the agency, they are not satisfied with the relationship, and they feel the agency has no commitment to their neighborhood. Housing authorities often offer to give communities something in return, such as lower taxes, for accepting low-income residents. The exchange relationship may buy off the opposition, but it usually is not enough. Residents, however, worry that communal relationships will be damaged and that the agency does not have such a relationship with the community.

Agency authorities likewise do not want to lose control to community activists and believe that if too much control is given to communities they will lose their ability to accomplish their mission—providing housing to less-advantaged citizens. This is often known as the NIMBY phenomenon—Not in My Backyard. They do not trust the community to do what they think is right, they do not believe the community is committed to helping its poorer citizens, and they are not satisfied with their relationship with community groups. Most importantly, agency authorities need to go beyond an exchange relationship with the community to develop a true communal relationship.

Symmetrical communication with the community should be able to improve these relationships. Symmetrical communication could be done with advisory panels, open houses in low-income neighborhoods, focus groups, and other means of listening to the concerns of community groups. Free access to the media will help to extend communication to those unable to meet personally with Authority representatives. Often times, though, mediators are necessary to help manage conflict and build relationships.

Many other organizations face similar relationship problems. For example, a mental health agency wants to place the mentally ill in group homes in established neighborhoods. Correctional authorities want to place offenders in similar half-way houses. Highway authorities want to build or expand roads in established neighborhoods. Hospitals or businesses want to expand their facilities. To do so, they need to communicate with and involve community residents in the decision process to build a kind of relationship suggested by these indicators.

A Nuclear Reactor in a Residential Community. The story is very familiar for organizations that must deal with toxic waste. Radioactive waste from the nuclear reactor at a national laboratory leaks into the ground water. Laboratory officials say nothing. Soon, however, someone tests the water for a well. Pollution is spotted in a stream. Local media report the leakage. Community activists are enraged. They feel they have no control over their own health. The laboratory has said little about the problem, so residents do not trust what they say in the future. The exchange of jobs for health is insufficient for the activists. Obviously, residents feel dissatisfied with the relationship and believe that the laboratory has no commitment to the welfare of its neighbors.

Lab officials, at the same time, believe they cannot accomplish their mission to conduct research in the national interest if they lose control to activists whom they believe have "a hidden agenda." The other indicators of poor relationships fall logically into place.

Active involvement of the community and complete openness to the media, however, have begun to repair the relationships. The laboratory needs to do its research; the community wants to preserve its health and safety. Working with a citizen advisory panel and local leaders, trusting, communal, and mutually satisfactory relationships are developing between the lab and its neighbors. Both feel they have some control over the situation; both feel the other is committed to the relationship.

Media Relations. The relationship indicators can be applied to the everyday contacts of public relations professionals and reporters as well as to the more dramatic problems already discussed. Reporters typically claim that they have poor relationships with public relations people. "Flacks," their term for practitioners, want to control what journalists write. Many journalists do not believe that practitioners are truthful news sources and do not feel practitioners are committed to a relationship of helping journalists cover organizations. Journalists believe that they have a communal relationship with community groups and citizens; they would like the organizations that hire public relations services to believe in a similar relationship.

Public relations people, at the same time, often do not trust journalists. They are dissatisfied with the relationship. They believe that the media are out to get their organizations and have no commitment to the interests of organizations they attack. They only want to file a story based on wrongdoing and conflict. Practitioners would like to have a more communal relationship with journalists because public relations people often have been journalists themselves and want to be valued and respected by their former colleagues. Often, however, practitioners believe they have to exchange favors to buy off journalistic attacks. Most importantly, public relations people and their bosses think they have lost control of what publics hear about the organization; they have lost control of their reputation.

Savvy media relations experts know, however, that good relationships with reporters are ones in which both feel they have some degree of control over the reporting of the organization—neither party is in control to the exclusion of the other. Both parties trust each other to help them do their job; indeed they have a communal relationship so each helps the other even though they may get nothing in return. They are committed to making the relationship between the organization and the media work. The bottom line is that they are satisfied with the relationship.

Employee Relations. The implications of these relationship indicators for employees also are clear and fall well into line with much of what is known about employee relations. To be most productive, employee must trust the organizations for which they work. Management wants committed employees; often the synonyms used are loyalty and identification with the organization. Job satisfaction is one of the most heavily researched areas of organizational psychology and communication. Employees want a communal relationship with their employers; they want to go beyond the exchange of work for pay. Perhaps most importantly, employee empowerment is the buzzword of modern employee relations: Employees want some mutuality of control with senior management.

The reverse of these indicators again applies to top management. They do not want to cede all control to employees, they want a communal relationship, they want employees to strive for excellence even when they are not paid for it, and they want to trust unions or employee groups. They, too, want a satisfactory relationship with their employees.

Marketing Communication. At first thought, marketing communication would seem to be a form of public relations where only exchange relationships are important. Marketers provide a product needed by customers in exchange for a price that makes a profit for the company. Advertising and product publicity often identify brand attributes and prices that customers want or need. Evaluative research is done to determine whether customers believe the exchange has been a fair one: Was the quality of the product sufficient to merit its cost?

Today, however, marketing theorists talk of relationship marketing and the idea that it is much cheaper to keep a customer than to attract a new one. Marketing theorists have used at least two of the relationship indicators identified in this paper—trust and commitment—to describe a good relationship with customers.[10] Morgan and Hunt defined brand loyalty as commitment. And as an executive of a major public relations firm has said, "The value of a brand is nothing more than trust in a product."

