

Negotiating Disciplines: A Model of Integrative Public Relations from a Conflict-Resolution Perspective

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Keywords

integrative public relations, conflict management, integrative negotiation, win-win

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Abstract

This paper investigates potential cross-fertilizations of public relations and conflict management. We first address criticisms of the two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory in the field of public relations in order to highlight how concepts borrowed from negotiation and conflict management scholarship can remedy those concerns. Ultimately, we theorize an integrative public relations model that outlines a conflict-resolution perspective of public relations. Multiple scenarios and contexts in which this model might be applied include: contexts where high value is placed on long-term relationships; processes characterized by repeated, serial exchanges of information and communications between contending parties; conflict scenarios characterized by multiple issues entangled in strongly complex ways; situations where minimal power asymmetry exists between an organization and its publics; contexts characterized by openness to information sharing and exchange; and contexts where a high importance is placed on trust. Finally, a case illustrates how integrative public relations can be leveraged. We conclude with our model's implications for public relations and conflict management.

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Scholars and practitioners often perceive public relations (PR) and negotiation/conflict management (N/CM) as belonging to distinct academic disciplines. The former is grouped with “communication studies” and the latter with “public management studies” due primarily to those fields’ separate developments (Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2006). In both theory and practice, however, both fields emphasize different aspects of similar and, at times, identical modes of discourse.

Analyzing the content and citation networks of articles published in *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research (NCRM)* between 2008 and 2017, Gross et al. (2019) revealed the ten most frequently used keywords in that publication, in descending order of frequency (Table 1): *negotiation, conflict, culture, emotion, gender, mediation, conflict management, groups, power, and trust* (p. 7).

Table 1

Ten Most Frequently Used Keywords in NCRM's First Decade of Articles

Rank	Keyword	% of Articles
1	Negotiation	35.9
2	Conflict	12.5
3	Culture	9.2
4	Emotion	8.7
5	Gender	8.2
6	Mediation	7.6
7	Conflict management	7.6
8	Groups	6.5
9	Power	6.0
10	Trust	5.4

Note. From “NCRM’s first decade: An empirical examination,” by M. A. Gross, E. J. Neuman, W. L. Adair, and M. Wallace, 2019, *Negotiation and Conflict Management Research*, 12(1), p. 7.

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Many of those keywords overlap with keywords commonly found in public relations literature (Gross et al., 2019; Ki et al., 2019). Accordingly, Murphy (1991), Plowman (1998, 2005), and Christen (2004) contended that negotiation/conflict management studies and public relations scholarship could cross-fertilize if they acknowledged common ground. Borrowing from game theory, Murphy explicated symmetrical and asymmetrical communication in order to propose a mixed-motive approach (1991). Following Murphy’s work (1991), Plowman (1998) defined conflict as “the notion of perceived incompatibilities” (p. 239) and claimed that conflict management is a public relations activity since public relations deals with stakeholders’ differing requests and desires. Plowman et al. (2001) further identified nine conflict resolution strategies in public relations, including contentious, mediated, and cooperative strategies. Christen’s (2004) work also pioneered the cross-fertilization of public relations and conflict resolution by emphasizing the importance of power and trust. Additionally, Huang and Bedford (2009) narrowed the scope to crisis communication (in public relations) and conflict styles (in negotiation and conflict management) in order to bridge the conceptual gaps that exist between them. Despite these conceptual advances that have helped bridge the two disciplines, specific guidelines for carrying out conflict resolution principles remain underexplored.

Consequently, we develop a conflict resolution perspective of public relations and use this paper to theorize the concept of “integrative public relations” as well as its implications for negotiation/conflict management and public relations. Here, we specifically advance the theoretical construction of public

relations models from a conflict resolution perspective in order to go beyond traditional managerial, rhetorical, and critical approaches and situate the study of public relations at a higher interdisciplinary level. Moreover, we aim to extend Murphy's (1991) and Plowman's (1998) work by enriching practical and operational knowledge and introducing integrative negotiation concepts involving conflict resolution and operational guidelines. We discuss several necessary conditions for integrative public relations. Finally, we illustrate the practice of integrative public relations using a case and conclude with our model's implications for negotiation/conflict management.

Conflict Management and Public Relations

In the 1960s, Galtung (1969) proposed the ABC triangle of conflict comprising three components: attitude, behavior, and contradiction. Attitude refers to positive and negative emotions contending parties have towards each other; behavior indicates physical or verbal performance during the conflict; and contradiction refers to the "incompatible goals" that often arise in conflict situations (Galtung & Fischer, 2013; Ramsbotham, 2011).

Tracing the impact of the conflict triangle model, Ramsbotham (2011) identified subjective, objective, and structural paradigms of conflict management research. Influenced by psychological science, the subjective paradigm emphasizes approaches that attempt to change the attitude of contending parties from confrontation to cooperation. The objective paradigm, influenced by game theory, focuses on maximization of rational outcomes for each party through negotiation or mediation. The structural paradigm explores the social, political, or cultural structures underlying incompatible goals and posits that such disclosure can lead to conflict transformation and resolution.

Following the emergence of conflict negotiation as a field of study, public relations emerged as an academic field somewhat later, in the late 1970s. By the early 2000s, it had more or less matured into a distinct discipline (Hu et al., 2015). First dominated by systems theory, the field of public relations scholarship was later characterized by multiple competing models, such as management theory (Dozier et al., 1995), rhetorical theory (Heath et al., 2009), and other critical approaches (Pavlik, 1987). Management theory views the primary role of public relations as organizational communication management as well as management of an organization's relationships with public constituents. Rhetorical theory views public relations as a symbolic activity of organizations that consists of communications delivered to public constituents. A more critical perspective idealizes public relations as an activity that serves the interests of constituents (Fitch et al., 2016; Toth & L. A. Grunig, 1993) whose well-being is often undermined by organizational actions.

Taken as a whole, scholarship on conflict management and public relations demonstrates common themes. First, both fields purport to harmonize interests of contending parties (Bercovitch et al., 2008) and build stable, quality relationships over time among them (Plowman et al., 2001). In conflict management, conflict has been regarded as a pervasive aspect of human relationships and communication (Fisher et al., 2011; Kuhn & Poole, 2000). More specifically, conflict and harmony constitute one of the many pairs of opposing tendencies that also characterize organizations. Negotiation then is viewed as a decision-making and joint problem-solving process (Plowman, 2005) framed by numerous practical guidelines that organizations can internalize and operationalize. Likewise, as Heath (2001) noted, public relations is a "relationship-building professional activity that adds value to organizations because it increases the willingness of markets, audiences, and publics to support rather than to oppose their actions" (p. 8). Similarly, adopting the perspective of global public relations, L. A. Grunig et al. (1998) held that public relations practitioners increase organizational effectiveness by helping to build stable, quality relationships over time via conflict management.

