III

USING THEORY FOR PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

13

What Theory Is and Why It Is Useful

Chapter Contents

Despite the admonition of a famous social scientist named Kurt Lewin that "nothing is as practical as a good theory" (Marrow, 1969), practitioners and students of public relations often seem skeptical. After all, the term *theory* sounds academic, not applied, and theories usually emanate from academics in ivory tower institutions, seemingly insulated from real-world complications. But Lewin was right: A good understanding of a few "good theories" enhances the strategic manager's success. Theories—essentially generalizations about how people think and behave—help determine appropriate goals and objectives for a communication program. Scientifically tested theories also help communication programmers develop effective strategies to achieve those goals and objectives.

Because applying theory makes communication planning more scientific and less haphazard, it helps ensure effectiveness. The value of being scientific does not diminish the need for creativity, but science makes it possible to (a) *predict* what will happen, such as anticipating the results from a mailing versus a radio ad campaign; (b) *understand* why something has happened, such as why attendance was poor at a special event; and (c) *control* what will happen (to the extent that this is possible). To achieve success, the manager wants as much control as feasible, and applied

theory provides the most control possible in a field notorious for its uncertainty.

WHAT IS A THEORY?

Theories explain why people behave in certain ways and how people are likely to respond to something. This gives the strategic manager the ability to make predictions based on an understanding of communication processes and effects. This is especially important to communication managers because much public relations communication takes place through gatekeepers such as reporters and opinion leaders instead of through paid advertising, increasing the opportunities for plans to go awry. In addition, many communication results seem difficult to quantify. These difficulties force managers to choose. Either accept the inability to control process and outcome along with its consequence, a lack of credibility, or find a way to exert more control, which requires developing the best understanding of likely explanations and predictions of communication processes and effects.

In truth, we all operate on the basis of theories every day. Many predictions come from personal experience. Savvy practitioners know that pitching a story to a reporter on deadline breeds failure. Localizing a story makes it more attractive. Media relations experience teaches practitioners what sorts of things to say (and not say) when pitching a story to an editor and what types of publications will find a story about a pastry chef interesting. All of these predictions illustrate theories. For example, the need to avoid the reporter's deadline pressure illustrates the larger point, or theory, that "timing affects receptivity." The need to localize a story exemplifies the theory that "relevance affects acceptance." Finally, the appropriateness of specialized publications, such as culinary magazines, to the pastry chef story demonstrates the theory that "proximity increases relevance." To the extent that the manager can control the variables of timing, relevance, and proximity, the better the manager can control the result of media relations activities. To the extent that the manager learns from others' experiences instead of from personal trial and error, the manager will endure fewer opportunities to learn from mistakes.

FINDING A GOOD THEORY

Theories cannot offer guarantees; instead, they improve the probability of success. Because of the way the scientific method works, theories are never proven beyond any doubt. They gain support, and they can be disproved. A scientific test of a theory sets up a situation in which the theory has to either succeed or fail. To gain support (never "proof"), a theory must demonstrate success at least 95% of the time in a given statistical test. The more times a theory is tested and the more methods and contexts used

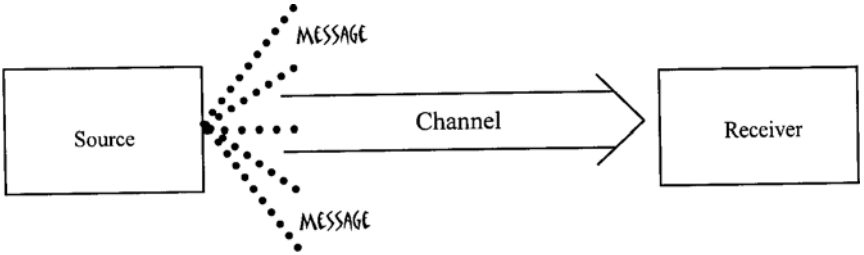

FIG. 13.1. The linear model of communication. The linear model is popular and easy to understand but does not accurately reflect the way communication really works.

to test it, the more confidence a practitioner can place in the theory's predictions. As a result of testing, theories often evolve; for example, testing may show that a theory applies better in some contexts than in others. This makes it important to keep up to date on what is new in communication, organization, and persuasion theory to know the nuances that give theories the most relevance to situations encountered by professionals. This becomes particularly important when a theory creates controversy or fails too many tests.

One of the most popular theories used by practitioners, also the most criticized, is called the *linear model* of communication or the *bullet theory* of communication (Fig. 13.1). Although the model originally was developed to illustrate the constraints that messages encounter when sent electronically through wires, too many people have embraced the illustrative model as an explanatory device, a theory of how communication works. Much research has shown that the bullet theory is too simplistic. Nevertheless, publicity-based communication programs essentially operate on that outdated theory, assuming that just getting the message out will have desirable effects.

Gaining exposure via the media can serve a valuable purpose. But a reliance on publicity greatly limits the practitioner's ability to achieve and measure success for important persuasive goals such as behavior change or important relational goals such as trust and commitment. Just because a message receives a lot of exposure does not mean anyone will pay attention to it, understand it, believe it, or act differently because of it. As a result, clip counts can be meaningless to a program focused on attitude change, behavior change, or even knowledge change. Because activities that do not contribute demonstrably to goal achievement waste time and resources, programs must include publicity only to the extent that reasons exist to predict and explain how publicity will help achieve stated goals. These reasons are theories.