In addition to trust and commitment, customers expect to be satisfied with products. They also expect mutuality of control in their relationships with suppliers of products. For example, automobile owners do not want to feel they are at the mercy of dealers. Owners of computers expect control over the assistance they get from a computer company. Owners of shares in a mutual fund expect assistance from representatives so that they feel in control of their investments. In short, customers today expect more than an exchange relationship with suppliers. They expect suppliers to be concerned about their welfare—i.e., they expect a communal as well as an exchange relationship.

Measuring Outcomes of Relationships

How can the outcomes of relationships be measured?

Most evaluation of relationships has focused on **perceptions** that one or both parties to a relationship have of the relationship. For example, gap research involves evaluating both sides of a relationship to determine if gaps exist in each side's perception of the relationship. Related to this is measuring **predictions** about the relationship that one party has for the other party or parties.

Academic researchers are working to develop reliable measures of relationship outcomes that public relations professionals can use in everyday practice. Academics have looked at the large body of research on interpersonal relationships, such as those between husbands and wives or members of other one-on-one relationships. They also have studied the research that psychologists have done on interpersonal relationships and on relationships between managers and employees. Psychologists and interpersonal communication researchers mostly have measured relationships from the perspective of only one party. This approach does not observe or measure a relationship *per se*, but a researcher can learn a lot by starting there.

At some point, public relations researchers should measure relationships as seen or predicted by both parties. This evaluation would document how organizational decision-makers see the relationship as well as how publics see the organization. Another future step is measuring the relationship independently of the perceptions or predictions of the parties involved in the relationship.[11] It is possible, for example, that neither party to the

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[10] Morgan, R. M., & Hunt, S. D. (1994). "The Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing," *Journal of Marketing, 58* (3), 20-38.
[11] See Broom, G.M., Casey, S., & Ritchey, J. (1997) cited in footnote 8.

relationship has a very accurate perception of what the relationship is like. A third party could be brought in to observe and measure relationship indicators. It is also possible that a well-trained public relations professional could make those observations, as long as he or she could lift himself or herself above the management-public relationship to observe it with some degree of objectivity.

What is an example of measuring relationships that public relations practitioners can follow?

James Grunig, Yi-Hui Huang, Chun-ju Hung, and other graduate students in public relations at the University of Maryland recently completed research to identify reliable indicators of public perceptions of organization-public relationships. They then conducted a pilot survey to see how respondents evaluated their relationships with five organizations chosen to represent different types of public and private organizations with both good and bad reputations. These organizations were General Electric, the National Rifle Association, the Social Security Administration, Microsoft, and the American Red Cross. The researchers conducted the survey by placing a questionnaire on the Internet and inviting people from randomly chosen e-mail addresses to respond.

There are problems with measuring reputations on a sample of the general population because many of the people who completed the questionnaire might not actually have had much involvement with the organizations they were asked about. A better approach would be to administer the questionnaire to people known to be in a public, such as community residents living near a nuclear reactor or employees of a specific organization. Nevertheless, such questions can be used in place of, or to supplement, the general reputational surveys that organizations often take of the general population. By measuring the perceived quality of relationships, we can measure the relational forces that usually explain why organizations have good or bad reputations. In addition, the Maryland researchers segmented the respondents into active and passive publics for each organization to see if these different types of publics rated their relationships with the organizations differently. They also asked respondents to indicate how familiar they were with each organization as an indicator of whether the relationship indicators would be different for people who are more familiar with an organization than for those who are less familiar.

Developing the Questionnaire

The researchers' first task was to develop reliable scales for trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, commitment, and communal and exchange relationships. They combed the literature in interpersonal communication and psychology to find indicators those others had used. Then, they rewrote the questionnaire items they found to make them applicable to an organization-public relationship. Reliability means that if you observe a phenomenon, such as perceptions of a relationship, more than once or in different ways that you will get a similar response from the different measures. Practically speaking, that means that if you ask different questions to measure the same relationship indicator that the responses will be correlated highly—i.e., respondents will give similar responses to the related questions. Ideally, we would like to have an index for each indicator that consists of at least four questions. The more questions one asks, the more reliable the index usually is. However, if a researcher asks too many questions, respondents get bored or tired and drop out of the survey before finishing the questionnaire.

The Maryland researchers asked their respondents 52 questions about their perceptions of the relationship indicators—12 for trust to include the dimensions of integrity, competence, and dependability and eight each for the other five indicators. That was a lot of questions, and indeed only about two-thirds of 200 respondents made it all the way through the questionnaire. However, that sample size provided enough information to test the items and to produce a shorter and still reliable scale for future use.

The researchers had to eliminate one of their trust items, one of the communal relationship items, and four of the exchange relationship items because they reduced the reliability of the scales. Measuring exchange relationships was most difficult, but the four items that remained had a good level of reliability. The researchers measured the reliability for the full set of items and then took the five and then four most reliable items to see if a shorter scale would be as reliable as a longer one. For trust, the shortened scale contained six items, two each for the three dimensions.

Measures of reliability usually are expressed by a statistic known as Cronbach's Alpha. Alpha is an overall measure of how well the items measuring the same characteristic correlate with each other. There is no set level of Alpha that indicates acceptable reliability, but generally a scale below an Alpha of .60 is not very reliable and an Alpha that approaches .90 is excellent. The longer the scale, the higher Alpha generally is, so that a shorter scale cannot be expected to have as high an Alpha as a longer one. The Maryland research produced highly reliable scales for all of the relationship indicators. With the exception of exchange relationships, all Alphas were above .80 and most approached .90. The four-item scale for an exchange relationship was still .70, an acceptable level. For every indicator, the four- and five-item scales were almost as reliable as the full scale. Readers interested in the exact results for Cronbach's Alpha for these relational variables for the five organizations can find them in Appendix 1, Page 40.

Administering the Questionnaire

The items developed for the six relationship outcomes follow in Figure 1. The first four items represent the four-item scale and the fifth item, when added, the five-item scale.

