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Abstract

Despite the advances made offering a viable perspective in strategic conflict management, the contingency theory has not addressed a prevailing question: How can the theory inform organizations to communicate ethically with its publics, especially during crisis? The only guidance the theory offers is through its proscriptive variables, which prohibit either communication or more accommodative communication. However, given the exigency and dynamism of many situations along the life cycle of an issue, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations. This study aims to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables that influence the organization's stance by reviewing corporate social responsibility and conflict communication literature to propose drivers that influence ethical elocution in crisis communication. Responsibility is ethics manifested (Joyner & Payne, 2002). Six factors, some not addressed by the theory, were found, namely the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. Though the study is exploratory, it represents a major theoretical breakthrough in theory building with the aim of offering a practical approach – rather than a philosophical argument and persuasion – for practitioners to begin engaging in ethical elocution.

Introduction

The contingency theory of strategic conflict management, which began as an elaboration, qualification, and extension of the value of symmetry propounded in the excellence theory, has come into its own and emerged as an empirically tested perspective. It is grounded on the premise that complexity in strategic communication is best represented by enactment of stance on a continuum, which has, at one end of the continuum, advocacy, and at the other end, accommodation. At the poles of the continuum, advocacy means arguing exclusively for one's own case, and accommodation, means entirely giving in to the other. The organization's stance usually lies somewhere in between "at a given time regarding a given public" (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008, p. 136). Over the last 12 years since its inception, to add structure to the matrix of 87 factors that the organization could draw on to determine its stance, contingency theorists have unearthed three sets of variables. Factors that influence the organization's stance on the continuum *before* it interacts with its publics are called predisposing variables (Cancel, Mitrook & Cameron, 1999). Factors that influence the organization's position on the continuum *during* interaction with its publics are called situational (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). Factors that prohibit organizations being accommodative with its publics are called proscriptive variables (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001).

Despite the advances made, the theory has not addressed a prevailing question: How can the theory inform organizations to communicate ethically with its publics, especially during crisis? Even though the contingency theory is a positive rather than normative theory (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press), hence it's non-prescriptive stance, there is still a need to, as Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams (1998) argued, explicate and elaborate "the efficacy and ethical implications" (p. 41) of the adoption of a given stance in practice. Thus far, the only guidance the theory offers is through its proscriptive variables, which prohibit either communication or more accommodative communication when the issue at hand violates the individual's moral conviction or the organization's fundamental principles. However, given the exigency and dynamism of many situations along the life cycle of an issue, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations.

This study, thus, aims to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables that influence the organization's stance on the continuum before it interacts with its publics. To do so, this study reviews conflict communication and corporate social responsibility literature to propose exploratory factors that influence ethical elocution in crisis communication. It is argued that insights from CSR literature could provide the initial roadmap on what constitutes ethical decision making. CSR can inform ethics as one manifestation of being responsible is being ethical. Responsibility is ethics manifested (Joyner & Payne, 2002).Velasquez (1999) argued that having an ethical bearing enables an organization to act responsibly. Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that CSR was closely related to ethical management of crises. Insights from conflict literature would provide a moral bearing to ethical elocution, i.e., how does one manage conflict in a manner that leads to a morally acceptable resolution? Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) argued that individual, organizational, and contextual influencers all play its roles communicating ethically in moral conflicts.

The significance of this paper is three fold. First, this represents a breakthrough – albeit exploratory in nature – attempt to further develop the theory. The contingency theory has emerged as a dominant theory in crisis communication and conflict management (Pang, 2006;

Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press) and attempts to enhance its explanatory powers would further our understanding of how ethical elocution can take place between the organization and its diverse publics. Second, the theory's initial postulations of 87 factors influencing stance movements may have been more complex than imagined. This paper aims to streamline and understand the influence of pertinent factors in ethical crisis communication. Third, given the theory's ability to generate new insights and expand the range of knowledge through its application and rootedness in the practical world (Pang, Cropp, & Cameron, 2006), this paper seeks to add to the dialogue and provide guidance to practitioners on what factors facilitate ethical elocution during crisis particularly when practitioners should be positioned as the "ethics counsel" (Bowen, 2008, p. 271). Unlike other conceptual work that explores moral phisophies in ethics (for instance, see Bowen, 2008a), this paper aims to offer a practical approach – rather than a philosophical argument and persuasion – for practitioners to begin engaging in ethical elocation.

This paper is divided into four sections. The first chronicles its origins, its theoretical platform, and the development of the theory into clusters of variables. The second reviews the CSR and conflict literature with a view of unearthing key factors that influence ethical and moral decision making and communication. The third and final section distills the key factors from the literature by relating to the contingency theory and identifies the ethical variables are derived.

