

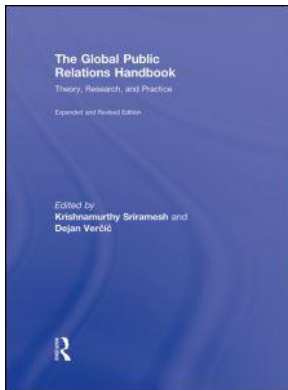
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CHAPTER 3

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND PUBLIC RELATIONS¹

KRISHNAMURTHY SRIRAMESH

INTRODUCTION

In presenting the literature review on corporate culture and public relations, we (Sriramesh, J.Grunig, Buffington, 1992) had begun our chapter by quoting Smircich's (1983, p. 339) succinct statement: "culture is an idea whose time has come." Organizational management literature had begun to accept the relevance of this concept at the dawn of the 1980s. We had contended that the time had come for the public relations body of literature to also integrate culture into its pedagogy because of the significance of this variable to human communication and relationship building.

Sadly, culture has yet to be integrated into the public relations body of knowledge. It appears that culture's time has not yet come after all for our field. Much of the literature and scholarship in our area continues to be ethnocentric with a predominantly American, and to a lesser extent British and Western European, bias even though studies have begun to explore the status of public relations in different regions of the world—especially in the past five years. In 1992, we had written: "to communicate to [with] their publics in a global marketplace, public relations practitioners will have to sensitize themselves to the cultural heterogeneity of their audiences.... The result will be the growth of a culturally richer profession" (Sriramesh and White, 1992, p. 611). Unfortunately, well into the 21st century, our hope has not yet materialized. The reality is that in a rapidly globalizing world, our field will ignore culture at its own peril. This is true of the other "environmental variables" that emanated from the Excellence project such as the political system, media system, economic system, and level of activism. We know conceptually that these variables do contribute significantly to making organizational environments around the world dynamic and challenging. It is important to recognize that there may be other variables, or local variations of the above variables, that need to be identified and integrated to the body of literature.

This chapter seeks to assess the role of one of the environmental variables, culture, on public relations. As mentioned in Chapter 1, we discuss these highly inter-related sociopolitical variables in isolation only for the sake of conceptual clarity and convenience of explanation. Each of these environmental variables influences the other. As a result, studying their relationship with public relations has not been, and will not be, an easy challenge. This chapter begins with a review of the research studies that have assessed the nexus between culture (both societal and corporate) and public relations. Next, it will offer suggestions to build on these initial attempts and give the culture

¹ Revised from the original in Toth, E. (2006) *Excellence in public relations and communication management: Challenges for the next generation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Inc. pp. 507–527.

concept the primacy it deserves in the public relations body of knowledge. In doing so, this chapter challenges public relations scholars to integrate this important variable into the public relations body of knowledge and pedagogy.

ORIGINS OF THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

One can state with a great deal of confidence that the I ABC's Excellence Project spawned research linking culture with public relations. When the Project began in 1987, culture had not yet been discussed as a determinant of public relations strategies or practice in the then fledgling body of knowledge of public relations. This was evident as there was no mention of this variable in the 1988 Body of Knowledge report commissioned by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). When public relations practitioners needed to enter a new market and interact with publics of a different culture, they often depended on anecdotal evidence to design strategies that were sensitive to the local culture. To a great extent, this continues to be the case even today because of the anemic growth of knowledge about culture and public relations.

Sriramesh and White (1992) began the literature review for the excellence project by discussing whether public relations practice is *culture-free* or *culture-specific*—terms we had borrowed from Tayeb (1988). Scholars advocating the former had argued that organizational characteristics (such as organizational structure) and their contextual factors are stable across societies. Hickson, Hinings, McMillan, and Schwitter (1974) articulated the culture-free thesis best: “[W]hether the culture is Asian or European or North American, a large organization with many employees improves efficiency by specializing their activities but also by increasing, controlling and coordinating specialties” (pp. 63–64). Scholars advocating the *culture-specific* approach (Hofstede, 1991, Tayeb, 1988, Pascale and Athos, 1981, Ouchi, 1981) have countered this argument by stating that organizations are made up of individuals who are acculturated differently at home, school, and the workplace, which makes each individual a unique personality offering different sets of opportunities and challenges to managers. Organizations, which are themselves cultures, face the challenge of harnessing these individual personalities to their mutual benefit, which is not an easy task.