For trust, however, the researchers produced only a six-item scale as a shorter scale for trust, so that there would be at least two items for each of the three dimensions of trust. They produced only a single four-item scale for exchange relationships because the other four items were not sufficiently reliable. The research results showed these scales to be good measures of public perceptions of their relationships with publics, strong enough so that public relations professionals and researchers now can use these questions to measure perceptions of relationships, either in a survey, or more informally in open-ended questions asked in qualitative research. They can choose the number of items that best fit their research needs. But, in most cases, using the shorter index is likely to increase the completion rate.

Practitioners also should consider administering these items formally or informally to senior managers to get their perceptions of a relationship with a specific public. The wording of the items would have to be adjusted slightly for managers to apply them to relationships. Putting both perspectives together would provide a more complete picture of a relationship. Or public relations managers might observe a relationship between, for example, management and employees and an activist group, and use the items to rate the relationship.

In the Maryland study, respondents chose a number from one to nine to indicate the extent to which they agreed that each item described their relationship with the five organizations. The items in the scales are reported in Figure 1.

Figure 1
FINAL ITEMS FOR RELATIONSHIP SCALES
(Boldface indicates shortest scales,
boldface and italic indicates short scale with one additional item)

Trust
Dimensions Integrity, competence, dependability

1. **This organization treats people like me fairly and justly. (Integrity)**
2. **Whenever this organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me. (Integrity; original dimension: faith).**
3. **This organization can be relied on to keep its promises. (Dependability)**
4. **I believe that this organization takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions. (Dependability)**
5. **I feel very confident about this organization's skills. (Competence)**
6. **This organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do. (Competence)**
7. Sound principles seem to guide this organization's behavior. (Integrity)
8. This organization does not mislead people like me. (Integrity)
9. I am very willing to let this organization make decisions for people like me. (Dependability)

10. I think it is important to watch this organization closely so that it does not take advantage of people like me. (Dependability) (Reversed)
11. This organization is known to be successful at the things it tries to do. (Competence)

Control Mutuality

1. **This organization and people like me are attentive to what each other say.**
2. **This organization believes the opinions of people like me are legitimate.**
3. **In dealing with people like me, this organization has a tendency to throw its weight around. (Reversed)**
4. **This organization really listens to what people like me have to say.**
5. ***The management of this organization gives people like me enough say in the decision-making process.***
6. When I have an opportunity to interact with this organization, I feel that I have some sense of control over the situation.
7. This organization won't cooperate with people like me. (Reversed)
8. I believe people like me have influence on the decision-makers of this organization.

Commitment

1. **I feel that this organization is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.**
2. **I can see that this organization wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.**
3. **There is a long-lasting bond between this organization and people like me.**
4. **Compared to other organizations, I value my relationship with this organization more.**
5. ***I would rather work together with this organization than not.***
6. I have no desire to have a relationship with this organization. (Reversed)
7. I feel a sense of loyalty to this organization.
8. I could not care less about this organization. (Reversed)

Satisfaction:

1. **I am happy with this organization.**
2. **Both the organization and people like me benefit from the relationship.**
3. **Most people like me are happy in their interactions with this organization.**
4. **Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this organization has established with people like me.**
5. ***Most people enjoy dealing with this organization***
6. The organization fails to satisfy the needs of people like me. (Reversed)
7. I feel people like me are important to this organization.
8. In general, I believe that nothing of value has been accomplished between this organization and people like me. (Reversed)

Communal Relationships

1. **This organization does not especially enjoy giving others aid. (Reversed)**
2. **This organization is very concerned about the welfare of people like me.**
3. **I feel that this organization takes advantage of people who are vulnerable. (Reversed)**
4. **I think that this organization succeeds by stepping on other people. (Reversed)**
5. ***This organization helps people like me without expecting anything in return.***
6. I don't consider this to be a particularly helpful organization. (Reversed)
7. I feel that this organization tries to get the upper hand. (Reversed)

Exchange Relationships

1. **Whenever this organization gives or offers something to people like me, it generally expects something in return.**
2. **Even though people like me have had a relationship with this organization for a long time, it still expects something in return whenever it offers us a favor.**
3. **This organization will compromise with people like me when it knows that it will gain something.**
4. **This organization takes care of people who are likely to reward the organization.**

Interpreting the Results

In this paper, we do not attempt to analyze and interpret all of the results of the Maryland study of five organizations. Rather, our purpose is to present a few charts to illustrate how the measures developed to measure public perceptions of relationships can be used. Complete results will be reported in a research paper, which will be available at a later date from the Maryland researchers involved.

The charts starting on Page 32 show the results for the five organizations. Participants in the survey responded on a 9-point scale to indicate the extent to which they believed that the indicators in the six indices listed above described each organization. Negative indicators of each concept were reversed, and the answers to all of the items measuring each relationship outcome were averaged so that the final score shown on the charts also was on a 9-point scale. The first five charts compare the six indicators for each organization. The second six charts compare the organizations on each indicator.

Together, they compare public perceptions of the relationships for each organization with the perceptions for the other organizations. They also compare the six indicators for each of the five organizations to show the strengths and weaknesses of each organization's relationship with this sample group. Keep in mind that the sample is not representative of the general population. Although respondents were picked randomly by choosing the first letters of e-mail addresses, not all people have e-mail addresses. And, the response rate to e-mail surveys is typically low. As a result, these mean scores apply only to the 200 people in this sample. However, the results are logical and might not differ greatly if the sample was truly random and the response rate higher. The items in each scale were averaged; and the scores in the charts represent these averages, which could vary from one to nine.