A Viable Perspective:Development of the Contingency theory

From Models of practice to practicing dynamic Stances

Much of the literature on effective strategic communication had been built on Grunig and Grunig's (1992) and Grunig and Hunt's (1984) excellence theory. Four models of excellence have been posited:

❑ Press Agentry/Publicity model: Here, the organization is only interested in making its ethos and products known, even at the expense of half-truths;

❑ Public Information model: Predominantly characterized by one-way transfer of information from the organization to the publics, the aim is to provide information in a journalistic form;

❑ Two-way asymmetric model: Instead of a rigid transference of information, the organization uses surveys and polls to persuade the publics to accept its point of view;

❑ Two-way symmetric model: Here, the organization is more amenable to developing a dialogue with the publics. Communication flows both ways between the organization and the public and both sides are prepared to change their stances, with the aims of resolving the crisis in a professional, ethical and effective way.

The two-way symmetrical model has been positioned as normative theory, which stated how organizations should be practicing strategic communication that was regarded as the most ethical and effective manner (Grunig & Grunig, 1992; Grunig, 1996).

The contingency theory, however, saw a different reality. Cancel, Cameron, Sallot and Mitrook (1997) argued that strategic communication was more accurately portrayed along a continuum. Because strategic communication, particularly conflict management, was so complex and subtle, understanding it from any of the four models, particularly the two-way symmetrical model, would be far too limiting and rigid (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001, p. 245).

The organizational response to the strategic communication dilemma at hand, according to the contingency theory, which has, at one end of the continuum, advocacy, and at the other end, accommodation, was, thus, "It Depends". The theory offered a matrix of 87 factors (see appendix 1), arranged thematically, that the organization could draw on to determine their stance. Between advocacy, which means arguing for one's own case, and accommodation, which means giving in, was a wide range of operational stances that influenced strategic communication strategies and these entailed "different degrees of advocacy and accommodation." (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997, p. 37). Along this continuum, the theory argued that any of the 87 factors, culled from strategic communication literature, excellence theory, observations, and grounded theory (Cameron, 1999, p. 31), could affect the location of an organization on that continuum "*at a given time* regarding *a given public*" (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999 p. 172; Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 40).

Pure   -- Pure
Advocacy   Accommodation

The theory sought to understand the dynamics, within and without the organization that could affect an organization's stance. By understanding these dynamics, it elaborated, specified the conditions, factors, and forces that under-girded such a stance.

Identifying Factors that influence adoption of Stance

Among the 87 variables, practitioners argued that there were some that featured more prominently than the others. There were factors that influenced the organization's position on the continuum *before* it interacts with a public; and there were variables that influenced the organization's position on the continuum *during* interaction with its publics. The former have been categorized as predisposing variables, while the latter, situational variables. Some of the well-supported predisposing factors Cancel, Mitrook and Cameron (1999) found included: (1) The size of the organization; (2) Corporate culture; (3) Business exposure; (4) Public relations access to dominant coalition; (5) Dominant coalition enlightenment; (6) Individual characteristics of key individuals, like the CEO. These factors were supported in the conflict literature. For instance, organizational culture had been found to be a key factor in ensuring the formulation of a sound crisis plan and excellent crisis management (Marra, 1998). Situational variables were factors that were most likely to influence how an organization related to a public by effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction. Some of the supported situational factors included: (1) Urgency of the situation; (2) Characteristics of the other public; (3) Potential or obvious threats; (4) Potential costs or benefit for the organization from choosing the various stances (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999).

The classification of the factors into two categories was by no means an attempt to order the importance of one over the other in a given situation. The situational variables could determine the eventual degree of accommodation an organization takes by "effecting shifts from a predisposed accommodative or adversarial stance along the continuum during an interaction with the external public" (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998, p. 43). At the same time, an organization may not move from its predisposed stance if the situational variables are not compelling nor powerful enough to influence the position or if the opportunity costs of the situational variables do not lead to any visible benefits (Cameron, Cropp & Reber, 2001).

Consequently, both predisposing and situational factors could move the organization toward increased accommodation or advocacy. What was important in determining where the organization situates on the continuum involved the "weighing of many factors found in the theory" (Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot & McWilliams, 1998, p. 50). Notably, the factors explain movement either way along the continuum.

Ethical and Moral Parameters: Need to identify a New Set of Ethical Variables

Even as the contingency theorists were able to explain the complexity, contextual, and even the conundrum of a dialogic process, they had yet to answer one central question, which was whether communication could still take place with a morally repugnant public. In a subsequent test of the theory, Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2001) found that there were occasions when accommodation was not possible at all, due to moral, legal, and regulatory reasons. These were labeled proscriptive variables. Six were identified: (1) When there was moral conviction that an accommodative or dialogic stance towards a public may be inherently unethical; (2) when there was a need to maintain moral neutrality in the face of contending publics; (3) when legal constraints curtailed accommodation; (4) when there were regulatory restraints; (5) when senior management prohibited an accommodative stance; and lastly, (6) when the issue became a jurisdictional concern within the organization and resolution of the issue took on a constrained and complex process of negotiation. The proscriptive variables "did not necessarily drive increased or extreme advocacy, but did preclude compromise or even communication with a given public" (p. 253), argued Cameron, Cropp and Reber (2001).

