
Public Relations in Global Cultural Contexts

Multi-Paradigmatic Perspectives

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How Intercultural Communication Theory Informs Public Relations Practice in Global Settings

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Culture is a multifaceted concept that has often been used to refer to a group of people who share similar views and interpretations of their world. These interpretations might include national identity, race, religion, geographic location, interpersonal relationships, and a host of other factors. Speaking of “a culture,” however, is misleading. People identify with many cultures (often called cocultures) simultaneously, and not every member of a particular culture shares all of the same cultural beliefs (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). From a communication perspective, culture consists of shared experiences and negotiated meaning and provides a way to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty (Samovar & Porter, 2001).

As globalization and new communication technologies bring the world closer together, there is a greater need for public relations practitioners to help organizations navigate cultural terrains. Communication in the 21st century will be marked by efforts to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty in an ever smaller, yet more tightly networked world. It is this ambiguity and uncertainty that has allowed the practice of public relations to emerge as a valuable organizational communication function.

A central part of many public relations professionals’ jobs is to communicate with multiple stakeholders and stakeholders. Communicating with diverse publics is a difficult enough task in a nation or region when the public relations practitioner shares the same overarching cultural background with the public. Communication becomes an even more complex task when organizations seek to engage in relationships with global publics that live and work across many real and perceived boundaries. Many public relations practitioners are being called upon to build relationships in complex cultural environments. Are they up to the challenge?

This chapter reflects on different intercultural communication theories that have been used in both the communication and public relations literatures. By having a wider range of theories and ideas to draw upon,

scholars and professionals are better equipped to understand the complexities of intercultural public relations. In intercultural communication readers and textbooks, a number of issues are consistently highlighted as important topics of analysis and discussion. These include, but are not limited to: national identity, cultural identity, and cultural identification, nonverbal communication, perceptual differences (time, status, trust), gender identification (masculinity/femininity), experiences of discrimination, individualism vs. collectivism, a sense of "otherness" when interacting in unfamiliar cultures, religious and ideological differences, negotiation of friendship and kinship, ethical questions, linguistic differences, code switching, and others (see Martin, Nakayama, & Flores, 2002; Samovar & Porter, 2003). For a person interested in culture in general, any of these issues (or a combination of them) might provide a valuable lens through which to understand the cultural norms and values of those from another region, country, or cultural group. However, from the standpoint of a professional communicator tasked with creating messages for multiple publics and negotiating relationships among diverse stakeholders, it might be best to take a generic approach (outlined below) to understanding public relations situations in global environments.

Globalization and new communication technologies have brought individuals, groups, and organizations closer together. What happens in one country now can have immediate effects on people, organizations, and relationships in many other countries. Indeed, given the complexity of culture, no single person or organization could learn about every cultural practice or communication pattern in every culture. What is actually more useful than trying to understand every aspect of every nation's culture is to consider intercultural communication and public relations from a relational and generic perspective.

Martin and Nakayama (1999) provided a useful framework for intercultural communication that emphasizes relational rather than culture-specific approaches guiding intercultural interactions. In intercultural communication research, the dialectical perspective is based on a holistic approach that places the "relationship" at the center of the communication (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 14).

Relationships are a central goal of public relations communication, and many factors influence an organization's relationships with its publics. Organization-public relationships are influenced by organizational actions, existing and evolving reputations, media coverage, recent crises, leadership, activism, the economy, and even new communication technologies such as blogs and YouTube postings. Public relations professionals also need to consider that culture, as a fluid phenomenon, influences how organizations enact relationships with domestic and international publics.

Central to intercultural competence is understanding that, like interpersonal relationships with our friends and family, effective intercultural communication is based on shared patterns of experience and interaction as well as a general and a specific understanding of individual cultures. In the past, some public relations scholars have argued that a single theory (such as Excellence theory) might be able to account for understanding international practices of public relations (J. Grunig, 1992; Verčič, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1996). Just as our relationships with our friends, family, coworkers, teachers, mentors, and even public institutions are different, cultures are also different. Clearly, given the complexity of meaning making and relationships, the one-theory-fits-all approach to intercultural communication is impossible in global contexts.

A better approach to understanding intercultural public relations is to understand that a practitioner should start by learning the answer to certain “generic” cultural questions (Kent & Taylor, 2007). Just as laying the foundation for an interpersonal relationship requires that one learn a number of general and specific facts about the other person, laying the foundation for intercultural interactions requires both specific and general knowledge.

Relational approaches to intercultural communication provide a framework for understanding relationships that are created by and changed by public relations. When we conceptualize public relations within “an organic framework of evolving relationships” (Pal & Dutta, 2008, p. 168), we can move past the traditional, managerial approaches to international public relations that focus on national boundaries and instead move toward understanding relationships wherever they form and in whatever forms they take (Pal & Dutta, 2008).

Our discussion is premised on the idea that people from different cultures come together when an exigency (a problem or opportunity) emerges that requires communication (Bitzer, 1968). This communication is intercultural and involves an imperative for shared meaning that seeks to build understanding and relationships. Thus, intercultural public relations is an interpretative communication activity that requires multiple, often simultaneous, frameworks for creating and changing relationships. This chapter is organized as follows: first, we review the principles of the generic theory as they relate to intercultural communication research. A generic approach focuses on practitioners asking questions that consider the general *context* of an intercultural communication situation. Genre theory provides a roadmap for these considerations. Then we reflect on different theories that explain how meaning is constructed in intercultural contexts. The final section provides an overarching framework, known as third culture building, as a way through which public relations practitioners can reflect on the theories mentioned

in the first parts of the chapter, and use these theories to enact mutually beneficial relationships with publics at home and abroad.