Second, both fields emphasize the ethical management of diverse interests and conflicts among contending parties (J. E. Grunig, 1992). For example, public relations theory considers practitioners to be

caretakers of corporate social responsibility for organizations (J. E. Grunig, 1992) who should strive toward an ideal of good corporate citizenship. In the field of conflict management, Lewicki et al. (2011) emphasized the importance of the power-with rather than power-over approach. Both perspectives stress the ethical dimension of professional practice.

Third, public relations and conflict management both emphasize different strategies for dealing with diverse interests and conflicts under different political or cultural contexts (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011; Fitch et al., 2016). Both disciplines emphasize the critical implications of contingency theory (Pang et al., 2010) and integrative solutions (Fisher et al., 2011).

Fourth, both disciplines purport to facilitate effective communication between contending parties and/or across the organizational/stakeholder divide, though public relations, more so than conflict management, tends to emphasize its boundary-spanning role and its ability to interweave an organization's internal and external publics (Huang, 2008). For example, J. E. Grunig (1992) claimed that public relations practitioners span organizational boundaries and perform strategic communication-management duties. On the other hand, negotiation and conflict management scholars do not particularly focus on organizations. A typical negotiation consists of the following characteristics: 1) it involves at least two parties; 2) the parties perceive some kind of conflict; 3) the parties have both diverging and shared interests; 4) the parties aim to achieve an agreement via communication (Baarveld et al., 2015).

Fifth and finally, both disciplines have been subject to similar criticisms. There is yet no consensus over the feasibility, sustainability, or utility of best practices in public relations and mutual-gain approaches in conflict management. Moreover, doubts exist as to whether either field's various models are applicable across different contexts and cultures (Cancel et al., 1997; Thompson et al., 2010).

Identifying synergies between the two fields could mutually enhance the overall effectiveness of their respective models (Babbitt & Hampson, 2011; Oetzel & Ting-Toomey, 2013; Plowman et al., 2001). First, public relations can inform negotiation and conflict management with theories of symbolic interaction and dialogic communication that are critical to the maintenance of stakeholder relationships and conflict resolution.

Second, public relations research can shed light on negotiation and conflict management from an organizational perspective insofar as it systematically investigates the interrelations of an organization's broader relational network. Namely, public relations offers to negotiation and conflict management the idea that organizations are not only sites of constantly contested communicative values and relationships but ought to be regarded as the outgrowth, in institutional form, of "intertwined internal and external communication processes" that constitute the fundamental activity of organizations (Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013, p. 283).

In turn, negotiation/conflict management research provides a foundation for defining, operationalizing, and evaluating a best-fit model of public relations. Of the various approaches to studying conflict management, integrative strategy is often judged the most advantageous conflict management style across various negotiation contexts because it reflects a continuous process of interaction and focuses on non-coercive, win-win solutions (Fisher et al., 2011). In particular, Thompson (1998) defined "integrative negotiation" as "both a process and an outcome of negotiation. Parties to negotiation may engage in behaviors designed to integrate their interests, but there is no guarantee they will reach integrative outcomes. An integrative agreement is a negotiated outcome that leaves no resource unutilized" (p. 47). Public relations would benefit from a better understanding of the utility of conflict negotiation in general, and integrative negotiation in particular.

Theoretical Perspectives for Determining Best Practices in Public Relations

Utilizing bibliometric analysis, Ki et al. (2019) identified Excellence theory as the predominant topic in public relations journals over the past four decades. Excellence theory developed out of pioneering work on relationship management (Huang, 2001), which accounts for Excellence theory's strong emphasis on dynamic equilibrium, responsibility, and interdependence. More importantly, both Excellence theory and relationship management developed from the perspective of two-way symmetrical communication. Therefore, our analysis of two-way symmetrical communication scholarship necessarily entails an analysis of subsequent work on Excellence theory and relationship management.

Below, we review the two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory in order to delineate the outstanding issues or problems that they raise. We highlight issues that require resolution across existing theories before delineating key characteristics of integrative negotiation in theories of conflict resolution and negotiation, with special emphasis on how they illuminate the theorization of our integrative public relations model.

Two-way Symmetrical Communication Model and Excellence Theory

Public relations scholarship began to focus in the 1990s on the need for two-way symmetrical communication between organizations and their constituencies (J. E. Grunig, 1992). J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) defined symmetrical communication as communication that is receptive to response. Holism, interdependence, open systems, dynamic equilibrium, equality, autonomy, innovation, and responsibility are all key concepts underlying the symmetrical worldview (J. E. Grunig, 1992). Following the definition of these key principles of two-way symmetrical communication, relationship management (i.e., organization-public relationships, OPRs) became a primary public relations research focus, generating the now widely accepted insight that relationship quality is a key communication outcome (Huang, 2001).

Symmetrical communication, however, was not without its critics. Cancel et al. (1997) critiqued the two-way symmetrical communication model's failure to capture the fluidity and complexity of public relations in the field. Other critics have made similar claims that symmetrical communication is too utopian to be practiced in the real world (Stokes & Rubin, 2010). Murphy (1991) held that symmetrical communication is hard to find in practice and likened the two-way symmetrical communication model to a model of pure cooperation in game theory. Implicit in these criticisms is the claim that both the two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory should make more room for contingency in order to maintain their practical relevance.

Contingency Theory

Cancel et al. (1997) developed contingency theory out of the claim that public relations practice can be described along a continuum from "pure advocacy" to "pure accommodation" (p. 37). Contingency theory identified 87 contingency variables grouped under two clusters: external (such as threats, industry environment, the external public, and issue in question) and internal (specific characteristics of corporations, public relations departments, dominant coalitions, and individuals).

Moreover, contingency theory (Cancel et al., 1999) categorized predisposing variables and situational variables in order to determine the feasibility and utility of different approaches as well as the match between a situation and the corresponding organizational response along the continuum of "pure advocacy" and "pure accommodation." Predisposing variables include "corporation business exposure, public relations access to dominant coalition, dominant coalition's decision power and enlightenment, corporation size, and

individual characteristics of involved persons” (p. 189), whereas situational variables exert their effects in communication between organizations and publics. Situational variables include “urgency of situation, characteristics of external public’s claims or requests, characteristics of external public, potential or obvious threats, and potential cost or benefit for a corporation from choosing various stances” (p. 189).