The proscriptive variables remain the only guidance offered by the theory to explain why no communication is possible with a morally repugnant public, or why the organization cannot move towards greater accommodation with a public when the issue at hand violates the individual's moral conviction or the organization's fundamental principles. However, given the exigency and dynamism of a crisis, non-communicating may not be an alternative offered to organizations. It is thus critical to go beyond the proscriptives variables to identify a set of variables that address specifically what factors influence stance movement in ethical elocution during crises.

Identifying factors that drive ethical elocution in crisis communication: Insights from Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is defined as "a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (Dahlsrud, 2008, p. 7). In other words, CSR is a way in which ethics can be manifested in business. The level of CSR engagement within an organization is contingent on several internal and external factors. Insights from the literature consistently show the predominance of several factors.

Internal factor: Dominant Coalition's Values

One of the factors that drive CSR in an organization is the values of the dominant coalition because they have the most control over the organization's strategies and actions. As a result, their belief in operating their business ethically translates into support for ethical decision making and subsequent CSR programs (Trevino, 1986). Top management drives CSR programs

as they bring their beliefs and values to bear (Kim & Reber, 2008). The internal motivations of dominant coalition appear to stem from two avenues. Logsdon and Yuthas (1997) argued that the interaction of individual and environmental factors culminate in the dominant coalition's ethical values which in turn determines the organization's morality. Individual factors refer to personal character traits of the dominant coalition as well as their personal values. Environmental factors refer to stakeholder's demands, industry standards and laws. These two factors allow the dominant coalition to determine the ethical rules guiding the organization which ultimately translates into how the organization does its business.

Similarly, Joyner and Payne (2002) posit two motivations behind businesses engaging in CSR, "ethical" and "Machiavellian". The ethical motivation stems from the decision maker's personal belief in doing the right thing, the individual's values translate to his way of doing business and as a result, he believes his organization should act ethically as well. The Machiavellian motivation arises from the need to garner support from stakeholders by presenting the organization in a good light with the purpose of avoiding litigation or show that the organization is not only concerned about profit-making but also cares for its stakeholders. The Machiavellian motivation is similar to the environmental factor in Logsdon and Yuthas's (1997) analysis as they both revolve around how factors external to the individual affect his ethical decision making. The ethical motivation is similar to the individual factor as they posit that the dominant coalition's individual values affect their way of doing business.

Internal factor: Shareholder Influence

The values of shareholders also influence the stance of an organization regarding CSR (O'Rourke, 2003). In recent years, the rise of shareholder activism has changed the way organizations respond to activist demands because shareholders themselves are turning into activists. Shareholders' ability to withdraw their investments from an organization should there not be active stakeholder dialogue that attempts to incorporate stakeholders demands for reporting and responsible behavior gives them a greater say in effecting changes within an organization. O'Rourke (2003) studied two cases of shareholder activism in the UK to gauge shareholder success in encouraging organizations to be socially responsible and found that it presents several opportunities for shareholders to convince organizations to be more receptive of CSR. First, shareholder activism makes the organization more aware of CSR issues as it garners attention from more than just the sustainability perspective. This is in contrast with external activists who are usually monitoring the sustainability of these activities. Second, shareholder activism almost always comprises demand for greater transparency which will allow them access to information previously denied. They can further their cause by understanding the CSR issues plaguing the organization and working towards solving the issues. Third, through the process of engagement between shareholders and the organization, CSR prerogatives gradually become prioritized in the organization. This is posited as a process which builds trust and makes CSR appear less of a threat. Four, it brings greater media coverage for CSR beyond just the environmental pages. All the above also have the cumulative effect of ensuring top management response. At this point, shareholder activism is limited in scope and influence as some organizations have restricted or even curtailed dialogue with shareholder activists.

Internal factor: Organization Resources

The amount of resources an organization has affects its ability to engage in CSR. Smaller organization, for example, may lack the time, financial resources, skills and knowledge to engage in CSR activities (McWilliams & Siegel, 2001; Vives, 2006). Despite that, the difference is argued to lie in the extensiveness of CSR engagement whereby smaller organizations may choose to engage in CSR activities that pertain to their definitive stakeholders such as employees and customers instead of engaging in environmental CSR (Lee, et al., 2009).