There can be little doubt that organizations are culture-bound. The linkage between culture and public relations is logical and very obvious. Culture affects communication, and is affected by it. Because public relations is fundamentally a communication activity, it is logical to conclude that culture affects public relations also. Therefore there is the need to conceptually link culture with public relations. In order to do so effectively, we believed it was important to distinguish between *societal* culture (Sriramesh and White, 1992) and *corporate* culture (Sriramesh, J.Grunig, Buffington, 1992). Drawing the distinction between these two types of culture is important because public relations professionals deal with *external* and *internal* publics who are acculturated differently by society and by organizations respectively. As members of a society, external publics are imbued with cultural idiosyncracies specific to a region. Internal publics, although acculturated to the culture of the larger society, also get acculturated to certain unique characteristics that are specific to the organization within which they operate. These two types of culture influence not only the way people communicate but also how they respond to communication within the organization.

Having made this basic distinction, we began an extensive review of literature from fields such as anthropology, organizational psychology, and sociology that helped identify conceptual linkages between public relations and these two types of culture. The next two sections will offer a review of studies that have empirically analyzed the relationship between these two types of cultures and public relations thus far.

SOCIETAL CULTURE

The review of literature on societal culture conducted for the Excellence study included the four cultural dimensions that Hofstede (1984) had identified at that time: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity, and individualism/collectivism. Hofstede (1991) added a fifth dimension that he first termed Confucian dynamism but later labeled long-term orientation. A few other studies that used the conceptual framework proposed by the Excellence study later included the fifth dimension also.

We ended our literature review with two conceptual propositions that linked societal culture with public relations. The first stated: “societal cultures that display lower levels of power distance, authoritarianism, and individualism, but have higher levels of interpersonal trust among workers, are most likely to develop the excellent public relations practices identified in this book” (Sriramesh and White, 1992, p. 611). Because we had no empirical data at that time we had chosen to keep this conceptual proposition very broad. Now that we have over a decade of data, albeit from only a few countries, it is possible to rephrase this proposition or divide it into several propositions. For example, it is possible that societies with higher levels of collectivism also can develop excellent public relations practices as long as the levels of other dimensions (such as power distance) are lower. Subcultures and countercultures also play a key role in public relations. As will be discussed later, these are some of the avenues and challenges for future researchers.

The second proposition had stated: “although such occurrences are rare, organizations that exist in societal cultures that do not display these characteristics that are conducive to the spawning of excellent public relations programs also may have excellent public relations programs if the few power holders of the organization have individual personalities that foster [a more] participative organizational culture even if this culture is atypical to [the] mainstream societal culture” (Sriramesh and White, 1992, p. 612). With this proposition we wanted to highlight the fact that an organization can develop an internal culture that is different from the mainstream culture of the society in which it exists, which happens more often than one might expect.

It is important to note that the Excellence study did not attempt to gather data on the dimensions of societal culture and, therefore, did not try to empirically link these dimensions with public relations. Despite the dire need to do so, we refrained from garnering empirical data on societal culture for several reasons. The scope of data gathering for the project had already expanded—especially with the inclusion of the employee questionnaire to elicit information for determining the organizational culture of the sample that also was a critical issue. Including societal culture as another variable to be studied would have increased the project’s scope exponentially and affected the efficacy of data gathering. Further, like scores of anthropologists and Hofstede, we recognized that culture is a malleable concept that is hard to define and harder to

measure. Therefore, we thought it would be best to design individual studies that break down societal culture into manageable parts and study its impact on public relations in some depth. A few studies have done this as will be reviewed presently.

Although the Excellence study did not gather empirical evidence on the relationship between societal culture and public relations, the literature review and conceptualization based on the project have spawned several studies that have contributed to the body of knowledge. Although these studies have not been large in number, they have contributed significantly toward extending the body of knowledge beyond Anglo-Saxon cultures. In doing this, they have helped reduce, at least to some extent, the extreme ethnocentricity of the field. These studies have principally used one or more of Hofstede's dimensions of culture and attempted to link them with public relations practice.