Synthesis

In summary, public relations seeks to reconcile various conflicting interests, values, needs, and wants between and among contending organizations and stakeholders to achieve mutually agreeable solutions that build and maintain long-term, trusting organization-public relationships. The two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory assume a symmetrical worldview in public relations practice. Contingency theory was subsequently developed in response to critics of the two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory who rejected what they viewed as idealized models of public relations.

The following section theorizes “integrative public relations” in response to criticisms of the two-way symmetrical communication and Excellence theory. We argue for conflict resolution and negotiation in general and integrative negotiation in particular as practices crucial for defining, facilitating, and evaluating integrative public relations.

Theorizing Integrative Public Relations via Integrative Negotiation

This section theorizes integrative public relations from a conflict resolution perspective. We consult Thompson’s definitions of “integrative negotiation” (1998, p. 47) and J. E. Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) definition of public relations and define “integrative public relations” as “both a process and an outcome of public relations. Parties, i.e., organizations and publics, may engage in behaviors designed to integrate their interests. An integrative agreement is a negotiated outcome that leaves no resource unutilized.” Our definition of “integrative public relations” as both a process and an outcome reflects a continuous process of interaction and a focus on non-coercive, win-win solutions. An integrative agreement is a negotiated outcome that “leaves no resource unutilized” (Thompson, 1998, p. 47). In other words, integrative public relations, from the perspective of cost reduction rather than revenue generation, is the embodiment of integrative negotiation/conflict management in the context of public relations.

Scholars of conflict resolution have suggested that all bargaining, particularly that involving cross-situational conflict, is properly thought of as integrative because integrative strategies maximize benefit for all parties (Fisher et al., 2011). For this reason, we advocate for the use of integrative public relations capable of maximizing benefit for both organizations and their stakeholders.

In this section, we explicate the extent to which integrative public relations, a model that is borrowed from and extends theories of integrative negotiation, are practical, effective, and sustainable. Theoretical propositions are developed below.

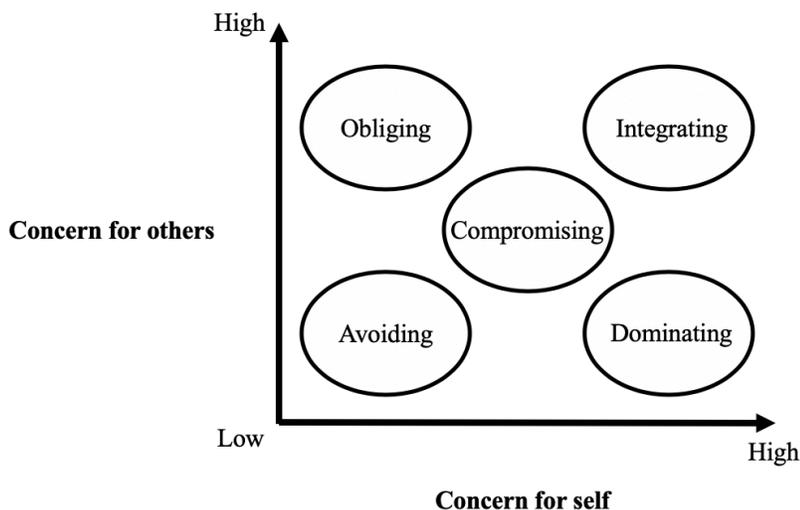
Conflict Orientation: “Concern for Others” as a Necessary Condition for Integrative Negotiation

Worldviews (or schemes) are defined as “large, abstract structures of knowledge that people use to organize what they know and to make sense of new information that comes to them” (J. E. Grunig, 1992, p. 34). A conflict orientation is a worldview that influences how a person responds to situations that consist of disagreements (Friedman et al., 2000). The widely used Rahim (1983) model maintained that people’s choice of conflict modes or styles derives from two dimensions: “concern for self” (i.e., attempting to satisfy one’s own concerns”) and “concern for others” (i.e., attempting to satisfy the other’s concerns). The Rahim model

(see Figure 1) also proposed five conflict styles: 1) dominating (high concern for self, low concern for others); 2) integrating (high concern for self and for others); 3) compromising (moderate concern for self and for others); 4) obliging (low concern for self and high concern for others); and 5) avoiding (low concern for self and others) (p. 369).

Figure 1

The Dual-Concern Model



Note. From "A measure of styles of handling interpersonal conflict," by M. A. Rahim, 1983, *Academy of Management journal*, 26(2), p. 369. <https://doi.org/10.5465/255985>

Thomas (1992) claimed that these two dimensions of conflict orientation are not mutually exclusive. An individual's attempt to satisfy other people's concerns does not necessarily come at the cost of sacrificing their own concerns, and vice versa. Extending this logic, empirical research supports the utility of "concern for others." A positive relationship exists between "concern for others" and problem solving, and a negative relationship exists between "concern for self" and problem solving (Sorenson et al., 1999).

Mathematically, a sufficient "concern for others" in negotiation could achieve Pareto optimal agreements (those that exhaust all mutual benefits). In other words, one party's gain is not necessarily based on their counterpart's loss if every aspect of a negotiated agreement exhausts the possibilities for joint gains (Raiffa, 1982; Tripp & Sondak, 1992). On the other hand, conflict orientation towards "concern for self" usually returns negative results in a negotiation. Butler (1995) demonstrated that if negotiators strongly pursue their own interests and ignore their opponents' interests, the resulting mistrust causes negotiators to overlook their counterparts' interests repeatedly in a vicious cycle. In a similar vein, "fixed-pie perceptions" describes a mindset in which one's own concerns and concern for others are incompatible, discounting the possibility of mutual benefit altogether. De Dreu et al. (2000) revealed that people with prosocial motives would lean more toward integrative negotiation than egoistically motivated parties. In contrast, nondirectional motivation helps negotiators discover and create more potentially integrative deals.

It should be noted, however, that cultural differences might have an effect on conflict orientation. For example, researchers have widely adopted the concepts of individualism and collectivism to describe the characteristics of a society as well as an individual (Hofstede, 1980). Individualists usually prioritize their own preferences, while collectivists show more concern for others (Hui & Triandis, 1986). R. Kim and Coleman

(2015) also revealed that individuals with collectivist orientation are more likely to adopt integrative conflict strategies compared to those with individualist orientation.

In summary, “concern for others” is a necessary conflict orientation for integrative public relations and has been proven to be practicable, effective, efficient, and rational. Moreover, “concern for others” is conducive to closing the perception gap that exists in the conflict between an organization and its publics (Schwarz, 2008). Proposition 1 is thus posited:

Proposition 1. Contending parties’ concern for each other increases the possibility of integrative public relations.