Theories often use fancy social science terms that have special meaning to scholars looking for nuances, but good theories usually can be boiled down into sensible language that is fairly simple to apply. Some theories

especially relevant to public relations practitioners focus on how relationships work, and others focus on persuasion. Theories focused on relationships correspond to what Grunig and Hunt (1984) called the *symmetrical model* of public relations, and theories focused on persuasion correspond to Grunig's (1989) *asymmetrical model* of public relations. According to Grunig, strategic managers often operate on the basis on both models, instead of on one exclusively. Two remaining models of public relations management—the publicity model and the public information model—operate on the basis of the outdated bullet theory, focusing solely on distributing messages. These two models cannot be considered strategic management.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR "SYMMETRICAL" PUBLIC RELATIONS

Several useful theories explain how the symmetrical model of public relations works, as well as what makes it work so well. These theories explain why public relations is relevant and useful for an organization. They also guide problem identification and goal setting because they help the manager understand when and why issues should be considered problems or achievements. Four theories are especially important for the public relations manager, whose ultimate focus rests on long-term relationship building.

Systems Theory—Adaptation and Adjustment

According to systems theory, organizations are most effective when they acknowledge that they interact with, affect, and are affected by their environment. They need to bring in resources that enhance their success and deflect threats that can compromise their survival. Organizations in *open systems*, which means in real life, exchange information, energy, and material with their environments. Organizations operating in *closed systems* exist in a vacuum without interacting with or exchanging things with any other organization or person. In an open system, the organization sometimes implements changes (e.g., flextime hours) to adjust to changes in the environment (e.g., increasingly difficult commute traffic). The organization also tries to obtain accommodations from the environment (e.g., having the county pay for access road maintenance) that help it operate effectively. According to the open systems model (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cutlip et al., 2006; Grunig & Hunt, 1984), organizations that close themselves off from this exchange process become inert or disintegrate. In other words, they become irrelevant or ineffective.

Activities necessary to succeed, according to systems theory, include surveillance, interpretation, and advising management (Table 13.1). *Surveillance*—also called *scanning*—means gathering information about the

TABLE 13.1
Necessary Activities According to Systems Theory

Surveillance	*Interpretation*	*Advising Management*
Gather information about environment	Prioritize issues	Suggest concrete actions
Gather information about opportunities and challenges	Prioritize publics	Suggest measurable objectives
	Anticipate changes	
	Develop recommendations	

environment and possible challenges or opportunities (data collection). Interpretation means having the ability to make sense of the information gathered to be able to prioritize issues and publics, anticipate how the situation may change in ways that may help or hurt the organization, and develop recommendations for action (theorize). Advising management means making credible suggestions for concrete actions that will achieve measurable objectives consistent with organizational goals. To sum up systems theory, organizations do not exist in a vacuum. They need to perform ongoing research to understand changing environmental constraints and possibilities.

Co-Orientation Theory

This theory helps to delineate what makes communication productive. According to co-orientation theory (McLeod & Chaffee, 1972; Newcomb, 1953), people and organizations relate to one another successfully to the extent that they think similarly about ideas. The co-orientation model shows the ways two parties may relate to the same idea (Fig. 13.2). Each party will have impressions both about the idea and about what the other party thinks about the idea. On one hand, the two parties can agree and know that they agree, but they also can think they disagree. On the other hand, they may disagree but think they agree. Even more confusing, they may think they are discussing the same idea, such as improving customer service responsiveness, when in fact they are thinking about different ideas, such as a need for new procedures versus a need for additional training. According to co-orientation theory, the most effective communication takes place when both parties agree and when they know they agree, which means they have achieved consensus.

Grunig & Huang (2000) wrote that the application of co-orientation theory promotes long-term success, but its usefulness may not seem obvious when examining only short-term outcomes. Clients and CEOs may not understand how measures such as agreement, accuracy, and understanding

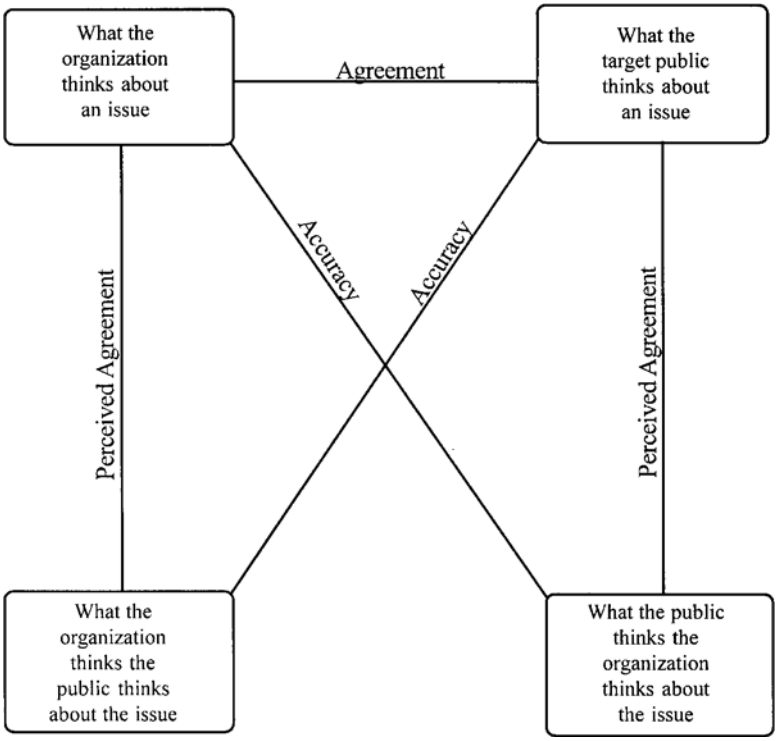

FIG. 13.2. The co-orientation model. The co-orientation model focuses the manager's attention on relationships, consistent with the overall mission of public relations.