Respondents had by far the strongest communal relationship with the American Red Cross and the weakest with the NRA. The perceptions of exchange relationships were just the opposite: The Red Cross was the lowest of the six organizations and the NRA the highest. These results suggest that, as a nonprofit charitable organization, people believe that the Red Cross cares about its publics even though it gets nothing in return and that it provides services to publics who have nothing to exchange for them. In contrast, the sample group seemed to perceive the NRA to be a selfish organization that will work with publics who have something to provide in exchange, perhaps political support or favors, but that it has little concern for the interests of the broader community.

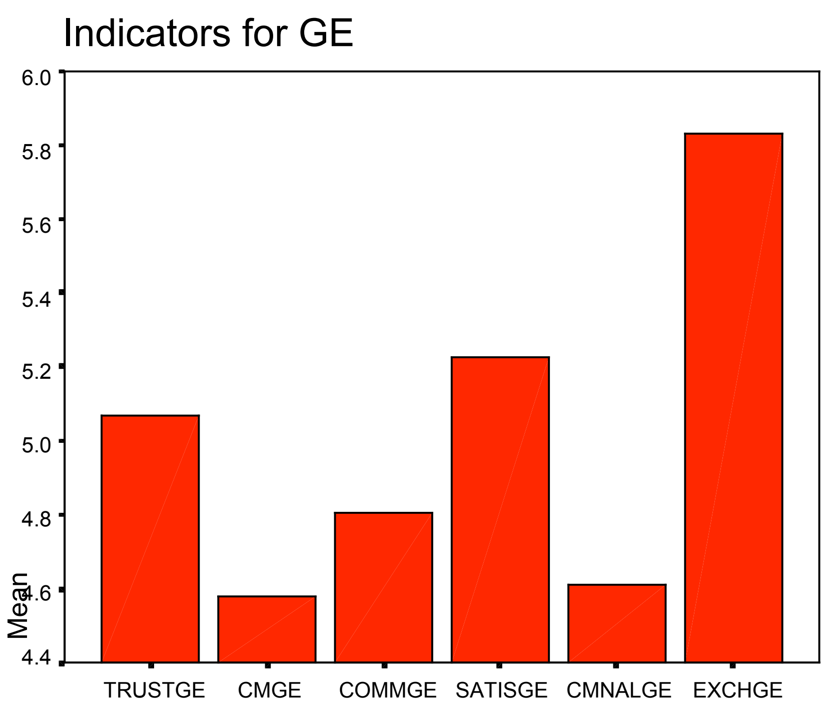
The exchange relationship was stronger than the communal relationship for the two corporations, but not so high as for the NRA. GE, which ranked first in the Fortune ranking of corporate reputation, had a stronger communal relationship and a weaker exchange relationship than Microsoft. One would expect publics to perceive that corporations only want exchange relationships from which they stand to benefit—with consumers or stockholders, for example. It also is important to recognize that corporations must have exchange relationships to survive. Therefore, one should not interpret these higher perceptions of exchange relationships for corporations negatively. However, we also expect public relations professionals in corporations to strive for a communal relationship in which the public believes the company is concerned with its overall welfare and the welfare of the community—beyond their interest as customers. The data suggest that GE has achieved such a relationship more effectively than has Microsoft.

The other four relationship indicators suggest that the National Rifle Association generally had the poorest relationship with this sample and the American Red Cross the best relationship. Overall, control mutuality was the weakest relationship indicator for each organization. This finding suggests that publics feel they can do little to affect the big organizations that affect them and that these organizations need to develop symmetrical strategies for empowering publics and maintaining relationships in which publics feel they have little control.

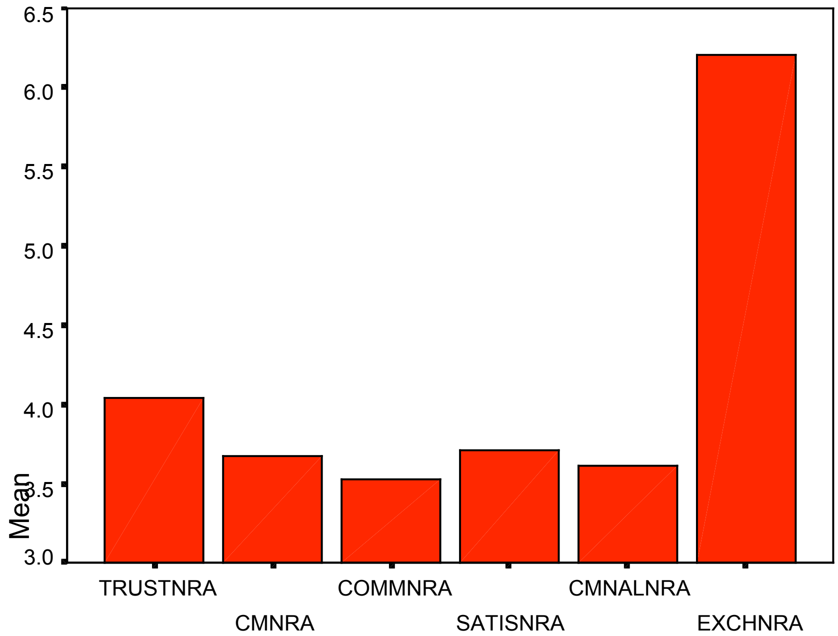
These results were similar when the researchers compared the relationship indicators for respondents who said they were more familiar with the organizations or who were classified as members of active publics. Generally, though, the patterns just described were stronger for respondents who were more familiar with the organizations. There also were interesting differences for different publics. For example, the public that was supportive of the NRA saw the relationship more favorably than did others in the sample. Also, a public that was most active for the Social Security Administration believed it had a communal relationship with the agency, trusted it, felt the agency was committed to the public, and was satisfied with the agency. However, the public also felt it had little control over the Administration's effect on the public.