Understanding the Big Picture: A Generic Approach to Intercultural Public Relations

Intercultural communication is an interpretative activity. Over the years, public relations scholars have drawn upon only a limited number of cultural theories and concepts (cultural variability, high/low context, face, *guanxi*, etc.) and have constructed even fewer intercultural public relations theories. When one thinks about culture and public relations, the work of Geert Hofstede (1997) often comes to mind. Hofstede's values work has been used as a foundation in business, communication, intercultural, interpersonal, and public relations research (see also the chapter by Courtright, Wolfe, and Baldwin in this volume). His work has been compelling for a variety of reasons, which include the business focus, the breadth of countries surveyed in his research, and the ease of applying his principles to international settings. Hofstede identified five cultural variables that influence communication and relationships in organizational settings: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, individualism/collectivism, and Confucianism, or "long-term orientation" (LTO).

Hofstede's work has been considered a good start for understanding the dynamics of international and organizational communication, and public relations. His work emerged as a heuristic for international communication during a time when the field of public relations sought to align its practice with management theories and activities. Top scholars such as those involved in the Excellence research argued that public relations was a "management process" and that once public relations practitioners gained access to the dominant coalition, the public relations function would be valued and respected (see Grunig, 1992). Hofstede's managerial focus is understandable given the nature of his research that surveyed professionals at international branches of IBM. Turning to Hofstede's work to help explain international public relations was natural for public relations scholars.

Research Traditions in International Public Relations

The field of public relations was introduced to Hofstede in the 1992 Excellence study (Grunig, 1992). A chapter written by Sriramesh and White (1992) explained how understanding organizational and national culture could be a part of Excellent public relations. Sriramesh applied Hofstede's theory to public relations relationships in South Indian

organizations (1992). Culbertson and Chen's 1996 edited book, *International Public Relations*, contained several chapters that included a discussion or application of Hofstede's dimensions of culture to national practices of public relations. Over the last decade, scholars have applied Hofstede to studying public relations in nations that included Western Europe during the 1999 Coca Cola tainting crisis (Taylor, 2000) Taiwan (Wu & Taylor, 2003), and Slovenia (Verčič et al., 1996). These were useful case studies, but as Martin and Nakayama (1999) and others have claimed, Hofstede's research embodies a static understanding of culture. What authors in the late 1990s and early 2000s found may need to be revisited in order to better describe culture and public relations within the dynamic conditions of globalization.

Other cultural models, such as Sriramesh's personal influence model and Kent and Taylor's (2002) research on dialogic communication, may help show the dynamic nature of culture as it influences public relations theory and practice.

Personal Influence

The personal influence model of public relations (Sriramesh, 1992) provides a valuable framework for understanding how culture may influence the development of public relations in a nation (or culture). The model is common in countries and organizations that are hierarchical, tightly controlled by the government, or subject to cronyism. Personal influence is often exercised behind the scenes by local business professionals, organizational and government leaders, and by local politicians or party members to achieve organizational or individual success.

Research shows that personal influence is common to India, other parts of Asia, Africa, and other nations. In "low-context" (see below) nations like the United States, having access to, or exercising personal influence is not a requirement for organizational or personal success, but it often helps. Some types of occupations and institutions rely more heavily on personal influence for success. In "high-context" cultures, like South Korea, however, personal influence is crucial and members of in-groups and those with connections are often more successful at achieving organizational and personal goals; for example, party members in communist or socialist states, members of in-groups, royalty, individuals with higher social status, people from higher castes, businesspeople, and individuals with more resources (Taylor & Kent, 1999).

The personal influence model reminds public relations theorists and practitioners that relationships are key. But, in this model, the relationship is not with a general public such as a community or regional group, but rather relationships of value are with people in positions of influence who can help the public relations practitioner accomplish his or her

job. Another framework, dialogic communication, may be better able to enhance relationships with publics.

Dialogic Communication

The dialogic model of public relations (Pearson, 1989) strives to maintain equality and equity among stakeholders. The goal of dialogic organizations is not simply to enact managerial goals but also to serve the needs of stakeholders and stakeholders. Dialogic communicators mediate between the interests of the organization and its key publics and seek mutual understanding rather than influence or adherence (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002).

Dialogue, as the word implies, refers to conversation or talk. Dialogic public relations refers to a kind of interpersonal interaction that acknowledges the individual self-worth and value of others and tries to create long-lasting, stable relationships with other people. As a professional practice, dialogue includes the ability to listen (with an open mind), empathize with others, admit when one is wrong, and be changed or altered by the experience of communicating with others. Ultimately, dialogue is a collection of interpersonal and intercultural communication skills and an orientation toward other people rather than a set of rules. Dialogic communicators do not ignore people because they can. They try to understand the needs of others and *actually* value their opinions (Anderson, Baxter, & Cissna, 2003; Anderson, Cissna, & Arnett, 1994; Buber, 1970; Christians, 1990). One way to implement the dialogic model is through an understanding of a generic approach to intercultural public relations.

The Profession Moves Toward a Generic Approach

As communication professionals, public relations practitioners understand that the first thing that one has to do before communicating about anything is to conduct research. The "R" in the RACE formula (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation) applies when creating any message, whether the message is created for an internal group of employee stakeholders, or is designed for an external group of stakeholders such as activists or consumers.