An ethnographic analysis of southern Indian organizations was among the first studies to assess the impact of societal culture on public relations (Sriramesh, 1992). That study focused in particular on the impact of *power distance* on public relations practice. Inequality exists in all societies and there are differences in power among people of different strata in every society. Like Mulder (1977), from whom he had borrowed the concept of power distance, Hofstede (1984) viewed power distance mostly as a form of oppression by the more powerful. Whereas this may be true in many societies, there is also an implicit practice of *deference to authority* by the less powerful that is often seen in some societies. In the study in India, for example, even though the CEO of a private bank wanted to bring a more participative culture in his bank, there was more discomfort from the lower ranks because of their deference to authority (Sriramesh, 1996, pp. 188–189). However, the study also found that more than half the public relations managers agreed that employees lose respect for a manager who consults them before making decisions, signifying that managers also exhibited high levels of power distance. Interestingly, high levels of power distance also resulted in lower status accorded public relations by organizations. Societal culture was found to affect corporate culture.

In her study of public relations in South Korea, Rhee (1999) used all the five dimensions of culture that Hofstede (1984, 1991) had identified. Her data suggested that except for the masculinity/femininity dimension, the other four dimensions identified by Hofstede correlated strongly with the public relations variables identified by the Excellence study. She noted that “[Although conceptually affiliated with high power distance,... Confucianism may not be detrimental to achieving excellence in public relations” (p. 185). She reasoned that certain key characteristics of Confucianism such as the focus on harmonious living and placing high value on family morals logically linked Confucianism with excellence in public relations.

Kim (2003) used documentary analysis and personal interviews to assess the extent to which Confucian dynamism affected the global as well as domestic public relations practices of a South Korean multinational corporation. Her data revealed the organization changed its public relations strategies by region. It predominantly used the personal influence model, and to a lesser extent the mixed-motive model, in relating to domestic publics whereas it used the two-way models for its international publics. Interestingly, the corporation also reported that it employs different cultural strategies for domestic and global audiences. Its domestic public relations strategies were largely driven by Confucian culture whereas its global public relations strategies were designed to be “as rational as possible” (p. 90). In other words, societal culture had a greater bearing on its

domestic public relations strategies whereas its global strategies were driven by what the author called “pragmatism” that one could construe as cultural relativism.

As Hofstede himself admitted, his dimensions of culture do not measure the variable in its entirety and so it is important that researchers go beyond these dimensions when attempting to link culture with public relations. This has been lacking in most of the small number of studies that currently exist on culture and public relations. Conducting country-specific studies focusing only on culture will greatly help unearth these nuances. In our analysis of public relations in Japan (Sriramesh and Takasaki, 2000), we found that the concept of *wa* (harmony) had a significant impact on public relations practice. Superior-subordinate relationships in Japanese organizations were influenced by the concept of *amae* (the desire to depend on another’s goodness) where the manager attempts to satisfy the *amae* of subordinates who in turn reciprocate the gesture by remaining loyal. *Amae*, we argued, contributes to a strong corporate culture, which directly influences an organization’s internal and external communication. We also found that *tataeme* (the public persona and behavior of an individual) and *honne* (the private self) play a crucial role in the way the Japanese communicate. The Japanese are reluctant to express disagreement publicly (practicing *tataeme*) because of the fear that it may destroy *wa* (social harmony). Instead, they prefer to engage in communication in informal and social settings (such as in a bar or restaurant) to build stable relationships, thus practicing *honne*.

The concept of *guanxi*, a uniquely Chinese cultural characteristic, is among the more widely discussed cultural dimensions (Chen, 1996, Kipnis, 1997, Tan, 2000, Huang, 2001, Aw, Tan, and Tan, 2002, Hung, 2003.). *Guanxi* appears to be the Chinese manifestation of the personal influence model of public relations. Like the personal influence model, *guanxi* involves building interpersonal relationships with strategic individuals such as journalists and government officials often by doing favors for them. Such relationship building helps open the “gates” so that when needed, these individuals can be relied upon to return the favor whether it be by publishing a news story or approving a government license.