What do these results mean for the public relations function?

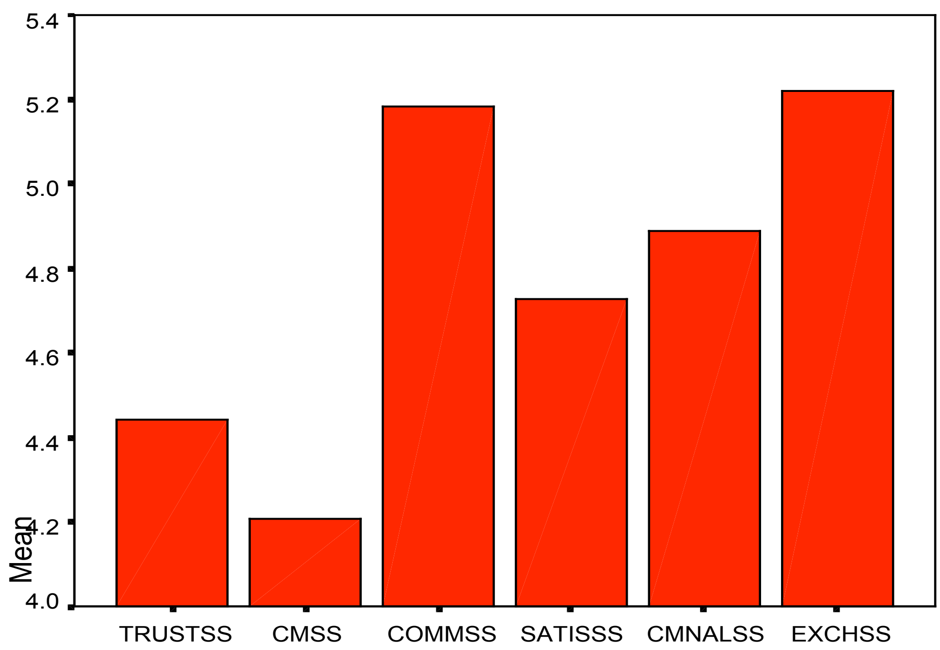
These findings provide **quantifiable evidence** of the perceptions that publics have of their relationships with these organizations. The results of this evaluation can be used for program management in public relations. For example, the low scores on control mutuality suggest that these organizations need to consider ways of increasing the involvement of publics in organizational decision-making. By measuring relationships, public relations professionals can contribute insights such as this to the management of their organizations and demonstrate the value of strategic public relations.