In some cases, research about key publics is obtained through environmental scanning and monitoring. This may include macrolevel areas of consideration including political systems, economic development, media ownership, or other societal factors. In other situations, however, communication professionals need to conduct some formal research (interviews, surveys, reviewing primary and secondary sources) in order to understand key publics. The importance to the creation of effective

messages of conducting research is not a new concept, every public relations student learns it. Indeed, the ancient Greeks and Romans wrote about the process of “invention” or the finding and gathering of information useful to constructing arguments and compelling messages.

In the modern era of public communication research, rhetorical scholars developed a targeted process of background research designed to understand specific communication situations, called “genres.” A communication situation involves understanding the background and assumptions of audience members, their cultural beliefs, and their expectations as audience members. Genre theory goes back more than 50 years to scholars who include Frye (1957) and Black (1965) (see also Kent, 1997; Kent & Taylor, 2007).

A genre refers to “a class of messages having important structural and content similarities, which, as a class, create special expectations in listeners. Inaugural addresses, then, constitute a genre, because they share textual features and are delivered in similar circumstances every four years” (Hart, 1990, p. 183; see also Hart & Daughton, 2004). As Martin (1976) explains: “A rhetorical genre is produced by a recurrent, distinctive relationship among three elements, (1) occasion, (2) audience and (3) speaker-role, from which springs discourse necessarily displaying recurrent similarities in theme, style, tactics, and perhaps presentational elements” (p. 247). In essence, genre-specific messages are based on research about target publics, occasions, and other situational factors, including culture.

The generic (or genre) approach to international public relations has been proposed as a model for preparing for international or intercultural public relations situations because it emphasizes genuine understanding of other cultures and communication, rather than simply convincing stakeholders to do what we want. According to Kent and Taylor (2007), a public relations professional who is interested in communicating with international or intercultural publics should engage in six activities:

- (1) Identify features of the situation
- (2) Identify the intended audience effects
- (3) Clarify the motivational intent of the organization and publics
- (4) Examine how meaning is created
- (5) Examine strategic considerations
- (6) Use communication principles and theory to understand how culture influences organizations and communication. (p. 11)

First, the practitioner needs to identify the *features of the situation*. The public relations practitioner needs to take a broad approach to understanding the rhetorical situation before him or her. Questions such as these need to be answered: “What are the expectations of the public

for our communication?" and "Which specific norms and values will guide our publics' interpretation of our messages?" The first principle is where the practitioner should make an attempt to understand the general context of what factors might shape how publics might create or respond to communication from the organization.

Effective and ethical intercultural communication depends upon understanding *how a public is likely to respond to a message* (i.e., passively, because the group feels powerless or because the government does not allow dissent; actively, because the group believes that it has a vested interest or feels empowered to take action). Additionally, public relations communication needs to consider *where compelling messages should come from in a culture* (what media outlets, which spokespeople), and other demographics. For instance, in some cultures, religious figures have great public influence, whereas, in other cultures, athletes and celebrities have the ability to shape how people understand situations and issues.

The second issue within a generic approach to intercultural communication and public relations is to *identify the intended audience effects*. Once we understand the situation, then we need to reflect on the goals of the organization's actual communication. To be ethical, we need to ask if our communication efforts are intent on honest persuasion, propaganda, or marketing. If our goals are propaganda or marketing, then we need to consider goals based on relationship building. The second generic principle calls for understanding the goals of the communication efforts. Having clear goals lies at the heart of all effective public relations, however, when dealing with global audiences there is a tendency toward ethnocentrism. *Ethnocentrism* refers to the tendency to judge other cultures in comparison to our own, and to believe that our own culture is superior to other cultures. All cultures tend to make sense of the world based on their own experiences, and take for granted that others see the world in the same way.

Burke (1984) called our tendency to judge things based on our own experiences "occupational psychosis" (pp. 37-48). Other scholars have referred to this as "frame conflict" (Reddy, 1993), or the inability to see things beyond our own frames of experience. Whether we call the tendency to judge the world based on our own experiences ethnocentrism, occupational psychosis, or frame conflict, does not really matter; what matters is that we appreciate the importance of understanding other cultures and *not* judging them by our own cultural standards. Every culture and coculture (groups within larger cultures) is different. Whether one culture is "better" than another should never be a pressing question.

As Reddy (1993) argues, to communicate effectively with intercultural publics requires effort and there is no recipe for success, except for

hard work. For organizations that wish to engage global publics, talking louder does not make the message any clearer. Effective intercultural communication requires research, cultural experience, sensitivity, and empathy.

The third step of a generic approach is for the public relations practitioner to *clarify the motivational intent of both the organization and publics*. The goal is to find where the interests of both the organization and the public intersect. Identifying shared cultural values is where the organization has the greatest chance of building a relationship with the public. Different kinds of knowledge are needed for effective interpersonal interactions (as compared to print, broadcast, or electronic messages). Interpersonal contact requires an understanding of issues like face, non-verbal communication, and time (discussed in some detail below). Creating print and electronic messages requires an understanding of cultural symbols and icons, colors, music, and cultural values that are unique to a nation or culture.

The fourth step of a generic approach ensures that the organization's messages make sense within the culture. This fourth generic principle suggests that professionals should *examine the archetypal or symbolic nature of language and communication in that culture*. Every nation/culture defines itself by both what it is, and what it is not (Burke, 1973), in relation to its neighbors, and in relation to the people and governments considered heroes and villains. Identification by *unawareness* refers to the kind of implicit identification people feel as a result of being part of an organization, group, cause, or activity, and the implicit otherness/enmity people feel toward those who are a part of groups, causes, or activities, that compete with their organization's cultural views (Burke, 1973, pp. 263–275). We make sense of the world metaphorically.