In an analysis of public relations in three Asian cultures, we (Sriramesh, Kim and Takasaki, 1999) exhorted scholars to build a global theory of public relations by taking into account the *native’s point of view* on how public relations is practiced within different political, economic, and cultural contexts. We had hoped that our three-nation comparison would be “the harbinger of many more such attempts because finding the uniqueness in public relations practices of a country is as important as finding commonalities among different countries” (p. 289). However, as will be dealt with at some length later in this chapter, there have been very few studies that specifically evaluate the relationship between societal culture and public relations. Further, to the best of the knowledge of this author, there appear to be no studies on this topic from Latin America, Central America, Africa, the Caribbean, or Eastern Europe—at least they do not exist in English.

In one of the few non-Asian studies that have linked societal culture with public relations, Vercic, L.Grunig and J.Grunig (1996) used the first four of Hofstede’s dimensions and interpersonal trust (Tayeb, 1988), to assess the impact of Slovenian culture on public relations. They gathered data through “lengthy personal interviews” with three executives of Pristop Communications, the leading public relations agency in

Slovenia. The authors discovered that the interviewees often disagreed among themselves about basic Slovenian cultural idiosyncracies. The authors attributed these disagreements to factors such as the difficulty of describing one's own culture, the rapid changes that the Slovenian society had been undergoing after becoming an independent nation in 1990, and the varying changes that each of the interviewees had experienced personally because of these rapid post-independence socio-political changes.

This is further evidence that it is very challenging to measure culture. Verčič et al. summarized one of the key findings of their study: "whereas Sriramesh and White's (1992) propositions suggest that societal culture shapes public relations...[the Slovenian data] suggested that a professional public relations culture may loosen the grip of societal culture on practitioners, freeing them to help transform that larger culture" (pp. 55–56). This is a significant finding and one that is of great importance to the field because the impact of public relations in shaping societal culture has yet to be explored although it should be a significant area of research in the era of globalization where public relations professionals may be accused of cultural imperialism when they communicate with foreign markets on behalf of multinational corporations.

Vasquez and Taylor (2000) studied the relationship between Hofstede's four dimensions and the models of public relations by surveying 134 members of a Mid-Western city's PRSA chapter in the United States. They found that the power distance perceived by respondents was low and concluded that "American practitioners in this study were not working under heavily controlled or authoritative management" (p. 443). However, the authors seemed perplexed that their respondents preferred the one-way models which led them to ask: "Do public relations professionals practice one-way models because their organizations force them to?" (p. 443). Relying on their data, the authors affirmed that "the answer would have to be no" (p. 443). What the authors seem to have overlooked in this seeming contradiction is the fact that authoritarian corporate cultures can, and do, exist in egalitarian societal cultures (Sriramesh, J.Grunig, and Buffington, 1992, Sriramesh, J.Grunig, and Dozier, 1996). Therefore, in a relatively egalitarian societal culture such as the United States, it is easy to find many organizations with varying degrees of authoritarian corporate cultures. Many studies have repeatedly stressed that it is often the case that public relations managers do not set communication policies, which is often the primary reason why they have no control over the public relations strategies they employ.

It is clear from the above review that even though it is a small body of literature, much of the literature linking culture with public relations emanates from studies conducted in Asia. A significant gap exists as there are few studies in English that have linked societal culture and public relations in Latin America, the Caribbean, or Africa. These are serious deficiencies that need to be addressed by the global community of scholars if the public relations body of knowledge is to become holistic and comprehensive.

CORPORATE CULTURE AND PUBLIC RELATIONS:

In 1986, Downey remarked that "[A] great deal has been written of late about corporate culture." The author contended that the term had become a buzzword and that this increased attention had created "armies of corporate culture vultures" (p. 7). He posited that corporate culture "is the consequence of corporate identity" (p. 7). One would have

to take serious issue with the author that corporate culture had become an “overused” term in 1986! In the 1980s, management scholars had just begun to discuss it as an important variable affecting organizational processes. More than two decades since Downey made that comment, the public relations body of knowledge has yet to fully identify the relationship between public relations and corporate culture!