Principle: Interest-Based Negotiation

Research typically focuses on three types of negotiation: game theoretic, heuristic, and argumentative (Jennings et al., 2001). Heuristic and game theoretic negotiations, especially zero-sum games, are often viewed as position-based negotiations in which the negotiation is a fixed-pie scenario (Pasquier et al., 2011). In contrast, argumentation-based negotiation emphasizes information exchange and uses interest-based negotiation to dig out underlying interests among contending parties in order to expand the “pie” and increase the likelihood of an agreement (Fisher et al., 2011; Pasquier et al., 2011).

While position-based negotiation emphasizes value claims, interest-based negotiation emphasizes value creation (Fisher et al., 2011; Katz & Pattarini, 2008). Position-based negotiation is distinguished by the development of target and resistance positions prior to negotiation as well as overstatement of opening positions (Fisher et al., 2011; Katz & Pattarini, 2008). There are four main assumptions inherent in position-based negotiation: 1) all pertinent information is “complete and held in common”; 2) all pertinent information is “perfect and correct”; 3) “agent communication and cognitive capabilities are underused”; and 4) “the positions of the agents are statically defined” (Pasquier et al., 2011, pp. 253-254).

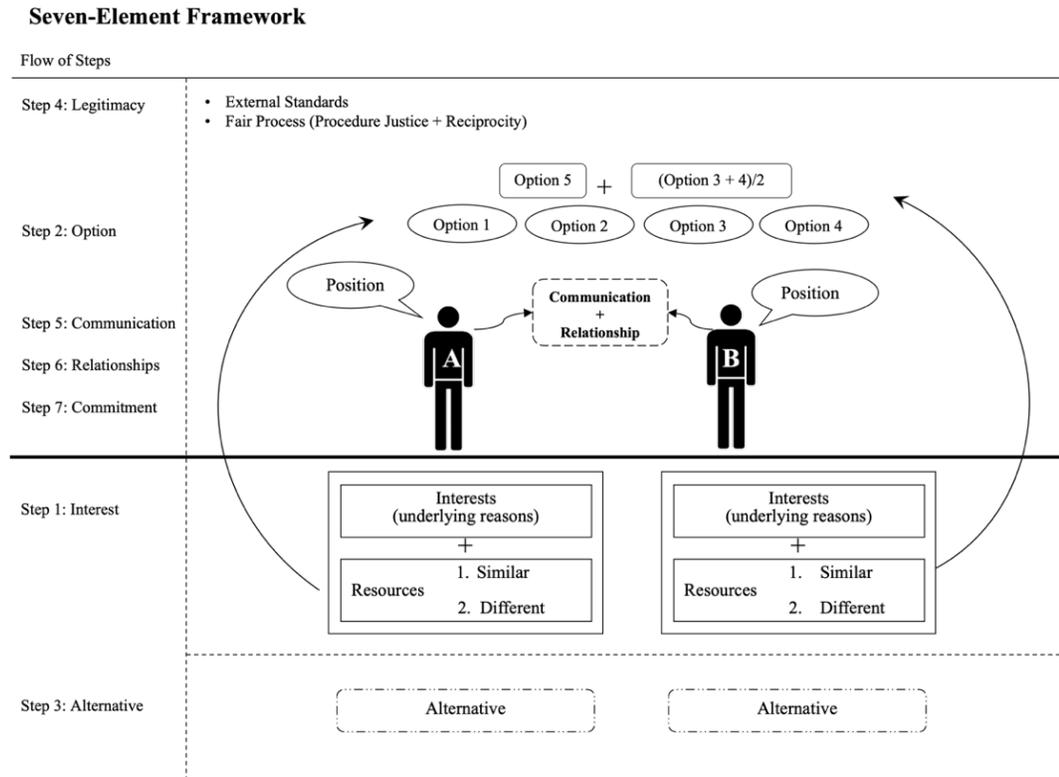
On the other hand, interest-based negotiation explores the underlying reasons for conflict and the underlying interests behind negotiation objectives. Therefore, interest-based negotiations and interactions endeavor to create value rather than divide the existing pie (Katz & Pattarini, 2008; Pasquier et al., 2011). Moreover, Katz and Pattarini (2008) argued that, because two-way symmetrical communication requires that parties accommodate each other’s interests, interest-based negotiation could operationalize this principle by “shifting focus from tasks and fees to value and trust” (p. 89). In a similar vein, Katz and Pattarini (2008) also claimed that the principles of interest-based negotiation constitute a powerful communication tool that can help organizations build better counselor-client relationships. Therefore, Proposition 2 is proposed:

Proposition 2. Following the principle of interest-based negotiation creates more value space and is more likely to achieve mutual gain.

Feasibility and Practicality of the Seven-Element Framework

As mentioned previously, some critics of dominant public relations theories focus on their lack of practicality and detailed implementation guidelines. Therefore, consulting Fisher et al. (2011), we developed the *Seven-Element Framework* (Figure 2) for achieving win-win solutions with interest, options, alternative, legitimacy, communication, relationship, and commitment.

Figure 2
A Framework Conceptualizing the Seven Elements of Integrative Negotiation



The *first step* is to discern position from interest. Interests and alternatives adopted by each side are usually “hidden” and placed “under” the negotiation table. Thus, Pasquier et al. (2011) and Fisher et al. (2011) suggest clarifying and probing for underlying interests as a critical starting point. At this stage, it is important for negotiators to focus on interests and not positions and to put themselves in the other person’s shoes, so as to avoid the “*fixed pie*” stereotype and partisan perception problem. Analysis of contending parties’ interests and underlying reasons leads to *step 2*, development of possible (creative) options to meet interests on both sides. At this stage, inventory analysis can develop options that combine each side’s similar and different resources and/or skills to produce value that maximizes joint gains. Leveraging various resources and skills beyond those needed at the negotiation table helps prevent zero-sum stasis and reveals multiple dimensions of the issue at hand.

Often, negotiators need to utilize the alternatives (*step 3*) to reveal more possible options. Additionally, external objective standards and a fair process are required for contending parties to persuade each other that they are not being ripped off (*step 4*). Parties also need to communicate with each other during the negotiating process (*step 5*). A good negotiator often asks “why?” “why not?” questions to facilitate information exchange. As mentioned above, interest-based negotiation is more likely to generate mutual gain. Hence, separating people from problems is a key principle for coping with relationship problems (*step 6*). Finally, negotiators should put agreements into action as soon as possible after they are reached (*step 7*).