relate to the achievement of organizational goals such as increased sales, increased membership renewals, or passage of an important bill in Congress. As a result, managers trying to demonstrate long-term communication effectiveness need to focus on outcomes such as trust and control mutuality, relational commitment, and relational satisfaction (Table 13.2). *Trust* is defined as the belief that the other party will not exploit one's goodwill. *Control mutuality* refers to the degree to which the parties believe that they have enough control over the relationship and the other party's goals and activities. *Relational commitment* means the desire to maintain the relationship, including level of interest in maintaining membership, level of acceptance

TABLE 13.2
Measurable Outcomes of a Mutually Beneficial Relationship

Trust
Control mutuality
Relational commitment
Relational satisfaction

of the organization's goals, willingness to exert effort on behalf of the organization, and extent to which the party believes the benefits of maintaining the relationship outweigh the costs of discontinuing it. Finally, *relational satisfaction* is defined as the degree to which a relationship seems fulfilling. Stafford and Canary (1991) suggested that relational satisfaction may be the most important measure of an effective relationship, but measures such as trust and commitment seem especially well suited to the demonstration of communication's contributions to organizational goals. Discover Card has applied co-orientation theory to try to preserve its relationship with customers even as its pursues their overdue accounts. The company has begun to use greeting cards from Hallmark to notify some customers about their late payments. According to Scott Robinette, president of Hallmark Loyalty, "Discover didn't want to alienate those customers" (Associated Press, 2004). As a result, customers have received a card encouraging them to "give us a call so we can work through this together" instead of getting a threatening business letter.

According to co-orientation theory, organizations must try to maximize levels of agreement, understanding, and accuracy among the organization's communicators and stakeholders. These indicators of successful communication contribute to long-term success measured by outcomes such as trust and commitment. Co-orientation theory demonstrates the importance of taking a long-term view of the organization's relationship with its stakeholders despite the temptation to focus on short-term goals such as the success of the next product promotion.

Situational Theory of Strategic Constituencies

This approach responds to the truism that "you cannot please all of the people all of the time." An organization must prioritize its efforts, and that includes the publics on which it focuses. Higher priority goes to publics whose opposition or support can either help or hinder the organization's ability to achieve its goals and mission. Publics can be internal to the organization (e.g., union employees), external to the organization (e.g., environmental groups), or both (e.g., employees who are members of environmental groups). According to Grunig and Repper (1992), strategic constituencies can be segmented into categories of active, potentially active (latent), and passive publics.

An *active public* is made up of individuals who perceive that what an organization does matters to them (called *level of involvement*), that the consequences of what an organization does affects them (called *problem recognition*), and that they have the ability to do something to affect the organization's actions or the consequences of those actions (called *constraint recognition*). Actions can be positive, such as purchasing stock or maintaining memberships, or negative, such as engaging in boycotts and lawsuits.

A latent public is one that has the potential to become active. These are people who should care about an issue because it could affect them but who may not be interested, may not know about the issue, or may not have the ability to take action.

Active publics can be divided into three types:

1. *The long haul.* Those interested in all aspects of the issue
2. *Special interests.* Those interested only in certain aspects of the topic
3. *Hot button.* Those who get interested only if an emotional debate ensues

A fourth category—apathetic publics—do not care about any aspect of the issue and have no relevance to the organization.

Excellence Theory

According to excellence theory, building mutually beneficial relationships with strategic constituencies saves money by preventing problems such as lawsuits, boycotts, and strikes and by increasing employees' satisfaction, which enhances productivity and quality. According to Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig (1995), excellence theory integrates systems theory and the situational theory of strategic constituencies explained in the previous section. It proposes that managed communication helps achieve organizational goals because it helps reconcile organizational goals with the expectations of its relevant publics (Grunig, Grunig, & Ehling, 1992). Excellence theory proposes that public relations is most *effective* when the senior communication manager helps shape organizational goals and helps determine which external publics are most important strategically. Communication management will be most *successful* when it operates strategically by identifying (segmenting) active publics and developing symmetrical communication programs that have success that can be measured (Grunig & Huang, 2000; Grunig & Repper, 1992).

Summarizing the Symmetrical Perspective

The combination of theories integrated into excellence theory takes a holistic view of communication and organizational success. According to this viewpoint, organizations must operate with an understanding of and respect for others who coexist in their social system. Because the system constantly evolves, the environment can change in ways that can affect the organization in beneficial or detrimental ways. Publics operating in the environment also evolve, which means their *relevance* to the organization—the degree to which their support makes a difference to organizational

TABLE 13.3
Comparison of the Us–Us and Us–Them Operating Styles

	Us–Us	*Us–Them*
View of strategic publics	Publics are stakeholders or partners	Publics are adversaries
Character of communication	Integrate publics' values into organizational goals	Communication lacks shared understanding
Focus of goals	Win–win situations (consensus)	Self-preservation (consensus unlikely)
Communication style	Focus on responsiveness (accommodation and advocacy)	Indifference or counteraction (advocacy only)

success—also will change. Organizations' success depends on their ability to integrate the needs and desires of relevant publics into organizational goals and activities to gain and maintain their trust and commitment.