Udayasankar (2008) proposed a more specific way of examining how an organization's size affects its CSR engagement by identifying three factors. First, more visible firms are hypothesized to be more supportive of CSR activities as the high amount of stakeholder scrutiny they are under forces them to engage in activities that heighten their legitimacy and bolsters their reputation. At the same time, smaller firms with lesser visibility may also engage in CSR to gain legitimacy and enhance their reputation. Second, firms with a bounty of resources are hypothesized to be more adept in allocating resources to meeting stakeholder demands through CSR activities. At the same time, smaller firms with access to less resources may engage in CSR with the aim of reaping benefits such as gaining greater access to environmental, human (appeal to employees), social resources (be part of social networks). Third, the organizational structure allows bigger firms to tap on their well-established issues management system and expertise to handle external issues. Economies of scale also allows them respond to CSR demands at a lower cost while at the same time affecting greater social change and achieving better corporate social performance. At the same time, smaller firms can leverage on CSR's ability to differentiate their products from competitors to improve sales. However, the effects of these three factors on an organization's stance towards CSR have still not been empirically tested. From the above analysis, it can be surmized that organizations base their decisions of engaging or not engaging in CSR by weighing their internal capability with the advantages CSR brings.

Internal factor: Public Relations' Role in CSR function

For an organization's CSR engagement to be sustainable, a proper structure should be put in place designed to handle CSR related issues (Sumner, 2005). Despite discussions that CSR should be part of PR, it is conceivable that that PR plays no role in CSR at all (Kim & Reber, 2008). However, if public relations practitioners are willing to step up and include this as part of their functions, as some organizations have done (Wilcox & Cameron, 2009), it would help elevate CSR substantially. Kim and Reber (2008) identified four roles practitioners could assume. First, one where they play a significantly substantive role; second, one where they promote philanthropic acts vigorously; third, one where they play guardian to the organization adhering to high ethical standards and serving as a "corporate role model" 9 (p. 339); four, one where they play the communicator's role and engage the stakeholders.

Internal factor: Exposure to Global Business

Chapple and Moon (2005) in their study of CSR reporting on the corporate websites of seven Asian countries found that organizations that operated beyond their national shores tended to report their CSR engagement. The authors concluded that organizations exposed to the international economy were more likely to engage in CSR lending support to Porter and Van der Linde's (1995) assertion that organizations facing global competition tended to comply with stricter environmental standards. Chapple and Moon (2005) also argued that MNCs engage in

CSR because they are answerable to a wider range of stakeholders. Therefore, it is in their advantage to be socially responsible and proactive in communicating their CSR efforts.

Birch and Moon (2004) also examined small medium enterprises' (SME) engagement in CSR and found that it may be due to the analogous effect brought forth by globalization, as MNCs may have proliferated CSR standards to SMEs. A ripple effect is created when large organizations, facing pressure from social activists abroad, transfer the need to be socially responsible to the local SMEs, who are part of their supply chain. SMEs will then be required to engage in CSR and even be CSR-certified (Kashinath, 2007). The increasing impetus for SMEs to engage in CSR to be in line with the demands of their larger business partners may have resulted in involuntary engagement in CSR (Kashinath, 2007).

External factor: Governmental Influence and Interference

Whitley (1992) argued that the complexities of examining CSR across global business systems were highly dependent on the level of governmental influences and interferences. Albareda, Lozano and Ysa (2007) also argued that although CSR started out as a concept borne by organization's voluntary commitment, it is now under the purview of governments which are actively pushing for it through public policies. Welford (2005) elaborated on this by maintaining that the institutional laws and policies governing stakeholders, labor, and local communities were almost always present in an economically developed country, and this enabled a country to fare well with regards to CSR in these particular social areas. This is very evident in Singapore where the government collaborate with other organizations to facilitate CSR within organizations (Fox, Ward and Howard, 2002). To promote and advance CSR in Singapore, Singapore Compact was set up by the National Tripartite Initiative (NTI) (Singapore Compact, 2005). Its key objectives are based on the capabilities of CSR to foster competitive business advantages. On top of this, government agencies and industry associations collaborate with SMEs to implement various CSR activities.

Albareda, Lozano and Ysa (2007) proposed a "'four ideal' typology model" to categorize the government's role in CSR in Europe. First, partnership. The government sets the framework by facilitating partnerships between businesses, NGOs and public organizations. Second, business in the community. This is when the government collaborates with businesses and provides incentives for them to work with the government to solve social problems. Third, sustainability and citizenship. Organizations assume the role of good corporate citizens and with the encouragement and incentives given by the government, they have to fulfill their responsibility to the community in which they operate. Four, through CSR policies where governments acknowledge the importance of CSR and actively engage the public and businesses on CSR issues.