By learning about cultural archetypes, heroes, villains, and social and political leaders, public relations professionals will be better prepared to succeed in global and intercultural contexts. For example, one just needs to take a look at maps of the world in other countries when one travels. Many countries have maps that show their part of the world as the dominant, central location by which all other nations are positioned. Nationalistic and geographic identification by unawareness exists in every nation, and understanding how people see themselves in relation to others is essential to communicative success (Taylor & Kent, 2000).

A fifth step within a generic approach is to *examine the strategic considerations* that communicators can draw upon to further make their message culturally appropriate. Strategic considerations include issues such as respect for elders, the role of the government, religious and social features, trust, and perceptions of time. Understanding culture involves understanding the role that various public and private institutions play

in people's lives, as well as how people see themselves fitting into society. Religion is, of course, only one cultural value. It is equally important to understand the nature of the media system in the nation or culture that a practitioner intends to communicate with. For example, the idea of a free press takes many forms. In Britain, citizens pay a television tax/license for every television set that they have in their homes to help fund an independent medium (BBC). In Korea, the media often share unfavorable information with businesses and influential citizens before publishing critical news reports. Korean editors allow organizations a chance to provide a response *before* a damning story is published. In Malaysia (and many other countries), the government is often informed of a crisis first, before the news is shared with the general public (Taylor & Kent, 1999).

A sixth and final step calls upon the practitioner *to use communication principles and theory to understand the culture being examined* and how cultures influence organizations and communication. Kent and Taylor (2007) argue that the sixth generic principle is actually the most important principle.

It is a mistake to think that communication is easy, that communication does not take work, or that any time two people speak the same language they are communicating effectively. We know from research into rhetoric and persuasion that people who understand their publics, who understand what motivates an audience, and who know how to structure an effective public speech, tend to give better speeches. Similarly, in fields like human communication, mass communication, political science, psychology, and sociology, we know that understanding theory, how people think and understand ideas, *and the process of meaning making*, is essential to effective communication. Effective intercultural communication is no different. Thousands of scholars and professionals have studied aspects of intercultural communication. And, as suggested, there are many theories and theoretical concepts developed with the aim of understanding how to effectively communicate with people from different nations and cultural backgrounds.

We devote the rest of the chapter to sharing some of these principles and theories. As suggested above, the generic principles are intended to identify elements of occasion, audience, and situational goals. The generic approach fits perfectly with professional research into international and intercultural communication situations since the heart of the generic approach is understanding relationships and how to use cultural knowledge to build those relationships. Effective practitioners should understand fundamental intercultural communication theories and be able to use that knowledge to improve their own intercultural communication. Discussion of several key theories comprises the next section of this chapter.

Theories that Facilitate Cocreation of Meaning in Intercultural Public Relations

The field of public relations has been moving from a functional approach, which has viewed publics as a means to accomplish organizational goals, to a cocreational approach. The cocreational approach posits that public relations creates shared meanings, interpretations, and goals. This perspective is long-term in its orientation, and focuses on relationships among publics and organizations (Botan & Taylor, 2004, p. 652). The cocreational approach argues that public relations is best understood as a meaning making process that brings both the organization and publics together.

Public relations professionals engage in intercultural communication for a variety of reasons, but all of these reasons involve meaning making. Practitioners might interview or survey members of a coculture in order to learn about their beliefs, values, and attitudes. If a professional works in a global organization, she or he might collaborate with colleagues in another nation or region as part of a communication campaign or marketing initiative. Even if a practitioner never leaves his or her own country, she or he might be asked to develop prosocial messages aimed at diverse cultural groups as part of a public health or governmental services initiative within his or her own nation.

Ultimately, understanding how individuals and groups from other nations, regions, or cultures see the world (their paradigm) is essential to effective intercultural communication. According to Kuhn (1970), a *paradigm*, or worldview, shapes how people see their world. A paradigm is similar to an ideology except that paradigms are more personal and represent models, assumptions, beliefs, and values that constitute how individuals and groups view reality. Paradigms may also vary by region, social class, race, ethnicity, and gender. Thus, ideologies describe the social world and the actors in it (which *groups* can be trusted, who runs things), while paradigms describe the world itself for the community that shares them (what counts as “good” and “bad,” which *individuals* can be trusted). Our ideologies and paradigms influence our mental images of the world. If, for example, we believe that the world is a “mean” place, then we are likely to support calls for enhanced penalties for criminals. Conversely, someone who sees the world optimistically might call for enhanced educational and rehabilitation programs for criminals. Public relations professionals, to be able to build relationships with culturally diverse individuals and publics, need to understand different worldviews and understand why people act as they do.

Indeed, correctly interpreting the actions of others is key to reducing ambiguity and uncertainty in intercultural communication. In the

1950s, Talcott Parsons, a Harvard sociologist, argued that one of the ways to understand human relations is to understand how people make sense of the world around them. Parsons suggested that dichotomous pairs could describe the actions of individuals and cultural groups.

Parsons' Pattern Variables

A pattern variable is described as "a dichotomy, one side of which must be chosen by an actor before the meaning of a situation is determinate for him/her, and thus before s/he can act with respect to that situation" (Parsons & Shils, 1951, p. 77). In general, actors do not really think about their choices so much as they act on shared paradigms that shape how they make sense of the world. According to Parsons, acts involve "the relationship of an actor to a situation ... and it is conceived as a choice ... among alternative ways of defining the situation. The ... act, however, does not occur independently but as one unit in the context of a wider system of actor-situation relationships" (1960, p. 467).