Notwithstanding Downey’s comment, the term corporate culture was very new to the public relations field in 1987. Based on the literature review for the Excellence study, Sriramesh, J.Grunig, and Buffington (1992) had made three propositions that conceptually linked public relations with corporate culture. They had largely relied on the work of scholars such as Ouchi (1981) and Pascale and Athos (1981) to identify two principal dimensions of organizational culture that were termed *authoritarian* and *participative* (Sriramesh, J.Grunig, and Dozier, 1996). The data from the Excellence project attempting to link organizational culture with public relations led to the following conclusion reported by L.Grunig, J.Grunig, and Dozier (2002):

“[Participative culture is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for excellent public relations. An authoritarian culture does not make excellent public relations impossible because it does not correlate negatively with the Excellence factor. At the same time, a participative culture provides a more supportive, nurturing environment for excellent public relations than does an authoritarian culture. Nevertheless, a participative culture does not produce an excellent public relations department unless that department possesses the knowledge and skills to practice public relations symmetrically (p. 496).

One of the conclusions of the Excellence study was that public relations practitioners would find it easier to conduct strategic public relations in participatory rather than authoritarian cultures.

Cameron and McCollum (1993) also assessed the linkage between public relations and organizational culture. They used personal interviews and a survey to assess the link between the efficacy of internal communication and shared beliefs among managers and employees. They posited that “consensus between employees and management at the level of constructs, ideals, and beliefs is both a product and facilitator of communication between management and employees” (p. 244). Their data suggested that employees are more receptive to communication initiated by management when they perceive that they and organizational managers share similar beliefs about the organization’s mission. The authors extrapolated from these findings that public relations practitioners should facilitate greater two-way communication between management and employees that would ultimately result in a stronger corporate culture.

L.Grunig’s (1995) critique of the corporate culture of the U.S. Department of State based on her analysis of a sex discrimination class-action suit by women in the foreign service is a good example of a different genre of research on corporate culture. Instead of measuring indicators of corporate culture as is typical of corporate culture studies, she used “primary and secondary sources to...look at the subcultures that may exist within the larger organizational context” (p. 139). She found that organizational leaders, formal

written codes, and the court order had all wanted, or required, the State Department to cease all sex discrimination. However, these seemingly powerful forces appeared to have consistently been over-ruled by “a grimly determined counterculture” that sought to “undermine significantly the emancipatory efforts of organizational management and the court” (p. 157).

Save for the above studies, one cannot find published information of empirical research that has specifically linked corporate culture with public relations. Everett’s (1990) essay, while reaffirming some of the conceptualization of the Excellence study (both essays seem to have been prepared around the same time even though published at different dates), also offered a deeper understanding of the relationship between ethnoecology and public relations. Everett saw organizations as socio-cultural systems just as we (Sriramesh and White, 1992) had done. The significance of Everett’s contribution is in the way he logically linked organizations with ethnoecology. Stating that “the view of organizations as sociocultural systems places such concepts squarely in the domain of organizational ethnography,” the author contended that “it is this relationship that is best explored using the theoretical features and methodological tools of ethnoecology” (p. 248). He concluded that “an adequate understanding of organizational adaptation [with its environment] necessarily requires an account of interactions of the organizational culture and the organizational environment” (p. 248). It is pertinent to note here that organizational ethnography, a critical tool, has not been the preferred methodology for even a handful of studies in our field.

A few other studies have made references to the direct or indirect linkage between corporate culture and public relations or communication in organizations. Reber and Cameron (2003) mentioned corporate culture as a determinant of public relations and noted that “organizational characteristics...[such as] harmony among staff...” contribute to the willingness among organizations to enter into dialogue with their stakeholders. However, these authors did not gather empirical evidence on specific indicators of corporate culture, as it was not the primary focus of their study. Although Negandhi and Robey (1977) were not studying the impact of corporate culture on public relations, their remark—that studies focusing on the importance of multinational corporations to economic development have limited efficacy in increasing our understanding of organizational behavior in multicultural settings—is pertinent to our field. The authors posited that researchers should focus also on specific management practices in individual firms (that often reflect corporate culture), which have a greater impact in increasing our insight into effective management practices globally.