External factor: Activism

Since the 1980s, the influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been increasing and their voices have been heard in many important public discussions. According to Naim (2000), NGO are seen as ballast to capitalism. Besides NGOs, governments, the community, and the media are the other actors that pressure organizations to take up what they feel are socially responsible practices (Doh & Guay, 2006; Garriga & Melé, 2004). In response, some organizations try to engage a wide spectrum of stakeholders in dialogue with the two-prong

aim of getting a clearer sense of stakeholders' demands and eliciting empathy from stakeholders on the limitations of the organizations (Kaptein & Van Tulder, 2003) which give rise to CSR activities.

According to Doh and Guay (2006), the institutional environments in a given society shape the meaning of CSR as well as how it is carried out by influencing government policy, organizational strategy and NGO activism targeted at organizations' behavior. The authors examined the institutional environments and political history of Europe and US and found significant differences that led to varying power accrued to NGOs in effecting policy changes which ultimately resulted in greater support for NGOs and CSR. These institutional changes stemmed from social, political and economic factors as well as cultural factors such as religion and individualism. As a result, NGOs have risen in prominence as an important stakeholder based on Mitchell's (1997) three attributes – power, legitimacy and urgency – that determine the relevance of stakeholders.

External factor: Exposure to Diverse Societal Culture

The meaning of sustainability and what it entails varies among countries as different societal cultures lead to individuals having different views with regards to CSR (Signitzer & Prexl, 2008). As a result, scholars have proclaimed culture as one of the most important influence in business decision making. For example, in a society largely defined as collectivistic and having long-term orientation such as India, the idea of having sustainable growth for the future generation is given higher priority than in individualistic society that are more present-oriented.

A recent study that examined the corporate social orientation of Japanese and Americans found (Smith, Singal, & Lamb, 2007) significant differences in the way people from these two nations view the responsibilities of businesses as delineated by Carroll (1991). College students from Japan and America (N = 806) were surveyed and it was found that Japanese placed greater emphasis on the ethical responsibilities of the firm. On a national level, this concern translated into many anti-corruption laws. American respondents, on the contrary, favored economic responsibilities, perhaps explaining why American organizations placed more emphasis on profitability as opposed to CSR engagement. American respondents were also found to place more emphasis on organization's legal responsibilities which may be accrued to the comprehensiveness of American laws. However, the Japanese's belief in social agreement, accommodation and conflict avoidance could also explain their lower priority on organization's legal responsibilities. While respondents from both nations ranked the discretionary responsibilities of an organization last, Japanese respondents placed more emphasis on it because they view organizations as corporate citizens and hence they had to be responsible to society.

On another level, societal culture also affects the organization's culture "because the human resources of an organization are acculturated into the culture of their societies" (Sriramesh, Kim, & Tagasaki, 1999, p. 273). A study was conducted among top managers of 15 countries and found that cultural factors affected the extent to which the dominant coalition supported CSR or the aspects of CSR they were more attuned to (Waldman et al., 2006). The authors examined CSR as comprising of responsibility towards shareholders, stakeholders and the community and found that the societal culture and the 'firm-level leadership' affected the dominant coalitions view of CSR. Top managers in poorer countries were found to be more concerned with societal welfare. A probable explanation given by the authors was that

governments of poorer countries were usually less capable of providing for the welfare of its citizens, hence managers might feel more personally responsible for their welfare. On the other hand, managers from prosperous nations tend to leave societal welfare in the hands of the government or other institutions. Managers operating in collectivistic cultures were found to be more supportive of CSR as the long term impact of managerial decision on the society is considered. Cultures with great power distance were also found to lack support for CSR due to an inclination towards self-centeredness and the use of power to benefit oneself as opposed to stakeholders.

Identifying factors that drive ethical elocution in crisis communication: Insights from Conflict Literature

Conflict scholars have studied public moral conflicts and provided insights on how to communicate in moral conflicts both in content and in process. These recommendations shed lights on what ethical variables might drive the organizational stances in communicating with conflicting publics.

External factor: The Nature of Conflict

A moral conflict is one in which groups in conflict have "incommensurate moral orders… a moral order is the theory by which a group understands its experience and makes judgments about proper and improper actions" (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 51). Moral conflicts are typically intractable, which in public relations context, can "occur within or between groups (as evidence in the antiabortion-prochoice conflict)" and "persist for long periods of time and resist every attempt to resolve them constructively" (Coleman, 2006; p. 533). Moral conflicts are typically "interminable" (having no endpoint or resolution), "morally attenuated" (the tendency of those who engage in conflict to become just what they are fighting), and "rhetorically attenuated" (the tendency of groups in conflict to speak of the other group in negative terms and to have a limited understanding of the other group's moral order) (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997, p. 68). It is a daunting task for any communicator to decide whether and how to use ethical and effective communication to facilitate conflict resolution by addressing the moral order bipolarity and identifying opportunities for win-win situation and constructive negotiation.