Parsons identified five variables that he claimed were universal: affectivity, ascription, collectivism, diffuseness, and particularism. Other scholars have subsequently examined many of the relational variables identified by Parsons (Dubin, 1960; Lipset, 1963). When Parsons proposed his variables more than 60 years ago, he argued that many of the variables associated with collectivist societies were premodern; that is, status, relationships, collectivism.¹ We now know with 60 years of hindsight that cultures are more complex than the pejorative modern/premodern framework might suggest. Nevertheless, Parsons's pattern variables are a precursor to many other cultural theories, and because of this they are worth understanding as a starting point toward a dialogic/generic approach to global public relations.

Affectivity/Instrumentalism Affectivity has two dimensions: affectivity (love, trust, nurturing) and instrumentalism (situational, transitory, selfishness). Affectivity refers to the role that relationships play in shaping people's actions. Affectivity correlates closely with collectivism in the sense that decisions are made based on one's familial and cultural bonds rather than what one might obtain now. Affectivity is also similar to Hofstede's (1997) notion of Confucian dynamism or long-term orientation (LTO) and Hall's (2000a) idea of high and low context. Affectivity is an important concept because so many of the decisions that people make are guided by cultural beliefs tied to family and relationships. Indeed, Phau and Wan (2006) have shown how both public relations and advertising draw upon this concept in persuasive communication.

Ascription/Achievement Ascription/achievement has to do with how people treat other people based on their status or performance. Like Hofstede's (1997) notion of power distance, which helps to explain how people relate to other people based on their *perceived* status, ascription/achievement tries to explain how an individual would treat an object or another individual because of who she or he is, what it is, what it does, or what response it produces. In other words, ascription suggests that an individual would give priority to certain *attributes* that object/individual possess over any specific *performance* or actions of objects/individuals; that is, Bill Gates is important simply because he is wealthy and not because he has lived his life well. Being wealthy, famous, and powerful is enough. Achievement suggests that individuals should be given priority because of their specific past performances. Achievement is actually a very useful concept for organizations that seek to enhance their reputation with publics across the world. Organizations that are achievement-oriented are motivated to innovate (like Apple computers), rather than work to undermine fair competition and fair trade (like Microsoft) (Kent, 2008). Since relationships are built on trust and shared experiences, achievement focused organizations are seen as more trustworthy and honest and more deserving of stakeholder support.

Universalism/Particularism In a universalistic orientation, people, or objects are categorized in terms of some universal or general frame of reference. Particularism comes closest to what the cocreational theories of public relations take as a guiding assumption: that the existence of a relationship alters how we treat others and how they treat us (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). Ironically, both universalism and particularism can exist in the same individual or culture. Indeed, the existence of a relationship is what, in many cultures, allows individuals and members of other groups to be seen as "friends" ("He's a good guy, he's not like the others ..."). When another individual or group can be thought of as a special case, she, he, or they can be granted special (or equal) privileges, while the larger group can still be treated unfairly.

Specificity/Diffuseness Specificity/diffuseness refers to how we respond to people or objects. When only particular aspects of a person or object are responded to (position, education, age, gender, sex, etc.), a specificity orientation prevails (a characteristic of individualistic cultures). When a person or an object is treated in a holistic manner (father/mother, group member, friend), a diffuseness orientation is displayed (a characteristic of collectivist cultures).

Diffuse cultures are harder to join and harder to build strong relationships with when one is an outsider. In diffuse cultures, people have multiple, overlapping, social ties. Diffuse cultures also present special

persuasion-related obstacles. Messages of actuation need to focus on familiar concepts and social ties rather than on individual gain. Additionally, negotiations cannot be framed as "mutually beneficial" so much as beneficial to the community or group of which one is a part. Diffuse cultures do not think in terms of "I" but instead consider the "we."

Specificity poses its own challenges for global public relations. In highly specific cultures, relationships are equally difficult to negotiate since "professionalism" should be maintained in business dealings. Similarly, when individuals from specific cultures interact with members of diffuse cultures, both groups will have difficulty seeing eye-to-eye on relationships, and what constitutes good business.

Intercultural public relations professionals can benefit from Parsons's theory but must also understand its limitations. Parsons's pattern variables are a good starting point because they help us to understand orientations as suggested by the dialogic and generic approaches. They are, however, only a starting place. The framework reflects the intellectual times in which it was proposed. The most important aspect missing from Parsons's variables is recognition of the social construction of meaning and culture. No culture is either specific or diffuse. Shades of gray (and negotiated meaning) always exist when talking about communication and culture. Parsons's pattern variables schema was originally developed to explain variations across national cultural boundaries. Parsons's work has some "baggage," but like all intercultural concepts, his schema is useful when combined with several other cultural descriptors. Culture is too complex for any single schema to account for everything, but when paired with the work of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, intercultural relationship building can be enhanced.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's Value Orientations

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) argued that cultures find solutions to common human problems like the nature of being, the nature of action, and the nature of relationships (p. 4). They posit five problems for which all cultures must find solutions (see Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 50; Zaharna, 2001).

The first question to be answered is: "What is the character of innate human nature: good, evil, a combination of good and evil, or neutral?" The human nature orientation assumes that human nature is either changeable (mutable), or unchangeable (immutable). A nation's/culture's views regarding the basic human nature of other groups will influence decisions to make war, allocate scarce resources, provide access to social services, and shape how the police and legal system work. Views of good and evil also influence the level of trust that individuals and groups have in others. Indeed, organizations are often ascribed human characteristics

and thought of as good or evil. This question about good and evil is valuable for understanding and practicing public relations in global contexts. In many situations, public relations will be called upon to build or rebuild trust between the organization and its publics.