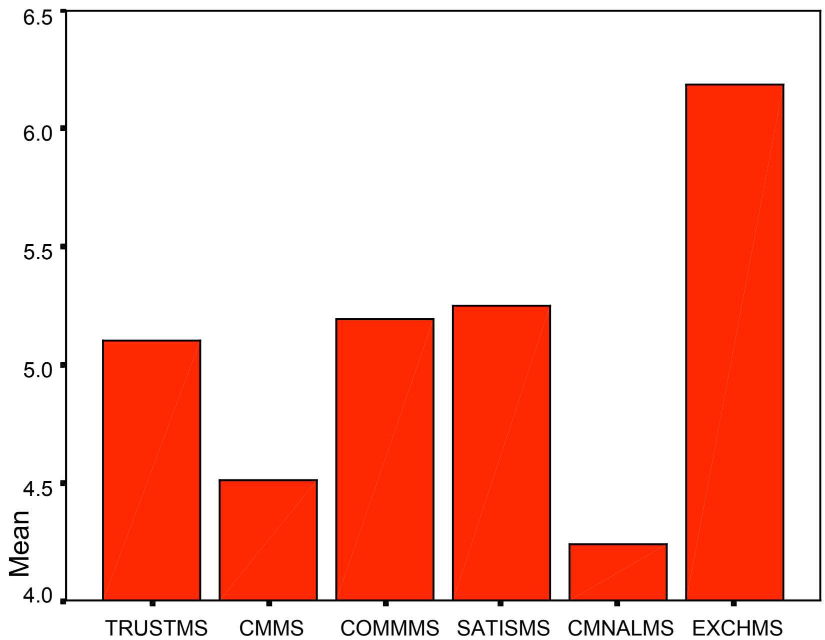
Indicators for NRA



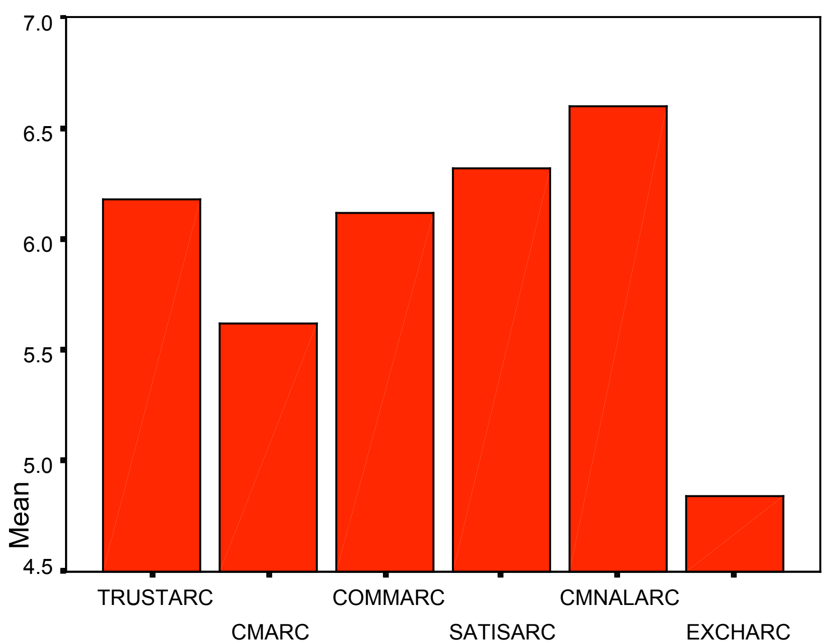
Indicators for Social Security



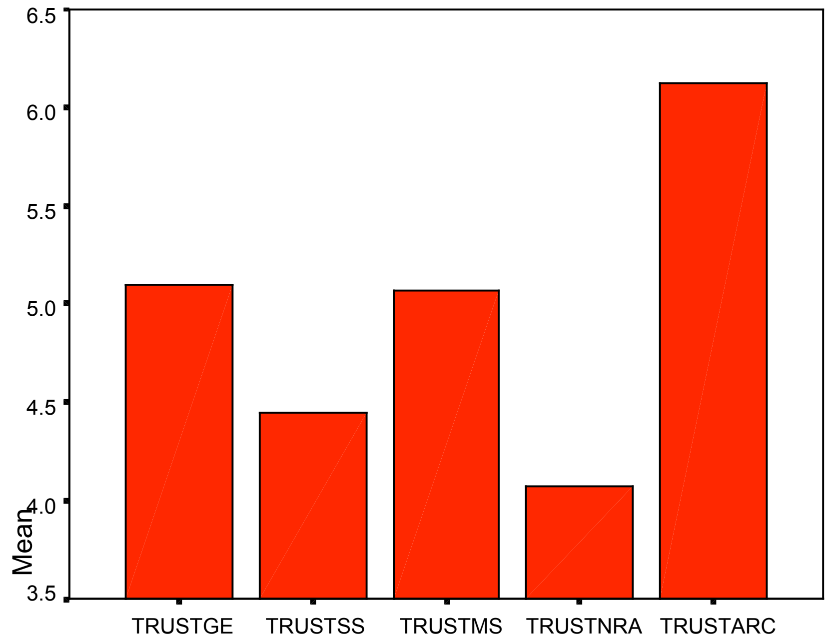
Indicators for Microsoft



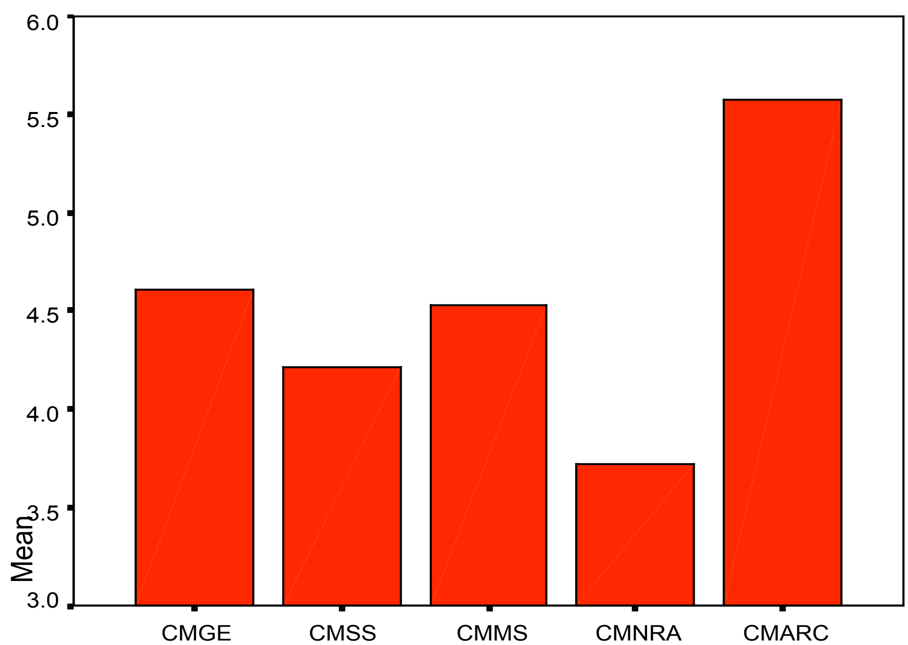
Indicators for Red Cross

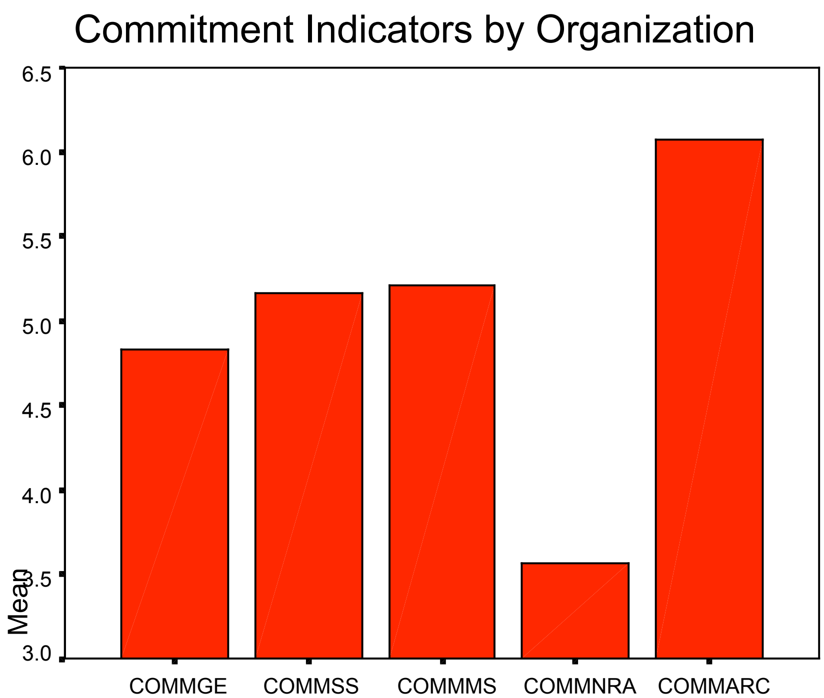


Trust Indicators by Organization



Control Mutuality Indicators by Organization