According to Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006), public moral conflicts, "sometimes termed cultural wars, ethnic conflicts, ideological conflicts, and intractable conflicts, are created when people publicly take opposing sides of a values-laden issue" (p. 561). Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) further cited that "the greatest problem of all is that each side is compelled by its highest and best motives to act in ways that are repugnant to the other" (p. 7). As Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) summarized, the challenge of moral conflict communication lies in two ways. First, to find a way to bring people representing seemingly irreconcilable differences together; and second, to create a process in which people are both interested and willing to find a path that allows acknowledgment and expression of the other's view point. Therefore, if an organization chooses to engage in communication, taking either more accommodative or advocating stance, it must decide the content, format and process of communication that would be strategically beneficial to the organization as well as constructive and meaningful in the eyes of the morally opposing public. Practitioners need to identify the way to bring representatives of both parties together and choose the most appropriate stance to allow both parties' values and interests acknowledged and expressed.

Internal factor: Role of Practitioners in Engaging the Other

As Fisher-Yoshida and Wasserman (2006) candidly pointed out, holding seemingly disparate perspectives is difficult, as different moral orders of different groups are an expression of a set of complex obligations, prohibitions, duties, rights, and aspirations rooted deeply in the cultural, historical and organizational soil. Therefore, "[r]evolving moral conflicts, minimizing moral conflicts, or at least trying to bring polarized parties to the same table to communicate with one another can be difficult. There are so many levels of complexity to consider and the struggle against the negative influences that may want to perpetuate the conflict can be very difficult" (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 564).

To tackle the complexity and understand the different levels of conflict, practitioners can learn from the lessons from conflict resolution and take a more proactive approach to engaging in more ethical communication while standing firmly by the organizational principles and moral standards. First, practitioners need to clearly perceive and help the organization to perceive the views of the opposing side in a moral conflict. This perception clarification "involves the capacity to see beyond one's own viewpoint and to correctly represent as well as to respectfully engage with those of the other" (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 563). As Buber (1955) mentioned, in moral conflict communication, "experiencing the other side" (p. 96) is crucial, which is a quality of being in relationship by being open to the beliefs of the other side while staying true to one's own beliefs. Second, the moral conflict itself could be further dissected and dealt with differently at different levels. Practitioners need to further analyze the issue under conflict, separating the elements that are completely against the organizational moral standard from those that might not be conflicting with the other party's demand diametrically. Third, in handling moral conflicts, practitioners should keep the vision of building sustainable ethical communication process, which might lead to possible relationship transcendence. To transcend moral conflict, a shift is required in the pattern of "logic, commitment and obligations" (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 564).

Relevance of insights to Contingency theory: What we can distill and infer
From the review, it is evident some factors were more prominent than others.

In this section, we would divide these factors into two sets of thematically consolidated and categorized variable: Those that found greater and consistent support, and those that found lesser support. The factors that found greater support were the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. The factors that found lesser support were shareholder influence and organizational resources.

Role of Public Relations Practitioners

The CSR literature found that the more involved practitioners were, the more entrenched and engaging would the CSR work be while the conflict literature showed that if practitioners took a more proactive approach to engaging in more ethical communication, the organization would abide by its principles and moral standards. We may be preaching to the choir, but what is evident is that if practitioners are highly involved and empowered to play the role of "ethical conscience" (Bowen, 2008, p. 290) as well as performing the role of "ethics

counsel to the dominant coalition" (p. 290) who would act in the "best of interests of both their organizations and their publics" (p. 290), the organization is likely to practice ethical elocution in crisis communication. The contingency theory, which characterized the PR access to dominant coalition as a predisposing factor (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008), may not have given justice to the critical role PR plays.

What this means: A clearer description comes from Pang's (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, which termed it involvement, autonomy and influence of PR practitioners. Borrowing insights from Pang (2006), it may mean that when the public relations practitioners have more influence and autonomy in crisis communication, the organization is likely to adopt a more accommodative stance with the aim of positioning the organization in a good light. It is therefore likely to mount a consistent defense based on the use of more accommodative repair strategies such as corrective action, and mortification. On the contrary, when public relations practitioners have less influence and autonomy in crisis communication, the organization is likely to employ a less accommodative stance. It is likely to utilize less accommodative repair strategies such as denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness.

Role of Dominant Coalition

The CSR literature found that the values of the dominant coalition were important as it had the most control over an organization's strategies and actions. Indeed, the dominant coalition dominates organizational life. Nothing happens in the organization without its sanction. The contingency theory characterized this as a predisposing factor and examined whether the dominant coalition is enlightened (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008). Related contingency studies found similar insights. Shin, Park and Cameron (2006) reinforced found that the involvement of the dominant coalition played a dominant role in defining the release of negative information and in the handling of conflict situations. Pang, Cropp and Cameron (2006) found that the most important public was the dominant coalition. Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that the dominant coalition is instrumental in establishing an "ethical environment" (p. 200) within the organization. Pang (2006) went a step further and argued that the dominant coalition should be highly involved during crisis.