This view can be summarized as an "us and us" (us–us) philosophy. It also can be summarized as the practice of social responsibility. According to this philosophy, the mission of public relations is to develop and maintain "win–win" situations for the organization and the publics on whose goodwill its success depends. This can be contrasted with an "us and them" (us–them) philosophy, which often devolves into an "us versus them" situation (Table 13.3). The reason for this is that the us–them philosophy fails to integrate strategic publics' values into organizational goals. Instead, it views organizational values and goals as distinct from publics' values and goals. According to systems theory, the us–them approach is likely to fail because it discounts the organization's interdependence with its environment. According to co-orientation theory, the us–them approach is likely to fail because communication will lack shared understanding and will be less likely to achieve consensus. According to situational theory, the us–them approach does not recognize that active and latent publics can take action damaging to the organization's ability to succeed and will do so if they feel the need and find the opportunity. According to excellence theory, the us–them approach fails to appreciate that responsiveness is less expensive and more effective than indifference.

According to the us–us philosophy, symmetrical public relations benefits the organization because strategic communication programs are essential to existence in an interdependent social system. The communication manager's ability to understand strategic publics, communicate successfully with them, and advise management about the implications of evolving relationships can have long-term, measurable effects on the bottom line.

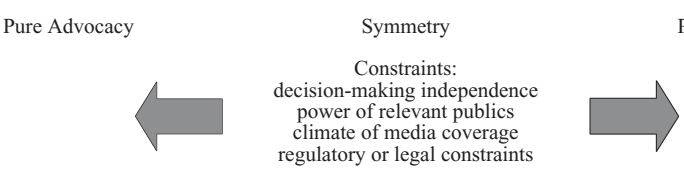

FIG. 13.3. Cameron's continuum of symmetrical contingencies.

What Makes the Symmetrical Ideal "Practical"

Grunig (1989) noted that few organizations put the symmetrical philosophy into practice, although the idea is not new. These organizations may not believe sufficient evidence supports the symmetrical imperative, or they may view the approach as impractical or difficult to apply. Cameron (1998) suggested that practitioners' ability to practice symmetrical public relations depends on various contingencies, such as independence in decision making, the power of relevant publics, the climate of media coverage, and regulatory or legal constraints (Fig. 13.3). According to Cameron, companies operate on a continuum that ranges from pure advocacy to pure accommodation. Pure advocacy refers to developing and delivering messages in support of a position without seeking feedback for compromise. Depending on the situation, companies' location on the continuum will vary. Although perfect symmetry may not exist between an organization and its publics, striving for symmetry demonstrates the willingness to meet another viewpoint part way and to at least seriously consider alternative perspectives on an issue. To attempt this is to practice social responsibility.

Plenty of evidence supports the view that communication management as the practice of social responsibility reaps measurable success. Although managers with a social conscience may embrace socially responsible management for its intuitive appeal, even the most hardcore pragmatist can seize on its bottom-line benefits, summarized by Feldstein (1992) and demonstrated by many others. According to *PR Reporter* ("Study Says," 2004), an increasing number of companies now produce annual "social reports" disclosing their corporate social responsibility activities. According to research performed by Equation Research, companies engaging in the practice, sometimes referred to as *public reports, sustainable development reports,* or *corporate citizenship reports,* find it valuable.

According to professionals writing in *PR News*, corporate social responsibility has become an essential part of doing business. A 2002 survey known as the Cone Corporate Citizenship Study found that a majority of Americans expect this from businesses and want companies to explain what they do (Cone & Feldman, 2004). The benefits of the social responsibility approach, according to Feldstein (1992), include the following:

1. *Consumer loyalty.* Increasingly, studies have demonstrated that consumer loyalty has value to an organization that translates into measurable profits. For example, a study by the Walker Group ("In Focused," 1996) showed that consumers are 90% more likely to buy products or services from a socially responsible company. In addition, the *Harvard Business Review* ("Building Customer," 1996) reported that even small reductions in consumer defection rates had remarkable effects on profits. For example, reducing client defections by 5% increased profitability to an auto service chain by more than 20%, to insurances brokerages by more than 40%, to software by about 30%, and to credit cards by more than 80%. On the other hand, a 2002 survey found that 91% of Americans who dislike a company's citizenship practices would consider taking their purchasing elsewhere ("Numbers Don't," 2004).

2. *Employee morale.* Businesses have discovered that employee morale is not a nicety but an important factor affecting recruitment, retention, quality, and profitability. For example, fear of job loss can hurt morale, which can contribute to accidents, mistakes, and decreased productivity. Helping morale, on the other hand, can increase productivity and loyalty. For example, Johnson and Johnson's Balancing Work and Family Program ("A Look," 1997) demonstrated that 71% of employees who used the company's flexible time and leave policies cited the policy as a "very important" reason for staying with the company. Two years into the program, employees maintained that their jobs were interfering less with their family lives even while the number of hours worked on average had increased. The program has helped keep Johnson and Johnson on *Working Mother's* top-10 list of family-friendly companies for the past 19 years (*Working Mother*, 2005). Meanwhile, companies such as Xerox and IBM have found that potential employees like the idea of working for a company that promotes volunteerism among employees. The Families and Work Institute has found, however, that nearly 40% of companies do not actively communicate policies such as their work–family programs to employees. Companies such as Allstate, on the other hand, provide managers with training—in Allstate's case, 3 days' worth—on how to foster a supportive work environment. Good employee relations can help recruitment as well as retention, with a variety of magazines now ranking companies on issues such as family friendliness and work environment. According to the Cone 2002 survey ("Numbers Don't," 2004), 80% of respondents would refuse to work at a company that they consider socially irresponsible.

3. *Shareholder value.* Retaining efficient and creative employees increases profits because quality and productivity increases, and less money needs to be spent on recruitment and on problems related to quality control or employee grievances. Retaining loyal customers reduces the need for attracting new customers and can sharply increase profits. One study of 600 Morgan Stanley Capital International companies between 1999 and

2003 found that companies scoring well on environmental and social performance measures outperformed others financially by 23% ("Numbers Don't," 2004).