A second question that Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck attempt to answer is this: "What is the relation of humanity to nature and the supernatural?" The human-nature (or environment) orientation hints at the relation between humans and nature and is subcategorized into: mastery-over-nature (all forces of nature can and should be overcome or put to use by humans), harmony-with-nature (human life, nature, and the supernatural are all extensions of each other), and subjugation-to-nature (nothing can be done to control nature—fate must be accepted). Cultures that believe in mastery over nature, like the mainstream U.S. culture, will build levees or sea walls to keep out rising tides, while cultural groups that believe in harmony with nature tend to build less permanent structures, live farther inland, or simply build their dwellings on stilts to let rising tides flow past. A group's cultural orientation toward nature is instructive of the lifestyle that the nation/culture values: permanence vs. change, mastery over nature vs. harmony with it. A public relations practitioner should know this orientation in advance of any communication or relationship building efforts.

A third question posed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) inquired: "What is the temporal (time) focus of human life?" The temporal feature of human life concerns: past (cultures that highly value traditions and their ancestors), present (cultures that have no traditions or believe in fate), and future (where change is valued highly, new is better than old). Long before Hofstede (1997) explored Confucian dynamism or the long-term orientation value, scholars like Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961), and Hall (1983) were aware of the fact that cultural groups had different perceptions of time. The issue of cultural orientations toward time is important in intercultural and international public relations settings.

Not all cultures place the same value on time or see it the same way. For example, in the United States, one is raised hearing the expression "time is money." However, in other nations, entire sectors may shut down on weekdays between noon and 2 p.m. for siesta/lunch break. In many nations, no one works on Fridays (Muslim nations) or Sundays (Christian nations) with the exception of a few family-run restaurant owners. In the United States, there are 24-hour shopping, banking, and gas stations. Yet, in many nations, weekends are for families and many people will not conduct business during this time.

Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's temporal orientation is on the past, present, and future, much like Hofstede's long-term orientation. Hall identified two orientations toward time that can help to make sense of the

behaviors and actions of various cultures: monochronic and polychronic time; also called “M-time” and “P-time.”

Time as a Cultural Orientation

Monochronic time involves the North European system of doing things sequentially, one thing at a time; polychronic time, on the other hand, “stresses involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules” (Hall, 2000b, p. 280). Polychronic time places an emphasis on “doing” rather than “accomplishing.” We often hear of people from the United States “multitasking” or doing more than one thing at a time. Multitasking is similar to the polychronic orientation except that polychronic cultures do not do several things at the same time as a way to be more productive. Rather, as Hall explains:

P-time stresses involvement of people and completion of transactions rather than adherence to preset schedules. Appointments are not taken as seriously and, as a consequence, are frequently broken. P-time is treated as less tangible than M-time. For polychronic people, time is seldom experienced as “wasted,” and is apt to be considered a point rather than a ribbon or a road, but that point is often sacred. (2000b, pp. 280–281)

Like orientations toward nature, a group’s perception and valuation of time significantly influences decision making. Perceptions of time also influence individuals’ and groups’ perceptions of the importance of patience vs. quick action, as well as responsiveness via technology like the Internet and e-mail. Understanding a culture’s temporal focus is a very important feature of message design and effective intercultural communication and relationship building. Indeed, consider that crisis communication is one of the fastest growing areas of public relations practice and research. Temporal orientation will influence how organizations and publics interpret crisis responses. When a crisis response does not meet a culture’s temporal expectations, an organization’s reputation may be damaged.

The Concept of Face in Intercultural Communication

Organizations, no matter where they are from or their motive for existence, seek to project an image or reputation that is positive. The public relations function helps organizations to communicate this constructed image. Every communication tactic in a public relations program or campaign seeks to create or reinforce a certain image. For instance, a

consumer products company from Japan seeks to communicate an image showing that it is innovative and high tech. A U.S. car company seeks to communicate an image of quality and dependability. A company from China wants to project an image of safety in light of the recent quality control issues in pet food, baby milk, and children's toys. A non-governmental organization (NGO) in any nation seeks a public image that recognizes it as a positive, contributing force in society.

Images are created via Web pages, brochures, news releases, annual reports, and other communication tactics. These tactics make every effort possible to project a positive image of the company or organization. An organization's public image is known as "face" in the intercultural communication literature, and it has clear applications for public relations.

The concept of face is a metaphor that refers to such entities as politeness, respect, pride, dignity, honor, and shame (Ting-Toomey et al., 1991; Wiseman, 2002). When we speak of "face," we often talk about someone "losing face" (being embarrassed or insulted) or "maintaining face" (not being criticized publicly, not being shamed, or not being put on the spot). Everyone has a sense of face (pride, dignity) although in many cultures, like the United States, face is not something that most people consciously think about in public situations. Instead, many organizations focus on their reputation. Yet, face is a powerful concept throughout the world.

Face always functions along three dimensions and involves efforts to maintain one's own face, help others to maintain their own face, and avoid challenging someone else's face. To help another person to maintain face is actually more valued than retaining one's own face in many cultures. When we prevent another person from being embarrassed or ridiculed this both allows the person being put on the spot to maintain face, as well as helping the person who challenged the other's face to maintain her or his own face by not appearing unkind.

"Face management," and face needs vary in different cultures. Thus, in some cultures (like the mainstream United States), being perceived as clever for making a witty comment in a public situation, thereby embarrassing someone else or making him or her look foolish, is sometimes seen as being socially acceptable. In high face cultures, however, embarrassing someone else with a snide comment both makes the recipient of the comment look bad, and the person who made the comment look worse.