What this means: Drawing insights from Pang's (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, it may mean that when the dominant coalition is more involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to adopt a less accommodative stance if it is bounded by moral, legal, regulatory and jurisdictional constraints. The repair strategies used are likely to be less accommodative strategies such as denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness. On the contrary, when the dominant coalition is more involved in crisis communication, the organization is likely to practice a more accommodative stance if the moral, regulatory, legal, and jurisdictional constraints do not prohibit it from entering into communication with its publics. The repair strategies used are likely to be more "accommodative" strategies such as corrective action, and mortification.

Exposure of Organizational Business and to Diversity of Cultures

The CSR literature found that organizations that had global operations, particularly MNCs, tended to support and report their CSR activities. The contingency theory, which characterized this as a predisposing factor, termed it business exposure (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008). A logical inference would be that the more exposed to a diversity of contexts an organization is in its CSR activities, the more enlightened the organization would be in appreciating – even tolerant – of the nuances, demands and contradictions placed on it. This

would certainly have a strong impact on the stance it adopts in its ethical elocution during crisis. Corollary to the above factor, the CSR literature also found that exposure to diverse societal culture had an impact on how organizations adapted their CSR programs to meet specific needs in different contextual settings. The contingency theory characterized this as the general political/social environment/external culture that the organization operates in (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2008).

What this means: Crandall, Parnell and Spillan (2010) argued that greater exposure to the global environment can leave the organization vulnerable. Coupled with the vulnerability faced by specific industries, these could present formidable "ethical boulders" (p. 199). A logical trajectory would then mean that organizations that have global operations may adopt a less accommodative stance when confronted with crises. On the contrary, this may not be the case. In their study of how MNCs managed conflicts in South Korea, Choi and Cameron (2005) found that these organizations tended to adopt more accommodative stances because they were fearful of the South Korean media and the local culture. Even if the MNCs were to adopt less accommodative stances at the beginning of the conflict, they would move towards accommodation once the powerful Korean media covered the story or when "an issue is related to national sentiment" (p. 185).

Government Influence and Intervention

The CSR literature found that governments play a pervasive role in encouraging and regulating CSR activities through implementation of CSR-friendly policies, establishment of CSR-focused institutions and by enacting laws to ensure organizations observe and practice minimum levels of engagement with the community. Despite the importance of the government, it is not a factor in the contingency theory and is often subsumed under the characteristics of the external public. However, studies employing the theory have highlighted the critical roles governments play in managing crises (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2006/2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2004). Pang (2006) also elaborated the facilitating role the Singapore government played in dealing with two air crashes in 1997 and 2000 even though it involved the aircraft belonged to a commercial entity, Singapore Airlines.

What this means: Previous studies (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2006/2007; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2004) found that organizations facing crisis would often have to follow the lead when the government intervenes in a crisis. Even if the organization may have adopted a less accommodative stance initially, the government, by virtue of its moral, legal and regulatory prerogatives, can sway the organization to move towards accommodation if the government deems it to be the "right" thing to do. For instance, Lee, Lee, and Pang (2009) in their study of how the Singapore government restored confidence in the charity sector in the wake of a massive charity scandal, found that swift government intervention exerted pressure on executives of an NGO (National Kidney Foundation) to back down from their advocacy stance. Further interventions like insisting on immediate public accountability forced the organization to eventuate on an accommodative stance.

Nature of Crisis

The conflict literature found that conflicts that border on moral issues involving the organization present the greatest challenge in ethical elocution during crises. Though every crisis can have a moral component – for instance, a factory fire that wiped out the economy in Lawrence, Massachusetts just before Christmas moved the CEO to continue paying the workers

because it was the morally right thing to do (see Ulmer, 2001) – it is important for organizations to differentiate crises that can be managed in a straightforward manner and those in shades of gray. The contingency theory did not specifically address this and subsumed under urgency of situation as a situational variable.

What this means: First, it is possible to manage organization-public conflict through ethical communication via appropriate conflict positioning. An organization should always strive to communicate with its publics whenever possible, but it does not necessarily always have to accommodate all the time. With a solid understanding of the issue under conflict, practitioners should further assess the moral conflict as a threat according to the situational demands and organizational resource to handle the conflict as well as whether ethically there is any room to accommodate or to negotiate (and at what level) with the opponent. In addition, the understanding of the terms such as accommodation and advocacy should not be termed too rigidly. For example, the gesture of listening to all aspects of the other party's issue arguments is a stance of accommodation. On the other hand, practitioners should communicate to reflect authentically the organization's moral standard and beliefs.