4. *Community goodwill.* Another apparent nicety that must be viewed as essential, community goodwill or support, can make or break a company in times of crisis. For example, when Los Angeles erupted in rioting following the Rodney King beating by police officers in 1991, McDonald's found its restaurants standing unscathed in neighborhoods that had been essentially razed and looted. McDonald's attributed its survival to the company's long-standing involvement in activities intended to benefit the communities in which they operated and the employees who worked for the company in those communities. According to Steve Voien of Edelman's corporate social responsibility practice, the agency's fifth annual Trust Barometer survey of 1,200 opinion leaders concluded that companies cannot afford to ignore the concerns of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and instead should endeavor to associate with them due to their much higher credibility (Voien, 2004).

5. *Community well being.* Because employees, customers, and potential employees all live in the community, the health of the community affects the well being of the company. Many indirect effects, such as good schools, safe streets, thriving arts, and health promotion all benefit the company by improving the environment in which the organization exists. As Feldstein (1992) wrote, 90% of the $144 billion given to charity in 1990 came from individuals, and only 5% came from businesses. He reported estimates that 87% of Americans give to charities and 78% volunteer their time. Many companies, as a result, have been divesting themselves of a major opportunity to help their communities and thereby help themselves. Both large- and small-scale projects make a difference. For example, companies such as Helene Curtis Industries, Inc., in Chicago and Columbia Sportswear in Portland "adopt" families and buy holiday gifts and household necessities for them. The consumer goods company Tom's of Maine, meanwhile, runs a 5%-for-volunteering program, which allows employees to spend 5% of their work time helping nonprofit organizations. Starbucks encourages customers to join in their embrace of issues by providing their own grants and promoting purchases that benefit selected causes. Working Assets long-distance telephone service performs an annual survey of its customers to select the causes it will promote during the following year.

Keys to Making the Symmetrical Ideal Sensible

Managers need not worry that acting socially responsible can lead to giving away the store, which would be asymmetrical and counterproductive. As Richmond (1990) wrote, stakeholders will understand that the organization must ensure its own success. Indeed, as McDonald's learned so

dramatically, stakeholders who see their values incorporated into the organization's values and goals have a vested interest in helping ensure the organization's survival. The manager can operate on several principles drawn from Richmond's sensible approach to corporate responsibility, what he called "putting the public in public relations":

1. *Be honest.* There is no shame in being straightforward that your organization needs to profit from its relationship with its publics.
2. *Be creative.* There is no need to give away huge amounts of resources to promote mutually beneficial relationships. A hotel, for example, can offer special services such as a tour of an award-winning kitchen and a meal as a door prize for a nonprofit group holding a special event at the hotel. Or the hotel can provide the room free, provided the organization agrees to include a no-host bar.
3. *Do your research.* The manager must know the public to find common ground on which to build understanding that leads to mutually beneficial goals. Richmond (1990), for example, knew that a major southwest association was determining where to hold its next Seattle-based conference. Richmond learned that one of the two major charities supported by the organization also was supported by his client, the Seattle Sheraton. The charity was happy to encourage the organization to support the business of another benefactor, and the organization was pleased to give its business to an organization that shared its philanthropic priorities.
4. *Find the right fit.* Philanthropic efforts must be strategic, but this means they need to reflect genuine concerns of the sponsoring organization and must not seem insincere or mercenary. Boston's IDPR Group ("In Focused," 1996) advised that programs need to reflect the organization's business interests and offer opportunities for its expertise to make a difference. Efforts also need to be relevant to the values and interests of active and latent publics. Philanthropic programs must reflect an organization's core beliefs, actively involve individuals at all levels of employment within the company, and correspond to the organization's behavior. Focusing efforts in a small number of areas can magnify the organization's impact.
5. *Always monitor and evaluate the relationship.* Never assume that plans will carry through as expected or that the health of a relationship is assured indefinitely. This often requires simple actions instead of sophisticated research techniques. Richmond (1990), for example, advised the Sheraton to buy some tables at events hosted in the hotel both to show support for the organization and to ensure quality control during the event.
6. *Remember that little things can count big.* Small donations can come back to an organization many times over. Richmond's Seattle Sheraton, for example, had a company move its function from another hotel to its hotel because the Sheraton unknowingly had donated a room to a key decision maker's son's elementary school for a raffle in a town located 20 miles

away. Likewise, small insults can cost big business. It is a good idea to remember that, in a social system always in flux, every relationship has the potential to affect other relationships.

A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR "ASYMMETRICAL" CAMPAIGNS

Another set of theories can help guide the manager developing a campaign. These theories, from communication, psychology, sociology, and marketing, take a more short-term, so-called "asymmetrical" view and emphasize persuasion. Although theories focused on campaign issues emphasize the asymmetrical approach, managers need to use them with long-term relational goals in mind. For example, although campaigns focus on changing a public's mind or behavior, such as approving zoning changes that allow a company to move into a neighborhood, the manager must recognize organizations need to respond to the public as well, such as by helping develop a solution to neighborhood concerns about traffic. Theories of public relations strongly suggest that an organization's long-term success depends on its ability to develop and maintain good relationships with key stakeholders. Even organizations taking the long view, however, need to engage in persuasion.

Persuasion (O'Keefe, 2002) is a "successful, intentional effort at influencing another's mental state through communication in a circumstance in which the persuadee has some measure of freedom" (p. 17). This aspect of freedom distinguishes persuasion from coercion, which is an attempt to force compliance by taking away the target's freedom to disagree. The definition of *persuasion* includes other important elements to consider:

Success. Persuasion does not occur unless the effort to influence another succeeds.