In global contexts, public relations would benefit from understanding the complexities of face for a myriad of stakeholders. For instance, in a crisis, the media often seek to attribute blame. Organizations may be tempted to identify individuals, groups, institutions, or even national leaders as reasons for a crisis. This short-term strategy, while perhaps an easy way to deal with the immediate attention of the crisis, may have

serious repercussions for an organization's long-term relationships with its stakeholders. Indeed, long-term attention to face could enhance reputation. Another factor that influences global public relations is context.

Context

Context may be best understood as situation, and it is a key tenet of the generic approach to global public relations mentioned earlier in this chapter. Context provides meaning and behavioral cues that guide people in how to act and react in intercultural encounters (Taylor, 2001). Hall's (2000a) work suggests that the context in which a conversation takes place will significantly influence the interpersonal/intercultural interaction. Hall identified two types of context: high and low.

High context cultures are characterized by communication that is influenced by both the situation and the relationship of the parties involved. In high context situations, much of what the participants communicate is unspoken or relationally based: people in high context cultures tend to know how to behave because of the nature of the relational roles that they play. Employees "know" what their supervisors want, partners and friends "know" or try to guess the needs of the other rather than asking them—and when they guess wrong, politeness (or face) prevents a friend, partner, or guest from telling the host. Relationships in high context societies tend to be very structured.

In low context cultures, communication is driven by what is actually spoken or written. Participants from low context cultures "say what they mean," and rely on written documents and formal agreements. When a person from a low context culture is uncertain about what someone wants, they ask. From a public relations standpoint, professionals need to understand that in high context communication settings (e.g., Asia, South America, the Middle East), indirectness and subtlety are highly regarded while in low context communication settings (e.g., North America, Australasia, Northern Europe), directness and candor are preferred.

The type of context prevalent in a culture will influence how much and what type of information is included in public relations tactics. For instance, when organizational leaders in low context cultures make mistakes, there is often pressure on them to apologize or find someone to blame. Apologies are enacted differently in each culture. For example, in 2001, a U.S. nuclear submarine, the U.S.S. *Greenville*, collided with a Japanese trawler. This accident occurred near Hawaii's Pearl Harbor and nine Japanese fishermen were killed. In U.S. mainstream culture, probably due to the litigious legal system, apologizing often means accepting responsibility for a wrongdoing. American companies and organizations avoid apologizing for fear that accepting responsibility will mean a

lawsuit. In Japan, however, apologizing is usually an honorable way for both the offended and the offender to gracefully deal with an unfortunate situation. The U.S. Navy formally apologized to the Japanese government and the families of the fishermen. Yet, as Lazare (2004) noted, the apology was too late, not perceived to be sincere, and came from a third party (not the captain of the submarine). The Japanese families did not feel that the Navy genuinely empathized with their loss. This example shows that multiple cultural lenses (apology, status, time) are used when people attempt to make sense of the actions and motives of those from another culture.

Empathy

The concept of empathy is familiar to interpersonal and intercultural communication scholars but is probably not as well understood by public relations professionals. The U.S.S. Greenville example above suggests that it is a key factor in relationship building, especially after a crisis. Empathy refers to the ability of a person to put him- or herself into the shoes of another, to see the world as the other does. Empathy, in contradistinction to sympathy, has nothing at all to do with feeling sorry for another person. Empathy and sympathy, however, often go hand-in-hand.

The ability to empathize is related to one's ability to transcend ethnocentrism. Indeed, one of the reasons that intercultural communication campaigns often fail is because of the inability of campaign planners to see the world from the perspective of the audience (Taylor, 2000). Reddy (1993) calls this "frame conflict" (mentioned earlier), and argues that our language itself is often what tricks us into thinking that everyone sees the world the same way. Public relations practitioners need to put themselves in the place of others as they engage stakeholders.

As Reddy suggests, our language and our culture actually trick us into thinking that everyone thinks about the world the same way that we do. In order to transcend our culturally programmed worldviews a new metaphor is required. Reddy argues that we need to move beyond what he calls the "conduit metaphor," the idea that language has tangible substance and fixed meaning that can be transferred to others, and embrace the "toolmakers' paradigm," or the idea that communication takes work on the part of all parties involved. When communication misunderstandings occur, many people implicitly blame the listener (as attribution theory suggests, people often ascribe internal motives to others and external motives to themselves), rather than accepting responsibility for misunderstandings or acknowledging that communication is a two-way street.

In reality, intercultural communication (indeed all communication),

requires feedback. No speaker is to blame because they have an accent any more than a listener is to blame for not speaking a particular language. Getting beyond our individual cultural baggage and assumptions and being able to see the world from the standpoint of the other (empathy) is a central component of relationship building.

Empathy does not require us to abandon our own beliefs and resort to radical relativism, pretending that all cultural practices are inherently good (see Holtzhausen's chapter in this volume). Every culture, even our own, has flaws. But being able to see the world from the standpoint of the public is a powerful communication skill and a prerequisite to effective intercultural communication and relationships. The final part of this chapter calls for a third culture building approach to enacting public relations and relationship building in global settings (see also Bardhan's chapter in this volume).

Public Relations in Global Settings: An Orientation Toward Third Culture Building

Public relations is about building, changing, and maintaining relationships. Building a relationship is not an easy task, and it is even more complicated when the public and the organization have different cultural frameworks that guide their understanding of the situation. The concept of third culture building may help us to develop a relational and dialogic approach to intercultural public relations.