The preceding review of literature on societal and corporate culture educates us primarily about how much we do not know about the link between public relations and these two concepts. In keeping with the continued effort of this volume to push public relations scholarship to study the linkage between public relations and culture (and other environmental variables) more closely, the next section explores avenues for future research in this area. Given that most of the chapters were unable to find empirical evidence linking culture with public relations, this chapter challenges the scholarly community to give culture the attention it deserves or neglect it at our own peril.

THE FUTURE

Robust theories generate intellectual debates and provide avenues for further research thereby advancing the body of knowledge. As arguably the largest and most influential research project in the field of public relations, one can state with a great deal of confidence that the Excellence study has certainly achieved both of these lofty goals vis-à-vis culture and public relations. Among other things, it provided the field the conceptual linkage between public relations and socio-political variables (environmental variables) of which culture is a significant one. In addition, the study provided empirical data on the linkage between public relations and two dimensions of corporate culture—authoritarian and participative. Finally, it also provided the conceptual foundation for many studies that have contributed to the advancing of the field by gathering empirical data from different parts of the world on the relationship between culture and public relations.

However, as the preceding review clearly shows, we are far from making definitive, and predictive, linkages between the each of the environmental variables and public relations based on empirical evidence. Predictive ability is the most significant contribution scholarship can make to practice—if a practitioner is able to predict with some uncertainty which strategies and techniques may work in a given culture based on the body of knowledge, it helps build bridges between the two. However, even though culture is the most researched of these environmental variables, in reality, we have barely touched the surface of the impact of culture on public relations based on data from a variety of nations and cultures from all parts of the globe. The next section provides some avenues for future research pertaining to culture and public relations.

Expanding the Dimensions of Societal Culture

Hofstede (1984) himself admitted that his seminal study had serious limitations because culture, being malleable, was hard to define and even harder to measure. Defining culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another” (p. 21), the author admitted that the dimensions of culture that he had identified were not comprehensive but only ones that he was able to measure (in fact it took him almost 15 years to add the fifth dimension to the original four). Scholars who have tried to link societal culture with public relations have almost exclusively relied on Hofstede’s dimensions. This is partly because of the lucidity with which he described and operationalized these constructs. But it is also because of the ease of replicating his reliable and valid survey instrument.

As useful as all these studies have been in advancing our body of knowledge, it would not be an exaggeration to state that there is a dire need to explore other cultural dimensions that often may be unique to a society, and then explore their relationship with public relations as we had done in the study in Japan (Sriramesh and Takasaki, 2000). Whereas Hofstede sought to study cultural dimensions that were common across cultures, we should not overlook the importance of cultural characteristics that are often unique to a single culture and determine its linkage with public relations. It is pertinent to note here that although he recognized that the corporation he studied had “a distinct corporate identity—a company subculture...” for the most part he presented his data as

representing the societal culture of the managers from the 39 countries he studied. His study has often been the target of valid criticism that it did not recognize the impact of the corporate culture of the organization. It is important to note in this context that quantitative methods have their own limitations in studying culture, which is why many ethnographers have relied almost exclusively on qualitative methods (Mishler, 1986). This is also why Everett's (1990) advocacy of organizational ethnoecology is pertinent and useful to our field.

The concepts of *guanxi* and *mianzi* from Chinese culture are good examples of successful efforts to expand the number of societal cultural dimensions that affect public relations. As mentioned earlier, the concept of *guanxi* has been mentioned by several scholars as affecting public relations in Chinese cultures. However, the depth of this concept as well as the manifestation of the concept vis-à-vis public relations, has not yet been fully explored. For example, Huang (2000) offered *Gao guanxi*, which represents the use of personal relations or human networks for personal gain as a cultural extension of *guanxi* in Chinese societies. But its presence and any variations in manifestation have not yet been widely studied by other scholars. This is the case with *mianzi* (face) also, which has yet to be deeply studied and integrated into public relations pedagogy even though it is very relevant in many Asian cultures. Even some studies conducted in Chinese societies often merely refer to these concepts as influencing communication without empirically testing their presence and manifestation. Many, however, take the easy route and indicate these cultural constructs as areas that should be studied in "future research." For example, Lee (2004) studied corporate image in a *Chinese-based context* (emphasis added) and yet did not assess the link between culture and corporate image. Instead, the author suggested *mianzi* and *guanxi* as avenues for future research!