When conducting negotiations, parties usually emphasize on the final outcome, i.e., *commitment*; however, a successful negotiation is more likely when negotiators understand each other’s underlying interests, communicate effectively, explore possible options, and develop strong relationships (Fisher, 1989). This seven-element approach to negotiation has been widely adopted in legal studies (Eckblad, 2020) and

public policy making (Lane, 2021) because it demonstrates the feasibility of achieving desirable outcomes. We therefore propose Proposition 3:

Proposition 3. Integrative public relations is feasible and practical via adoption of interest-based negotiation principles and the seven-element approach to negotiation.

Utility and the Optimal Effectiveness: Long-term, Trustful, and Sustainable Relationship

Scholarship on two-way symmetrical communication and relationship management frequently calls for building and maintaining long-term, trusting organization-public relationships (J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 1998). Integrative negotiation, also conceived of here as integrative public relations, is among the best methods for achieving “win-win” agreements with lasting outcomes (L. A. Liu, 2014; Sorenson et al., 1999). This goal can be understood via the concept of Pareto efficiency, which refers to situations where “it is not possible, through alterations in the resource allocation, to improve the utility of any member of the defined reference group without loss of utility by some other member (or members)” (Sandler & Smith, 1976, p. 152). Pareto-optimal agreements are those in which no additional joint gains are possible without disequilibrium of previously negotiated gains.

Several mathematical models test these relationships. Raiffa (1982) introduced a method for using a Pareto-efficient frontier to solve negotiation problems by weighing the importance of each issue for the concerned parties and calculating the values of various potential agreements. Tripp and Sondak (1992) later developed a method to measure Pareto efficiency by dividing the number of possible agreements Pareto superior to the reference agreement by the sum of the number of possible agreements Pareto superior to the agreement and the number of possible agreements Pareto inferior to the agreement (p. 291). Moreover, multi-objective optimization theory (Deb, 2001) supports better results in Pareto-optimal agreements (Tripp & Sondak, 1992). These empirical models all suggest that integrative negotiation is the most direct path to negotiating win-win agreements via Pareto efficiency (Tripp & Sondak, 1992).

In principle, when negotiators discover sharable resources and mutual interests, mutually beneficial agreements and integrative solutions become possible. Namely, the utility of an integrative negotiation is assured when Pareto efficiency promises maintenance of high quality, long-term relationships and benefit beyond increased profit (Tripp & Sondak, 1992).

Public relations has traditionally emphasized long-term, trustful relationships, as has the field of negotiation/conflict management. Trust/trustful relationship plays a crucial role throughout the negotiation process, serving as a result, a pre-condition, and even an important element during the negotiation process for successful outcomes (Lewicki & Polin, 2013).

As an independent variable in the negotiation process, the existence of trust between/among parties can simplify the negotiation process and reduce procedural inefficiency (Lewicki & Polin, 2013). In negotiations that involve high trust relationships, the probability of cooperation is higher and fewer resources are wasted (Lindskold et al., 1986). For example, the exchange of information is integral in every negotiation case, and trust can induce information exchange. This in turn contributes to integrative negotiation (Neale & Bazerman, 1992). Second, the negotiation process can build trust/trustful relationships, allowing trust to serve as a dependent variable as well. Butler (1995) indicated that negotiating parties are more willing to exchange information where integrative negotiation is possible, thereby enhancing mutual trust. Trust/trustful relationship can also act as a mediator/moderator during the negotiation process. For instance, M. N. Liu and Wang (2010) revealed that trust mediated the relationship between anger and negotiators’ interaction goals.

To conclude, trust/trustful relationship is vital, no matter what role it plays, to integrative negotiation and integrative public relations. Moreover, trust is critical in dynamic contexts defined by repeated, serial rounds of negotiation (Mannix et al., 1995). Negotiators who attach more importance to future interaction

(high concern for others) are more likely to explore integrative solutions than those with short-term goals (high concern for self) (Lewicki et al., 2011). Rubin et al. (1994) found that future-focused orientations fostered a sense of interdependency. This gives rise to Proposition 4:

Proposition 4. Integrative public relations is achieved more easily on the basis of trust/trustful relationships, and at the same time can contribute to trustful, long-term relationships (Pareto efficiency) during the conflict resolution process.

Synthesis

Public relations reconciles various conflicting interests between and among stakeholders to build and maintain long-term, trusting organization-public relationships (J. E. Grunig, 2006). As previously mentioned, however, critics have found existing theoretical perspectives unreflective of reality.

The model of integrative public relations outlined here has the potential to resolve these unsettled criticisms. Specifically, “concern for others” suggests a concrete worldview and addresses the “utopian” problem. Interest-based negotiating principles and the *Seven-Element Framework* for achieving win-win solutions provide procedural guidelines and details. Moreover, integrative public relations is an effective approach insofar as it closes the gap between reality and the Pareto-efficient frontier. Integrative public relations can produce win-win agreements and trustful relationships with long-lasting outcomes. W. French et al. (2002) claimed, moreover, that integrative negotiation underlies negotiation ethics. Hence, integrative negotiation provides a path for parties to negotiate more ethically. For example, L. A. Liu (2014) viewed the revision process as a negotiation between authors and reviewers, where integrative negotiation or interest-based negotiation strategies could be applied.

Contingencies for Integrative Public Relations

Does integrative public relations in fact constitute a new model of public relations? To answer that question, it is necessary to determine the relevance of integrative versus distributive negotiation management with respect to public relations practices. Some negotiations are predominantly distributive and have modest value-creating opportunities while other negotiations have substantial value-creating opportunities (Levinger & Rubin, 1994). This section outlines the contextual factors contributing to the conditions for integrative versus distributive negotiation strategies with the goal of shedding light on the transferability of the concept of integrative negotiation to public relations.

Time and Relationship Continuity

Axelrod (1990) claimed that immediate needs for conflict resolution often make integrative solutions impractical. If, however, the deleterious effects of a particular conflict are long-term rather than immediate, then more integrative solutions might be used. The relationship over time of those involved in a conflict is also important to take into consideration. A single time-limited scenario is more difficult to resolve through integrative negotiation than issues in which reputation and long-term relationships matter (Ross, 1980).

Digital public relations' capacity to build and maintain relationships highlights the field's relational nature. The increasing prevalence of digital communication also indicates a gradual epistemological shift in our understanding of relationships. Increasingly digitized public relations practices suggest the profound impact of digital technology on relationship building, particularly on a long-term basis (Taylor & Kent, 2014). Digital technology enables users to engage in two-way, immediate, and timely interaction, suggesting that serial, repeated negotiation could become normative (Nowak et al., 2010). A reasonable conclusion is that integrative public relations may be easier to achieve as more public relations activity takes place online.