Third culture was initially conceptualized in regard to children who grow up overseas (Chao, Nagano, Solidon, Luna, & Geist, 2003; Pollock & Van Reken, 2001; Useem, Donoghue, & Useem, 1963). Sociologists noted that third culture children were able to walk in two worlds, and reflect both on their own culture as well as on the culture of the country in which they had spent much of their life. These children had the potential to serve as bridges between cultures. In communication, third culture has been offered as a way of understanding how members of different groups *coconstruct* meaning. Based on a Weickian (1995) perspective of enactment, individuals and organizations impact their environment just as the environment in turns impacts the individual and the organization.² Third culture building argues that intercultural communication is not about variables and outcomes but rather intercultural communication should be thought of as interactions and processes that enable *shared* meaning construction in chaotic, unpredictable environments. Third culture takes the variable-driven frameworks of Parsons, Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck, Hall, Hofstede, and others, and then asks: "What can I pull from all of these theories (and others) to make sense of interactions and communication? How can I engage others relationally and dialogically?"

The concept of third culture, first introduced by Casmir (1978) in communication research, was explicated in 1993 in a series of articles published in *Communication Yearbook* (Belay, 1993; Casmir, 1993; Shuter, 1993) and then later extended both methodologically and theoretically by Casmir (1999). Casmir proposed third culture building as a way of moving beyond the static, etic approach to understanding intercultural communication. Casmir (1999) noted:

My own concern with developing an adequate conceptual model responsive to the challenges and processes which were identified above is based on the acceptance of communication as an ongoing negotiation of meaning. My emphasis results in seeing the dialogic nature of human communication as necessary to electively deal with chaotic systems and environments. That is the case because dialogue and negotiation deal with the study of those things we do together to make sense of any given setting. (p. 98)

Third culture building is premised on a dialogic orientation and shared meaning. Botan and Taylor (2004) have noted that public relations is moving toward such a paradigm as well. Third culture building helps to take out the manipulation of communication, and instead focuses on shared meaning construction and shared outcome. As public relations takes a turn toward cocreation of meaning in its general theory building, third culture provides a roadmap for engaging in ethical relationships with publics at home and abroad.

We believe that third culture orientation of public relations in global contexts is an appropriate synthesis of the theories and frameworks noted in this chapter. There are many cultural frameworks that are useful for helping public relations practitioners to communicate with global publics. In isolation, each framework can only provide one piece of the complex intercultural puzzle. Yet, when taken together, issues such as orientation directed toward the world, empathy, face, and context provide the background for communicators to build dialogic relationships. The frameworks and theories provided in the early part of this chapter are valuable for helping organizations communicate with diverse publics. They are most valuable when they are part of an orientation toward the needs and expectations of others. In other words, if this chapter could be summed up in one concept then this concept would be a *dialogic orientation*. Global public relations and intercultural communication in general are best achieved when the public relations practitioner takes an empathic orientation to the "other" and seeks to understand his or her motivation, values, and expectations.

Conclusion

At the heart of competence in intercultural communication is a relational and dialogic approach that moves away from traditional, managerial, top-down approaches to public relations in global cultural contexts, and moves toward understanding relationships and cultural diversity in whatever form they take. This move reflects a broader trend in public relations whereby the field is moving away from a functional view of publics and communication and, instead, is embracing a cocreational perspective in its theorizing and practice.

Students, public relations professionals, and educators, indeed, all communication professionals would benefit from first-hand experience in a number of cultures. Although most of us will never be able to gain expertise about every country and every culture, all of us can enact a dialogic orientation that will allow us to understand those cultures. However, it is equally important to understand how diverse stakeholders and publics view the world, the range of such beliefs, and how our own beliefs and ethnocentrisms lead us to see the world in incomplete ways.

The future of intercultural communication is not in knowing where a nation or culture falls on a social science dimension or scale. Rather, the future of intercultural communication competency is in the ability of practitioners to ask: "What do different theories of intercultural communication provide that will help me to make sense of interactions and communication? How can I engage others relationally and dialogically?" It is our sincere belief that a dialogic orientation is the future of international/intercultural public relations in global contexts.

Discussion Questions

1. Many people mistakenly assume that "face" is an Eastern concept and that people from more direct (low context) cultures are largely unaware of or unconcerned about face. In what ways might having a more complex understanding of face allow you to be a more effective communicator within your own culture?
2. How much does context influence how we communicate with others? For example, does the context of being "friends" versus simply "acquaintances" alter your communication? How about "student and teacher," "parent and child," "grandchild and grandparent" and "employer and employee?" What influence do such contexts have on your communication? Now explain what role context plays in public relations practice.
3. How is "talk" different from "dialogue?" When you talk with your friends, or in class, certain people often tend to dominate the conversation—maybe sometimes you are the one who dominates

a conversation. How would a dialogic conversation be different? What difference would being dialogic with your friends make, and how would it influence your conversations? Now apply this to public relations: How would the profession be different if dialogue was the prime focus of communication?

4. What is your position toward the world in light of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) value orientations: "the relation of humanity to nature" and "the temporal focus of human life"? For example, how might that influence your decision to build a golf course rather than a community garden?
5. How much does your orientation toward time (monochronic vs. polychronic) influence how you do things? What would happen if the emphasis in your classes was not on "grades" and "accomplishments" (monochronic orientation) but on doing "interaction"/"process" (or polychronic orientation)? How would the learning environment be different?
6. What are the characteristics of a public relations professional who can enact third culture building? Be specific. Identify and describe these characteristics.

Notes

1. See www.sociology.org.uk/pathway1.htm?p1pmp5b.htm for an excellent overview
2. Weick's (1995) concept of enactment is valuable for understanding how individuals and organizations create meaning through interactions and then are influenced by these interactions.

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