Commitment Indicators by Organization
6.5
6.0
5.5
5.0
4.5
4.0
3.5
3.0
Mean
COMMGE
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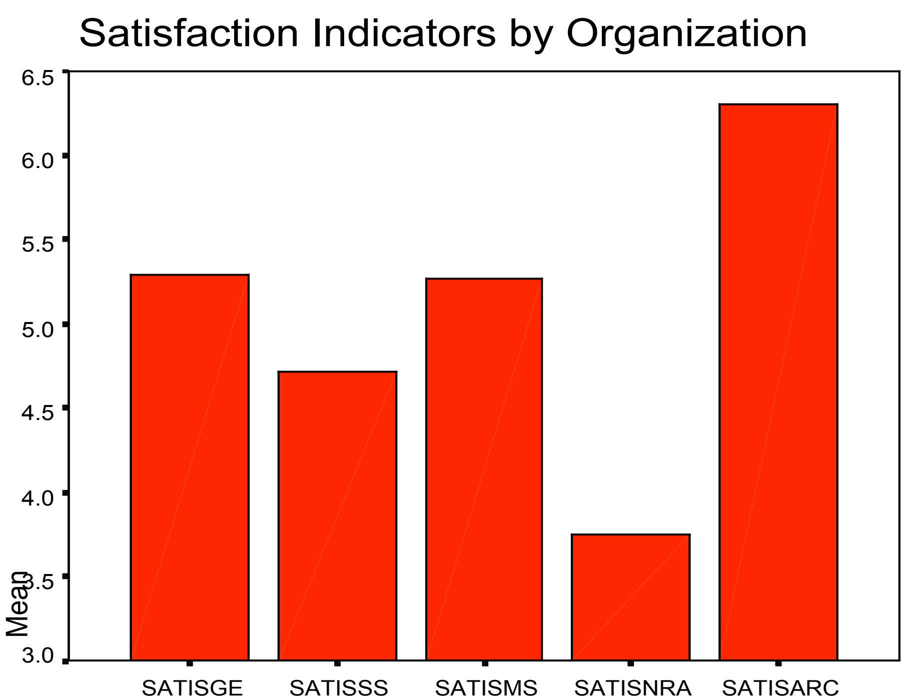
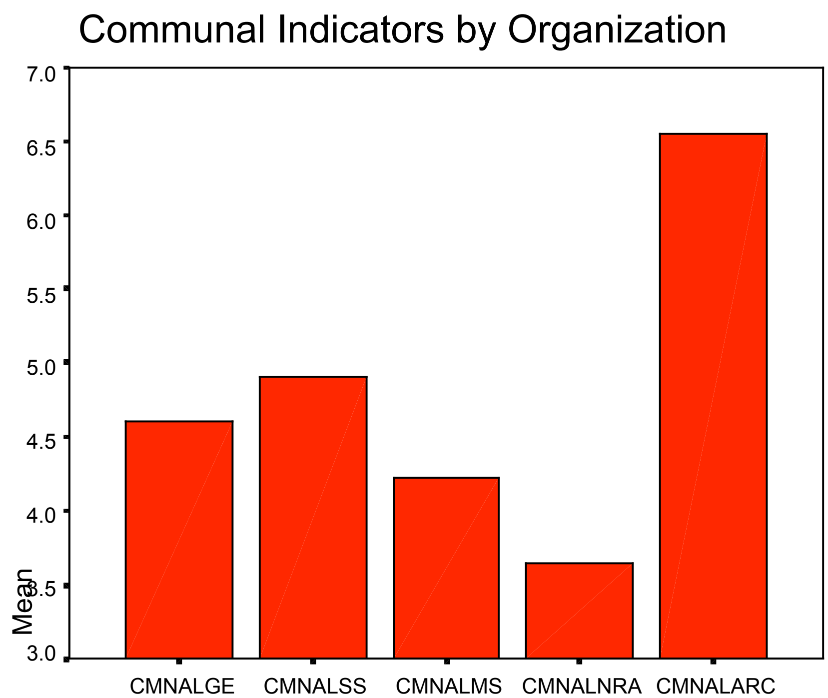
COMMMS
COMMNRA
COMMARC


Satisfaction Indicators by Organization
6.5
6.0
5.5
5.0
4.5
4.0
3.5
3.0
Mean
SATISGE
SATISSS
SATISMS
SATISNRA
SATISARC