Intent. Persuasion occurs on purpose. Change can occur accidentally, but that is not persuasion.

Mental state. Persuasion often focuses on changing a behavior, such as increasing sales or the number of votes in favor of a particular issue, but changing behavior is not enough if attitudes do not correspond to the behavior. If attitudes and behavior conflict, coercion may have taken place instead of persuasion. On the other hand, sometimes attitude change, such as increased trust, is enough to satisfy organizational goals, without an associated specific behavior.

Through communication. Persuasion uses communication instead of force to achieve goals.

Persuasion and Ethics

After a long discussion of the importance of symmetrical practices and social responsibility, students of public relations often worry that engaging in persuasion somehow is unethical. Indeed, the asymmetrical approach to communication management often gives public relations a bad reputation because of its us-them embrace of persuasion as unidirectional change. The media and other publics notice the lack of reciprocity on the part of the organization and resent what can seem like efforts to take advantage of others. Nevertheless, just as every individual operates according to personal theories, everyone engages in efforts to persuade. Even babies quickly learn that they must communicate their needs and desires to others in an attempt to have those needs and desires fulfilled. As grown-ups and communication professionals, we often need to persuade others to help us achieve our goals. But just as we learn to give as well as receive in our personal relationships, organizations at times must permit themselves to be persuaded by others, to be responsive to strategic publics' needs and desires. In other words, persuasion on behalf of an organization must occur in the context of the symmetrical approach to public relations. The PRSA Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations provides a useful yardstick for evaluating whether persuasive efforts remain within ethical bounds (Sidebar 13.1; see also Appendix A).

The values in the PRSA code of standards highlights this issue, that a member needs to act in accord with "the public interest." Several provisions address the importance of the persuadee's freedom to disagree by acknowledging that the withholding of important information violates a message recipient's freedom to evaluate the veracity of a message. As a result, the communication practitioner is expected to "deal fairly . . . giving due respect to the ideal of free inquiry and to the opinions of others". The member must act with honesty and integrity, communicate truthfully and accurately, refrain from knowingly spreading false or misleading information, refrain from representing conflicting interests, and be prepared to identify publicly the client or employer on whose behalf public communication is made. In addition, the practitioner may not corrupt "the integrity of channels of communications or the processes of government" or accept fees or other remuneration from anyone except clients or employers who must fully disclose facts.

In simple language, the PRSA code of standards means that persuasion must occur without resorting to lying or misrepresentation. Indeed, research shows that persuasion is more effective and has longer lasting effects when persuaders acknowledge and refute the other side of an issue. It is not necessary to use dishonesty to persuade someone; after all, if the organization holds a particular view, its reasons for the view are real. The key to persuasion is to communicate successfully the reasons why a target

SIDEBAR 13.1
PSRA Member Statement of Professional Values

This statement presents the core values of PSRA members and, more broadly, of the public relations profession. These values provide the foundation for the Member Code of Ethics and set the industry standard for the professional practice of public relations. These values are the fundamental beliefs that guide our behaviors and decision-making process. We believe our professional values are vital to the integrity of the profession as a whole.

Advocacy

We serve the public interest by acting as responsible advocates for those we represent. We provide a voice in the marketplace of ideas, facts, and viewpoints to aid informed public debate.

Honesty

We adhere to the highest standards of accuracy and truth in advancing the interests of those we represent and in communicating with the public.

Expertise

We acquire and responsibly use specialized knowledge and experience. We advance the profession through continued professional development, research, and education. We build mutual understanding, credibility, and relationships among a wide array of institutions and audiences.

Independence

We provide objective counsel to those we represent. We are accountable for our actions.

Loyalty

We are faithful to those we represent, while honoring our obligation to serve the public interest.

Fairness

We deal fairly with clients, employers, competitors, peers, vendors, the media, and the general public. We respect all opinions and support the right of free expression.

public should share the organization's view on an issue or should want to participate in a behavior the organization thinks is a good idea.

In support of this perspective, a theory has developed based on research that has shown that the most effective campaigns treat persuasion as a relational situation in which everyone can benefit, instead of as a contest in which the organization desires victory and the public must concede. Managers must not view a campaign as an attempt to push a public to accept something the organization wants distributed, such as a product or an attitude. Instead, the manager should view a campaign as an opportunity to demonstrate to a public that the organization has something from which it will want to benefit. Public relations calls this a receiver orientation; marketers call it a consumer orientation. A theory called *social marketing* illustrates the value of this perspective.

Social Marketing Theory

According to social marketing theory, purveyors of ideas need to think more like purveyors of products, who view a purchase as an equal exchange. The consumer deciding whether to buy a product must weigh the cost of the product against the benefits of having the product. If the benefits outweigh the costs, the consumer will buy the product. Similarly, the public deciding whether to embrace an idea must weigh the costs associated with embracing the idea against the benefits. For example, the cost of turning out to vote could include lost time, a missed opportunity to do something else, the need to go outside in bad weather, the need to move a car from a hard-won parking space, and so on. The benefits—the possibility of helping a favored candidate or proposal win at the polls—must outweigh those costs. This cost–benefit analysis is known as a *profit orientation*, and social marketing theory acknowledges that the consumers of ideas evaluate the degree to which they will profit from the ideas.