Moreover, crisis situations, defined as they are by dynamic contexts and repeated, serial rounds of negotiation, also highlight the importance of integrative public relations. Although crisis response is often perceived as an isolated set of communications, or even a single communication at a fixed point in time, repeated serial negotiations between contending parties (organizations and stakeholders) often occur during crises (Mannix et al., 1995). According to Mannix (1991), people will choose immediate rewards over long-term benefits, even if the reward is relatively small. Similarly, negotiators who often discount future outcomes will fail to notice long-term integrative solutions. Thus, integrative negotiation potentially improves chances for long-term results in public relations (Mannix et al., 1995).

The Number of Participants and the Number of Issues Involved

The relationship between the degree of conflict intensity, number of contending parties, and number of issues is inconclusive. Some scholars have suggested that as the number or size of the parties involved in a conflict increases, it becomes more difficult to reach an agreement due to the need for coordinating more preferences and resources (Kleiboer, 1996). Others have found that an increase in the number of parties augments the availability of additional resources (Levinger & Rubin, 1994), thereby making various pie-expanding, integrative solutions more likely. The odds of attaining a settlement may be enhanced in multiparty and multiple-issue arrangements due to there being "greater opportunities for developing crosscutting pies among the disputants" (Levinger & Rubin, 1994, p. 207).

According to Moloney (2005), public relations is "about giving 'voice' to organizations and groups that hold different values, behave differently, and promote different interests as they seek to maximize advantage in their political economy and civil society" (p. 551). If the discrepancy between the perceptions, values, and behaviors of an organization and its stakeholders is pre-defined in a distributive manner (i.e., a fixed-pie worldview), odds for an integrative solution decrease. However, interest-based negotiation and mutual-gain approaches to negotiation underscore the importance of redefining and reconceiving the nature of conflict from a distributive to an integrative type so as to expand the number of issues, contending parties, discrepant values of risk, priorities, and preferences (Fisher et al., 2011). Such a multitude of discrepant values and perspectives sets the table for greater value creation and option invention through integrative negotiation.

Power and Asymmetrical Relationships

Power balance or lack thereof is a critical issue in all conflict situations. Different scholars have analyzed what we mean when we refer to "power." Bass (1960) divided power into position power and personal power, while J. R. P. French and Raven (1959) taxonomized legitimate, reward, coercive, expert, and referent power.

Most conflict situations involve power asymmetry such as differences in experience, information, or costs (Ross, 1980). Rubin and Zartman's (1995) review of over 20 studies supported the hypothesis that perceptions of equal power among negotiators tend to result in more effective negotiation than perceptions of unequal power. Evidence suggests that an equivalent level of power makes both parties fear escalation and therefore exercise greater care not to antagonize each other (M. N. Liu, 2019). Slight power differentials are generally conducive to problem solving.

Power imbalances, however, make integrative solutions less likely, especially if one party is completely powerless. In such instances, the powerful can ensure a favorable outcome for themselves. For example, Lawler and Bacharach (1987) proved that if party A has coercive power over B, which means A has the ability to punish B, A would tend to adopt damaging tactics in negotiations, which would hinder information exchange and result in less subsequent integration.

While the common view is that punitive actions result from power asymmetry, findings related to this effect are varied (Lawler et al., 1988). Bilateral Deterrence Theory claimed that punitive actions are less often adopted where power imbalances exist, while Conflict Spiral Theory argued that such conditions generate more punitive actions (Lawler et al., 1988).

While power asymmetries persist, the democratic nature of the Internet has empowered public constituencies on the receiving end of public relations messaging. Digital technology is capable of closing the power gap between organizations and their stakeholders. The organization-centric assumptions of public relations research undertaken from the functional perspective are less relevant when the audience for public relations is a massively connected and socially networked collective. As a result, public relations scholarship has witnessed calls for a more balanced research perspective between organization-centric and public-centric research agendas (Kent & Taylor, 2002). This shift has created a more viable context for the adoption of integrative public relations.

The Importance of Trust in Conflict Resolution and Public Relations

Recent studies on conflict resolution and public relations have emphasized trustful relationships (Huang et al., 2020). According to these scholars, trust plays a crucial role throughout the negotiation process as an end result, an important element in the process, and an important a priori condition for successful interaction and negotiation (Lewicki & Polin, 2013). For example, negotiations that involve high trust relationships, prevalent in certain cultures, have a higher probability of cooperation and waste fewer resources (Christen, 2004; Lindsfold et al., 1986). Neale and Bazerman (1992) also claimed that building trust and exchanging information is the most important rule of successful negotiation.

Integrative public relations emphasizes information exchange and open communication (Baarveld et al., 2015), two values that hold a great deal of importance in the field of public relations (Huang et al., 2020; Taylor & Kent, 2014). Trust provides these organizations with a foundation for communicating and interacting in a rapidly changing information ecosystem. If the parties involved in an organization-public relationship are willing to share information and communicate transparently, an integrative solution is possible. Mutual trust is therefore a constitutive component of integrative public relations (Neale & Bazerman, 1992). The more trust exists in organization-public relationships, the better the odds that integrative public relations can be achieved.

Case Illustration

In this section, we examine the DiDi Hitch crisis in the Chinese Mainland to illustrate integrative public relations. We conclude with our model's implications for public relations, conflict management, and crisis communication.

A transportation platform like Uber, DiDi is widely used in the Chinese Mainland. It ranked 93th on the Kantar BrandZ Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands in 2021 (Kantar, 2021). Its services consist of DiDi Express, Premier, Taxi, Hitch, Bus, Designated Driving, Luxe, and others (DiDi, n.d.).

DiDi Hitch is the company's "ride-sharing platform." Passengers can take a ride with a driver headed in the same direction, at a much lower price than using other DiDi services. Drivers typically do not make their primary living by offering DiDi Hitch rides (DiDi, n.d.).

Before 2018, DiDi Hitch was commended for its convenience and novelty. However, in May 2018, a female flight attendant was killed by a DiDi Hitch driver. Not long after, a female passenger was raped and murdered after hailing a DiDi Hitch ride. These two homicides triggered widespread concern over the safety of this service. Because users could choose to display their gender and headshots on the platform, many

feared that criminals might select female passengers on purpose and sexually assault them (Beijing Daily, 2019).