Second, practitioners should recommend the organization to only take different stances toward different publics but also toward different levels of the conflict issue. An organization could take an advocating stance on the core of a moral issue and prohibit further communication on a given issue aspect, but in the meanwhile it could be open for further discussion on possible accommodation on other aspects of the issue under conflict.

Third, in ethical communication with the opponent public, the organization should strategically position itself in appropriate level of emotional engagement and, if possible, facilitate the conflict coping process of the other party. Research showed that the level of emotional engagement with the story of the other side affected "the capacity to hear it, especially when it conflicted deeply with an alternative existing story they held" (Fisher-Yoshida & Wasserman, 2006; p. 577). By providing a forum for both parties to cope with conflict stress via emotional venting and emotional support, the organization might pave smoother way for future communication competitive advantage while cultivating a less hostile external environment.

Activism

The CSR literature found that activism, particularly by NGOs, could influence the level of CSR engagements by organizations. Conceivably, activists have different levels of influence on different issues in different societies. For instance, environmentalist group Sierra Club whose members were vegetarians certainly had much manifest influence in determining ranching issues in Montana (Cameron, 1999) than, for instance, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty towards Animals (SPCA) in Singapore. The contingency theory did not address activism specifically and subsumed it under external threats.

What this means: Borrowing from Pang's (2006) conflict positioning conceptualization, it may mean that when the threats posed by activists appear to be high, organizations may be more likely to adopt a more accommodative stance in crisis communications to resolve the crisis. The repair strategies used are likely to be corrective action and mortification. On the contrary, when the threats posed by activists appear to be low, the organization is more likely to adopt a less accommodative stance. The repair strategies used are more likely to be denial, evading responsibility, and reducing offensiveness.

The factors that found lesser support were shareholder influence and organizational resources. These are discussed briefly as the CSR literature found their impact minimal. For

instance, for shareholder influence, this remains limited in scope as organizations have imposed restricted or even curtailed dialogue with shareholder activists. For organizational resources, the closest association would be the contingency theory's predisposing factor (size of the organization), it is argued that literature found that size need not necessarily matter in ethical elocution during crisis. One would expect more in responsible and ethical communication from a large organization like Enron (see Seeger and Ulmer, 2003). However, it was a comparatively smaller outfit, Malden Mills in Lawrence, Massachusetts, that was heralded as the epitome of ethical elocution (Ulmer, 2001).

Conclusion

This conceptual paper had set out to unearth a new set of factors called ethical variables in the contingency theory that influence the organization's stance on the continuum before it interacts with its publics. It is premised on the basis that if the contingency theory of strategic conflict management had offered a viable perspective in portraying a realistic description of how organizations manage conflicts (Pang, Jin, & Cameron, in press), then strengthening the theory's explanatory power, generating new factors, and expanding its range of potential knowledge would be a consequent trajectory in the development of the theory. Chaffee and Berger (1987) argued these were characteristics of a theory's rigor.

To engage in this task, this study has reviewed conflict communication and corporate social responsibility literature to identify the key factors that would influence ethical elocution. CSR literature has provided the initial roadmap on what constitutes ethical decision making, and consequently ethical elocution during crises while the conflict literature has provided a moral bearing to ethical elocution, i.e., how does one manage conflict in a manner that leads to a morally acceptable resolution? From the literature, the study has unearthed six factors that influence ethical elocution, namely the role of public relations practitioners; role of dominant coalition; exposure of organizational business and to diversity of cultures; government influence and intervention; nature of crisis; and activism. These factors are exploratory and far from exhaustive. However, they present a starting point for further discussions to take place and a practical approach for practitioners to engage in. Furure research needs to be developed to test the validity and reliability of this new set of ethical factors using qualitative methods (such as indepth interviews with senior practitioners) and quantative methods (i.e. practitioner surveys in different contexts and situations) to further explore the structure and dimensionality of the ethical aspect of organizational conflict stance. In addition, consideration should be given to how these factors might be associated with other contingeny factors in contributing to different degrees of accommodation the organization could effectively and ethically take toward different publics and different aspects of a given conflict issue.

Not since the last cluster of variables, the proscriptive variables (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001), has the theory made a major theoretical breakthrough. Besides theory building, the authors believe that organizations which strive to be ethical can benefit from understanding the factors that can impact its stances and concomitant strategies/tactics as it enters into communication. Our motivation to do this is closely tied to Albert Einstein's call for organizations to engage in ethical elocution. In an address to CALTECH in 1931, he said, "Concern for man himself and his fate must always form the chief interest of all technical endeavors, concern for the great unsolved problems of the organization of labor and the distribution of goods – in order that the creations of our mind shall be a *blessing* (italics added) and not a curse to mankind. Never forget this in the midst of your diagrams and equations" (cited in Bartlett, 1992, p. 635).

That is our humble endeavor.

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