The concepts of *wa*, *amae*, *tatamae*, and *honne* have added to our expanding knowledge of Japanese culture and its impact on public relations (Sriramesh and Takasaki, 2000). However, we have yet to explore the relationship between public relations and concepts such as *onjoshugi* (managerial paternalism) discussed by Raz (2002). The author mentioned *katachi de hairu* or "entering self-fulfilment through the rules" as one of the ways Japanese employees (*kobun*) define their relationship with the organization. Yoshikawa (1993) discussed the intermediated communication pattern that Japanese often have used to bring credibility to interpersonal communication. Sometimes, even an introductory letter from a third person who knows the principals serves the purpose of breaking the ice between two people and gets the communication underway. The business card (*meishi*) also serves a similar, important, role. We have yet to study individual societal cultures deeply enough to bring out the impact of such unique dimensions on public relations.

Interpersonal Trust

Although in the literature review for the Excellence project Sriramesh and White (1992) identified interpersonal trust as a key dimension of societal culture and one that has a great influence on public relations practice, only one study (Verčič, J.Grunig, and L.Grunig, 1996) has so far studied the impact of this dimension on public relations. In

fact, the significance of interpersonal communication on public relations activities is one of the most important, yet least studied, linkages in the public relations body of knowledge.

In the early 1990s, the “personal influence model” was introduced as a potential fifth model of public relations extending the original four models proposed by Grunig and Hunt (1984). Although studies in three diverse cultures (Sriramesh, 1988, Huang, 1990, Lyra, 1991) initially confirmed the presence of this model and studies from other countries have done so since then, there is clearly a dearth of research that assesses the different ways in which culture affects the interpersonal relationships that the personal influence model describes—in both public relations strategy and practice. Personal influence has been studied by other allied disciplines such as mass communication since the mid-1950s (Sriramesh, forthcoming). Trust is a key ingredient that gives credibility to a source in any communication. Interpersonal trust, then, should take primacy in the way public relations practitioners practice the personal influence model in building relationships with key stakeholders. There can be little doubt that the strategies of developing and maintaining interpersonal trust are culture-specific. Yet, the body of knowledge of public relations has yet to study the linkage between culture, interpersonal trust, and public relations.

Relationship Patterns

The notion of relationship building is related to interpersonal trust although this linkage has not yet been recognized in the literature. Scholars (Hon and Grunig, 1999, Ledingham and Bruning, 2000, Huang, 2001, Hung, 2003) have proposed relationship management as one of the key activities of public relations practitioners. Hon and Grunig offered six relationship outcomes and suggested ways of measuring them: trust, control mutuality, relationship commitment, relationship satisfaction, communal relationships, and exchange relationships. However, culture, although fundamental to any relationship building effort (including all the six outcomes listed by Hon and Grunig), has yet to be integrated into the discussion of relationship building.

Hung’s (2003) is among only two empirical studies that have attempted to integrate culture and relationship building. She found that Chinese cultural characteristics such as family orientation, relational orientation (role formalization, relational interdependence, face, favor, relational harmony, relational fatalism, and relational determination) influenced the relationship cultivation strategies of a sample of multinational companies operating in China. Based on her empirical data from an earlier study (Huang, 1997), Huang (2001) added *face and favor* as a fifth relationship dimension, which is laudable. However, the impact of culture on the other four dimensions has yet to be established empirically even though conceptually it appears very logical that such a relationship should exist.

Further, it is also important to assess the cross-cultural nature of relationship building as we live in an increasingly globalizing world. F.Kluckhohn (1953) identified three relationship patterns. She stated that the *individual* pattern is typical of Western cultures where the existence of nuclear families ensures that an individual’s relationship within the family is limited in scope and intensity. The *collateral* pattern represents cultures where the family sphere is wider than that of a nuclear family (to include grandparents,

uncles, cousins, etc.) and the intensity of relationship is also greater than the individual pattern. The *linear* pattern is indicative of an even wider circle of family members to include distant relatives that may often include the tribe or clan. Future studies should assess the impact that acculturation into one of these patterns has on the way organizational decision makers and public relations practitioners of different cultures manage their relationships with key publics on behalf of the organization.