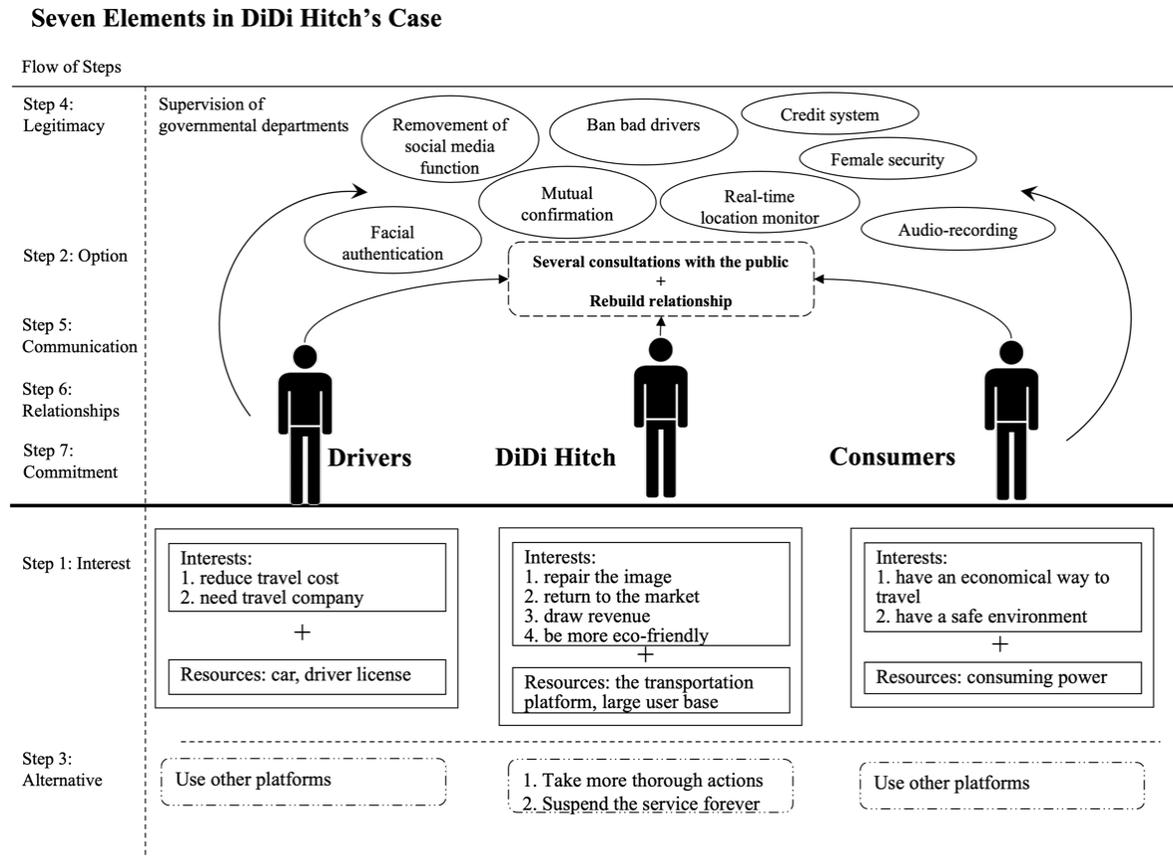
After a year-long suspension of the service, DiDi made an announcement that DiDi Hitch would return to operation in seven select cities in the Chinese Mainland on November 20, 2019. After re-launching operations, DiDi Hitch seemed to have regained the public's trust.

The nature and sources of conflict in the DiDi case can be identified and interpreted from various angles. For example, the main conflict could be viewed from the perspectives of interest (in terms of financial terms, compensation, travel convenience, etc.), relationship (trust), or ideology/value (e.g., human life should not be negotiated or exchanged). When it comes to financial terms, the conflict between DiDi Hitch and its customers seems to be distributive. DiDi Hitch aims to generate the most profit with the least investment, while consumers want to enjoy premium services that include safety and comfort at the lowest price. In other words, optimizing safety entails a larger investment, which may result in a higher price for consumers. However, the fact that both DiDi Hitch and its customers place such a high value on trust opens a space for integrative public relations. DiDi Hitch depends on customers' trust to survive in the market, and customers depend on a trustworthy "ride-sharing platform" for safety and convenience. To conclude, collective perceptions of a conflict should be viewed along a continuum rather than at a fixed point, especially in the context of public relations. By nature, the DiDi Hitch case is not an extreme distributive conflict, nor a purely integrative one. Conflict perception is greatly determined by whether people hold a fixed-pie outlook. However, when public relations managers maintain a perspective of integrative public relations, integrative solutions become possible. In our view, DiDi Hitch's navigation of the crisis embodies integrative public relations (see Figure 3).

First, DiDi Hitch identified the underlying interests of three parties: its own interests as well as those of passengers and drivers (*step 1*). Customers want to save money without sacrificing safety, while drivers hope to reduce some of their own travel costs through this service. DiDi Hitch's interests lie in repairing its image and re-launching service operations. During the one year-suspension, DiDi Hitch re-evaluated its business model, carried out potential safety hazard analysis, and adopted a series of reform measures and public relations communication campaigns (*step 2*), including more than 200 function optimizations covering safety functions, privacy protection, a social credit system, transaction processes, and transparent communication. It should be noted that DiDi Hitch's service optimization was informed by consumer input via Weibo and other official channels. To list just a few examples: face authentication is now required for both passengers and drivers; drivers now have to open the DiDi application in order to track their real-time location and audio for the duration of the trip; drivers with bad reviews can no longer drive for DiDi Hitch; passengers can no longer display their headshot and gender information; drivers and passengers now pick each other, rather than drivers picking passengers; drivers must now select common routes and stick to them; and female security officers now handle complaints related to sexual harassment.

DiDi Hitch did not roll out these mandates simultaneously (*step 3*). They removed passengers' personal information and strengthened safety protections for women in May 2018, but these measures alone could not prevent violent incidents from recurring. Hence, in August 2018, DiDi announced that they would suspend the service indefinitely before re-launching with more thorough safety reforms. Even after re-launching, DiDi Hitch continues to improve service quality. For example, drivers and passengers can only use DiDi Hitch at nighttime when they have gone at least one year without any negative reviews. Governmental supervision (*step 4*) of this reform process helped ensure that the measures were widely perceived as fair and effective.

Figure 3
Seven Elements in DiDi Hitch's Case



Preceding re-launch of the service, DiDi Hitch frequently communicated with the public and announced incremental progress as it was made. This helped repair consumer relationships (*step 5&6*) and ensured a customer base was waiting on re-launch. These actions, which embody integrative public relations, led to a successful re-start of operations (*step 7*).