Social marketing theory views the consumer as the center of the universe. As with product marketing, success hinges on a successful exchange relationship with the consumer. The marketing of ideas, however, presents a tougher challenge than does the marketing of products. Although the gain of a small market share in product marketing can translate into large profits for a company, stakes often are much higher in social marketing, the need for 51% of the vote, for example. Solomon (1989) listed several other differences:

1. Social marketing often targets the toughest audiences instead of the most easily profitable. A rule of thumb for persuasion is that on a continuum of support, persuasive efforts are most likely to reinforce positive opinions, crystallize neutral opinions to become more positive, and

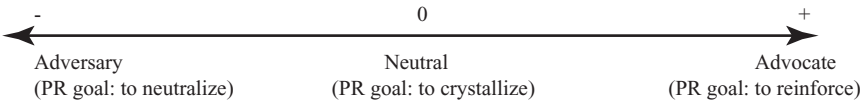

FIG. 13.4. The continuum of public support.

neutralize negative opinions. (See Fig. 13.4.) To move negative opinions to the positive side represents a huge, probably unrealistic, leap for a single campaign. Persuasion likely must take place in increments. As a result, social marketing often must acknowledge that change will take time.

2. Social marketing consumers often do not pay in dollars for services and products. The costs to them are perceptual, such as in time, reputation, ego, or guilt.

3. Political dimensions often exist in social marketing campaigns.

4. The products or services marketed often are not seen as valuable by the target public. It can be tough to sell the idea of a new school to the 80% of the public who do not have school-age children but who will have to pay for it in taxes.

5. Social marketers often have small budgets and need to acquire both clients and funding sponsors.

6. Too much success can prove disastrous if the marketer cannot handle the demand. Colleges implementing new register-by-telephone systems have had entire telephone systems fail because of the sudden overload. An 800 number can be overwhelmed so that no one can get through. An organization can run out of brochures, or pizzas, if too many people show up.

To apply social marketing theory successfully, the communication manager can refer to the model of the *six Ps* to answer the questions that give the campaign focus. The six Ps encompass the traditional four Ps of marketing—*p*roduct, *p*lace, *p*rice, and *p*romotion—but also include the *p*ublic (instead of the consumer) and *p*ositioning. The combination of elements is known as the *marketing mix* (Fig. 13.5). Managers determine each element through research, given that each choice to guide a campaign must respond to public perceptions.

1. Who is the *public*? Everything else in the campaign hinges on the target public's needs, interests, and perceptions.

2. What is the *product*? The product is the focus of the transaction between an organization and a public. In social marketing, the product is the goal, whether this involves the embrace of an item or an idea or the adoption of a behavior.

3. What is the *price*? The price represents the cost of embracing the idea or behavior from the public's point of view. This can include time, sacrifices, cultural misgiving, and psychological discomfort.

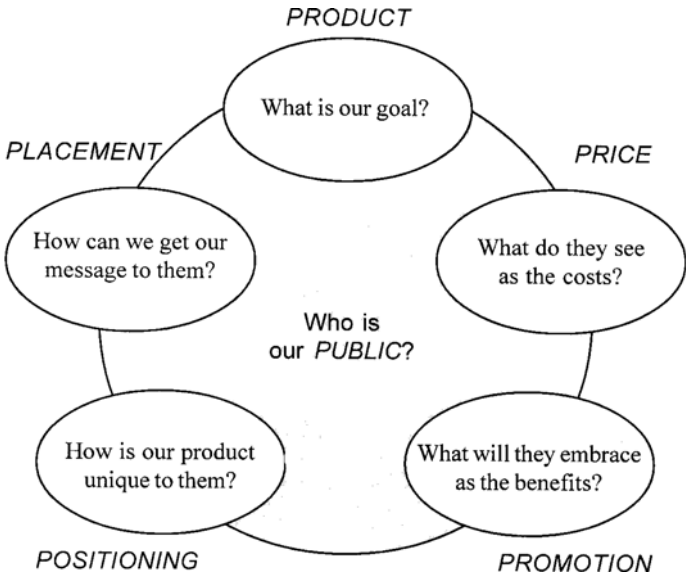

FIG. 13.5. The marketing mix. Elements of the social marketing model as applied to communication programs. The marketing mix includes the *six Ps* of public, product, price, promotion, positioning, and place.

4. What is the *promotion*? The promotion represents the benefits of the idea or behavior from the public's point of view. What benefits outweigh or decrease the costs it associates with the behavior? Promotion does not mean a simple advertising slogan but represents a summary of the cohesive message strategies that are used in a campaign.

5. What is the *positioning?* Positioning refers to what makes a product special or unique. What makes one event especially worthy of the public's attention? What will make yet another anti–drunk-driving campaign be noticed among the crush of other messages about driving, drinking, and safety? Positioning answers the "why should anyone care?" question and distinguishes the idea, service, or product from competitors in ways the public appreciates.

6. What is the *place*? The place refers to the distribution channels by which the public gains access to information about the product, service, or idea. Where can the public best receive a message about the product?

Figure 13.6 illustrates a social marketing mix based on the Truth campaign against tobacco use developed in Florida. The goal was to reduce tobacco use among Florida teenagers. Through a review of existing research and tobacco-use statistics in the late 1990s, the campaign designers had learned that teenagers already know that tobacco use presents serious health risks but that adolescent smoking rates nevertheless had increased