Communal Indicators by Organization
7.0
6.5
6.0
5.5
5.0
4.5
4.0
3.5
3.0
Mean
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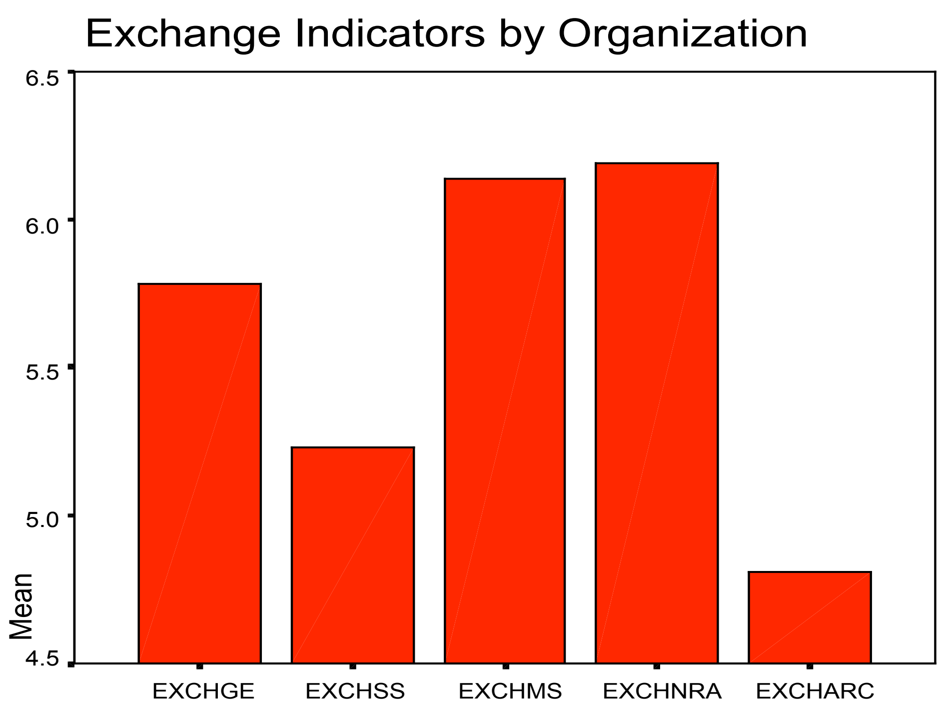
CMNALSS
CMNALMS
CMNALNRA
CMNALARC


Exchange Indicators by Organization
6.5
6.0
5.5
5.0
4.5
Mean
EXCHGE
EXCHSS
EXCHMS
EXCHNRA
EXCHARC

Where Do We Go From Here?

Over the years, public relations researchers have developed good measures of the short-term processes and outcomes that can be attributed to public relations programs. Those measures were described in the first paper on measurement and evaluation issued by the Institute for Public Relations.

In this paper, however, we have maintained that the time has come to go further. In addition to short-term measures of public relations processes and outcomes, public relations professionals need indicators and measures useful for identifying, maintaining, and evaluating longer-term relationships—for environmental scanning of strategic publics, of successful strategies for maintaining relationships, and for outcome indicators of the quality of relationships. We have described the nature of research needed for environmental scanning and for indicating the nature of ongoing maintenance strategies. In addition, we believe we have taken a step in moving public relations research forward by identifying six important indicators of relationship outcomes and developing reliable measures of these indicators.

Although the relationship outcome indicators have been tested only in the one study described above, we believe they are ready to be used by other researchers. Other researchers should continue to measure and report their reliability. Over time, we believe they will continue to be good measures of public perceptions of relationships with organizations. Researchers also should move forward to test the effect that the short-term outcomes of public relations programs have on these longer-term relationship indicators to supplement the evidence found in the IABC Excellence study. We believe that successful public relations programs result in good relationships with strategic publics, which in turn makes organizations more effective by allowing them to achieve their goals. More research evidence is needed to support that relationship, however.

In the future, we need to adapt these questionnaire items so that they can be used to determine management perceptions of the relationships as well as the perceptions of publics. That translation should not be difficult, however. When perceptions of the relationship are measured from both sides, we will be able to measure gaps in the way management and publics perceive the relationship. Such a gap analysis will suggest even more strategies for maintaining or repairing relationships. Researchers also need to move forward to develop measures of the relationship itself, as described by Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (cited in footnotes 8 and 11). Those measures would allow public relations practitioners to observe and measure relationships in ways that might not be captured by measuring perceptions of the relationships alone.

We also believe that much could be learned that is of value to public relations practice by examining the nature of relationships among publics and how those relationships affect the relationships of publics with organizations. Such research would examine the problem of multiple publics with conflicting interests, a problem that makes relationship building by an organization with different public particularly difficult. To be able to build stable relationships with conflicting publics, we believe that public relations professionals in these organizations will have to work with the publics themselves to build relationships with publics.

Another area of relevant research would examine the effect that the Internet and other new media have on relationships. Public relations professionals know that relationships develop among publics and between organizations and publics on the Internet, but researchers still know little about the nature and quality of these cyber relationships. In the future, organizations may build most of their relationships with publics in cyberspace.

Finally, this paper could not describe the research techniques needed for environmental scanning or for describing and testing the effect of maintenance strategies on relationship outcomes. That information is available in the public relations and management literature, however, if readers are interested. Researchers then should correlate the use of successful strategies for environmental scanning and maintaining relationships with the relationship indicators developed in this paper to provide further evidence on which public relations strategies are most effective in building good long-term relationships with strategic publics.

Appendix I

Reliability of Indices for Six Indicators of Relationships for Five Organizations, Expressed as Cronbach's Alpha

Relationship Indicator	General Electric	National Rifle Assoc.	Social Security	Microsoft	Red Cross	Average
Trust						
11-item scale	.90	.89	.93	.91	.91	.91
6-item scale	.86	.81	.89	.86	.86	.86
Control Mutuality						
8-item scale	.88	.90	.90	.91	.89	.90
5-item scale	.86	.87	.86	.88	.86	.87
4-item scale	.85	.85	.86	.86	.84	.85
Commitment						
8-item scale	.85	.89	.87	.88	.87	.87
5-item scale	.82	.88	.84	.84	.87	.85
4-item scale	.81	.89	.83	.82	.84	.84
Satisfaction						
8-item scale	.87	.91	.88	.91	.89	.89
5-item scale	.87	.90	.88	.91	.87	.89
4-items scale	.86	.89	.89	.88	.86	.88
Communal						
7-item scale	.86	.88	.85	.85	.84	.86
5-item scale	.83	.86	.84	.81	.81	.83
4-item scale	.82	.82	.80	.80	.75	.80
Exchange						
4-item scale	.73	.78	.68	.68	.62	.70