In summary, the DiDi Hitch case illuminates the descriptive, predictive, and explanatory power of integrative public relations and its related theoretical propositions. The case involved a typically distributive conflict, i.e., one defined by a single issue (whether DiDi Hitch should be suspended), two contending parties (DiDi and consumers), and asymmetrical power (Didi has tremendous power in terms of resources and market capitalization that its customers lack). Moreover, some contingencies also defined this scenario. For example, trust/relationship rebuilding cannot be accomplished overnight. Time is needed to repair an organization's image and organization-public relationships. In addition, the severity of the DiDi Hitch crisis cannot be overstated due to the deaths of two women. It must be acknowledged that the situation was very unfavorable to the company. DiDi Hitch announced that they would not return to the market until their safety issues were solved, indicating that time and trust were constraints in the company's attempts to rehabilitate its image.

DiDi's practice of integrative public relations, however, reconciled the seemingly distributive conflict among interests, values, needs, and wants of the contending parties to achieve mutually agreeable solutions. This led to the successful re-launch of DiDi Hitch. In DiDi Hitch's new business model, drivers and passengers

meet each other's interests and needs for convenience and cost savings, while DiDi Hitch provides the platform that puts them in touch with one another.

Conclusion

This study theorizes the concept of "integrative public relations" and surveys the literature on the two-way symmetrical communication model and Excellence theory, contingency theory, integrative negotiation, interest-based negotiation, and Pareto-optimal agreements.

We extend previous research (Christen, 2004; Murphy, 1991; Plowman et al., 2001) and advance the theorization of public relations models from a conflict resolution perspective, placing them at an interdisciplinary level. We pose integrative public relations (or, interchangeably, integrative negotiation) as a practical way of accounting for contingency in various models of negotiation.

In addition to providing procedural guidelines, we also divide the seven elements of integrative public relations into two parts. Specifically, five of the seven elements (i.e., legitimacy, options, communication, relationships, and commitment) are "above" the negotiation table, while the other two elements (i.e., interests and alternatives) are "under" the table. This provides practitioners with a clearer framework when conducting negotiations as well as a clearer sense of which issues should only be discussed internally with the party they represent.

Integrative public relations is best understood as a kind of integrative negotiation whose characteristics offer the most direct path to negotiating win-win agreements via Pareto efficiency. "Concern for others" is a necessary condition of conflict orientation. Wherever this condition is met, integrative public relations, practiced as a kind of interest-based negotiation, is feasible and practical. Integrative negotiation can close the gap between reality and Pareto efficiency, is ethically grounded, and has great potential in a dynamic context defined by repeated, serial rounds of negotiation.

In addition to "concern for others," the potential for several substantial value-creating opportunities is also often a precondition for integrative solutions. Scenarios that present multiple avenues for value creation are defined by the following features: value placed on long-term relationships; repeated, serial exchanges of information between contending parties; complex entanglement of multiple issues; minimal power asymmetry; openness to information sharing and exchange; and a high importance placed on trust.

By contrast, scenarios with little apparent value-creating opportunity include single, narrowly defined issues; fixed transaction costs; no ongoing relationships; high levels of power asymmetry; asymmetrical and unverifiable information; lack of open communication and information exchange; and lack of trust between contending parties.

Given these seemingly obvious constraints, we emphasize the importance of going beyond "fixed-pie perceptions." To treat for a moment the "single-issue" constraint as a representative problem, value can actually be created by unbundling and adding issues if contending parties can abandon "fixed-pie perception" and adopt a worldview of "concern for others." For example, in a used car negotiation, it seems that price is the only issue between a seller and a buyer. An integrative negotiation, however, can add value by unbundling price from payment method, length of payment, and actual payment. The key is to expand and multiply conceptions of value. Similarly, in negotiations that involve several parties, it becomes easier to more readily exploit differences among different parties in time preferences, risk tolerances, predictive capacity, and efficiencies.

Likewise, in order to make creative and integrative solutions possible, power should also be conceived as relative and dynamic, rather than static (Christen, 2004). As previously mentioned, power asymmetry is common in public relations and conflict scenarios. P. H. Kim et al. (2005), however, challenged the static conception of power by depicting four components of power dynamics, i.e., perceived power, potential power, power tactics, and realized power. On a related note, when dealing with conflicts, both

objective (e.g., resources, power, etc.) and subjective factors (e.g., value, perception, etc.) should be taken into account (Deutsch, 1991). Under conditions of imbalanced power, moving beyond a purely objective orientation and abandoning fixed-power perceptions facilitates integrative negotiation.

We acknowledge that our proposed perspective of integrative public relations is not intended to be “one best practice” in a strict sense. In essence, a range of different solutions for a given negotiation might attain to ideal ‘Pareto-optimal agreements.’ In such scenarios, one party’s gain in a negotiation is not necessarily based on his (or her) counterpart’s loss, and every aspect of a negotiated agreement exhausts the possibilities for joint gains.

We also acknowledge that the public relations theories we reviewed cannot fully capture the field, and we did not cover some theories/models such as dialogical communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002), image restoration strategy (Huang et al., 2005), situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2007), integrative crisis mapping (Jin et al., 2012), issue management (Jaques, 2009), or situational theory (J. N. Kim & J. E. Grunig, 2011). What we propose as integrative negotiation or integrative public relations should be viewed as a new method for studying public relations through the lens of conflict management rather than as a new model of public relations.

In addition, by theorizing integrative public relations, we set aside any discussion of other conflict styles such as distributive, avoidance, and third-party mediation (Huang & Bedford, 2009) as well as other conflict styles such as unconditional and principled situation (Plowman et al., 2001). This paper also selectively emphasizes several key issues but leaves some equally important concepts, such as “fixed-pie perception,” under-elaborated. In addition, while it has limitations, the DiDi Hitch case illuminates the descriptive, predictive, and explanatory power of integrative public relations by demonstrating that integrative public relations is not affected by number of issues (being single or multiple), number of contending parties (two parties or multiple parties), or nature of contending parties (individuals, organizations, stakeholders or in-group or out-group) as long as mutual concern and information sharing enable tradeoffs and win-win outcomes.

Future studies might re-examine the propositions laid out in this study. For instance, the measurement of “concern for others” should be developed and validated in empirical studies. The seven steps of integrative public relations should also be tested via experiments or interviews. Finally, the effectiveness of integrative public relations should be mathematically tested via the Pareto efficiency model.

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