High and Low Context Cultures

Hall was among the first to identify the differences between high and low context cultures. Despite its importance to success in communication, the relationship between high and low context in culture remains one of the under-researched concepts in public relations. There is a need to assess how context affects interpersonal communication and relationship building, which is crucial to the success of public relations outreach with external publics. Further, context must affect organizational communication internally (perhaps as an indicator of the corporate culture of an organization) and therefore also needs to be studied. Myths, stories, rights, and rituals, are all discussed as ingredients of corporate culture. These also provide the context for internal communication in organizations and therefore need to be studied and integrated into public relations pedagogy.

Finally, we also need to keep in mind that culture affects, and is affected by, other environmental factors such as political system, economic system and level of development, media system, and activism. This relationship is yet to be empirically established and incorporated into the public relations body of knowledge. For example, the spiral of silence theory, which is influenced by the political system of a society, invariably affects the level of openness and communication patterns of individuals of a culture. These are as yet unexplored and certainly not integrated into the body of knowledge despite their relevance and importance.

CONCLUSION

As noted in Chapter 1, Freedom House called the 20th century *Democracy's Century*. It is no coincidence that modern public relations flourished concomitantly with political pluralism in the 20th century. Yet, we have yet to empirically link political systems with public relations practice based on data from different parts of the world. For example, in a study of organizations in Shanghai we found the impact of political ideology on public relations in the form of the *lun zi pai bei* system (Sriramesh and Enxi, 2004). Because those Chinese who are now in their 50s grew up during the cultural revolution when many did not have access to higher education, the Chinese government has an affirmative program that actively promotes employees based on seniority (measured in the number of years one has worked in an organization) rather than on professional qualifications or suitability for the position. As a result, we found instances where the public relations managers of some government agencies had previously been steel mill workers, school teachers, and even chefs!

If the 20th century was Democracy's Century, the 21st century has exploded as the Century of Globalization. In such an environment, where peoples of various cultures are

becoming ever more interdependent, it is sad and alarming that the concept of culture is being treated almost as an afterthought in many disciplines including public relations. For example, the *Journal of Public Relations Research*, arguably the premier journal oriented to empirical research in our field, welcomed the new millennium by publishing a special issue titled “Public Relations **Values** [emphasis added] in the New Millennium.” The thoughtful essays in that volume, from the leading scholars of our field, discussed the values of the profession because “professions are based on values and a body of knowledge to teach and enhance values” (Toth and Pavlik, 2000, p. 1). Even though values of every profession are steeped in culture, only one of these essays made a mention of culture, albeit briefly, to argue that “[individualistic] Anglo cultures need symmetrical public relations even more than organizations in collective cultures” (J.Grunig, 2000, p. 39).

The other essays in this special issue very articulately discussed the importance of activist values (Dozier and Lauzen, 2000), feminist values (L.Grunig, Toth, and Hon, 2000), rhetorical values (Heath, 2000), and postmodernist values (Holtzhausen, 2000). It is an indication of how culture’s time has not yet come in our field that all these discussions seem to have been presented almost completely devoid of any discussion of the impact of culture even though concepts such as values and ethics are so deeply rooted in culture as are all human beings. All the rhetorical theories currently discussed in public relations literature are based in Western philosophy even though Indian and Chinese culture, for example, have a more ancient history that includes rhetorical principles. Public relations scholars, especially from other parts of the world such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean, most of which have longer histories of human habitation, should take it up as a challenge to integrate the cultural values of their societies into the public relations body of knowledge and help expand it. This appears to be the only way of reducing the extreme ethnocentricity that exists in the current body of knowledge of public relations. It is hoped that many of the chapters of this volume contribute to increasing our understanding of the cultures from around the world and are harbingers of even greater awareness and research.

Culture (or multiculturalism) is almost an afterthought in most public relations books and textbooks. The challenge before us is to conduct public relations research studies indigenous to other parts and cultures of the world such as Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. This is the only way of reducing the ethnocentricity of the body of knowledge thus making it more culturally diverse and holistic. Students who receive training in such a holistic system would truly be “global citizens,” which is what it will take for them to succeed in, and be effective contributors to, a global and culturally integrated world.

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