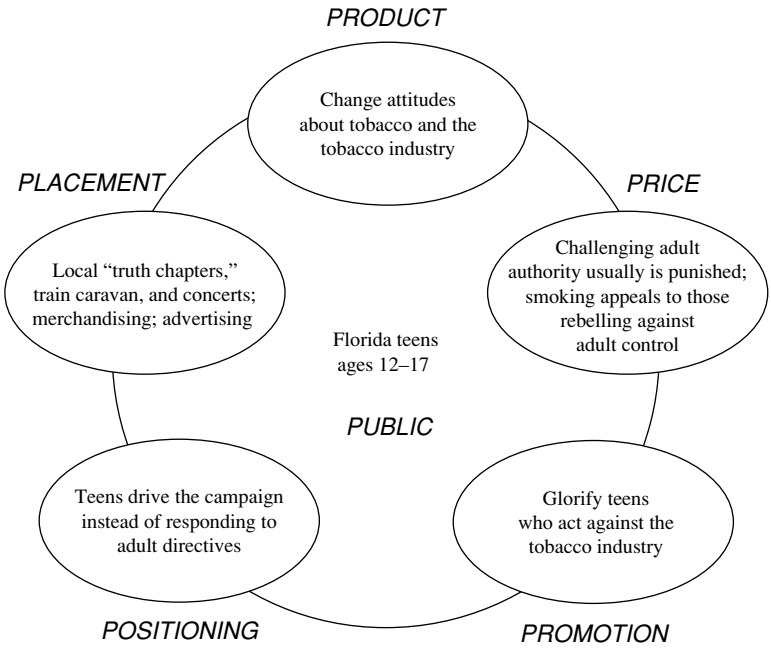

FIG. 13.6. Social marketing in action. From the Florida "Truth" anti-smoking campaign, implemented by the Office of Tobacco Control, Tallahassee, Florida.

by about one third in the previous decade. Much of tobacco's allure seemed to stem from the perception of smoking as a rebellious activity against adult authority. The strategists decided they needed a *product* that would "drive a wedge" between teens and the tobacco industry: activism against tobacco use. What would acceptance of the "product" cost this target public, and what promotion could convince them to buy into it?

For the target *public*, teens 12 to 17 at risk for using tobacco, the health dangers of tobacco use clearly did not present a relevant cost. Despite their knowledge of tobacco's physical effects, smoking rates had increased. To them, the social success gained from daring to embrace the danger and defy adults outweighed the health risks. From this perspective, the cost of *not* smoking could be high, because it represented caving in to adult directives (Hicks, 2001). The *price* of acting against adult authority usually is punishment from adults, but this activity invited praise from peers. The best way to *position* the campaign, strategists realized, was to enable young people to motivate each other to take on adults through *placement* of messages via grassroots advocacy, merchandising, and a mass media campaign. The *promotion*, therefore, was glorification of actions against the tobacco industry. The campaign designers held a youth summit

with 500 teens and continued to include teens as partners throughout the campaign.

According to Porter Novelli (Ruiz, 2000), the campaign achieved 92% awareness among Florida teens within 9 months. An evaluation by Farrelly and colleagues (Farrelly, Healton, Davis, Messari, Hersey & Haviland, 2002) indicated that the campaign increased the belief among teens that cigarette companies want young people to smoke and lie about tobacco's health risks. The interpretation of campaign results has sparked some controversy because of the difficulties of isolating the effects of a massive, multipronged strategy, but the campaign eventually was implemented nationwide and appeared to contribute to a 22% decline in youth smoking from 1999 to 2002.

In another case demonstrating the importance of audience-centered and research-based communication, Publicis•Dialog, on behalf of Gardenburger, decided to position its veggie burgers as products for mainstream, omnivorous 25- to 54-year-old women instead of as a specialty product for funky vegetarians. They gambled on spending $1.5 million to put a 30-second advertisement on the last episode of *Seinfeld* on May 14, 1998. According to Kevin Bush (personal interview, January 15, 1999), who supervised the campaign, the investment represented one seventh of the company's advertising budget for the year and brought them considerable attention for taking such a risk. The advertisement could have produced awareness for the product lasting an eyelash blink, but the strategy of a small player making such a big play attracted national media coverage—more than 400 news stories—which greatly increased public attention to the spot and to the product. The week after the spot aired, sales jumped 104%. Several months later, Gardenburger's share of the meatless burger market had increased from 35% to 54%. Although no strategy can guarantee success, Gardenburger's success illustrates how the audience-centered approach can give clients the confidence to embrace unusual or seemingly risky strategies that will cut through a crowded marketplace of ideas.

Choosing a Level of Effect

Campaign designers must determine what type of effect they intend to achieve. As chapter 14 illustrates in more detail, it is much harder to change someone's attitudes or opinions than to change their level of awareness, shown as the base of the level of effects pyramid in Figure 13.7. Changing someone's value system, shown as the pinnacle of the pyramid, offers a nearly impossible challenge. The communication manager must know a huge amount about the target public and the social environment to choose a realistic level of effect on which to base measurable objectives for a communication program.

FIG. 13.7. The level of effects pyramid. Outcomes at higher levels of the pyramid are progressively more difficult to change.

Attitudes are learned, enduring, and affective evaluations of a person, thing, or idea (Perloff, 2003). Attitudes show that someone feels positively or negatively about something or someone. *Beliefs*, on the other hand, are pieces of information about things or people, whether or not these pieces of information are accurate. Beliefs can trigger emotional reactions—attitudes—but generally are considered to be more logically based. Attitudes not only often grow out of beliefs but also can contradict beliefs because people are not purely logical. On the pyramid in Figure 13.7, beliefs appear above attitudes because beliefs are more clearly based on information (or misininformation), and some theories of attitude and behavior change suggest that it is more difficult to change people's minds if they are more systematic (information-oriented) in their responses to messages (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Yet, product advertising typically depends on short-term change based on affective responses. This body of research suggests that more affectively based attitudes change more easily than logically grounded beliefs. Nevertheless, managers must realize that attitudes supported by strongly held beliefs can be just as challenging to alter as the beliefs.

Some scholars and practitioners consider opinions to be equivalent to attitudes, but others find it useful to make distinctions between them. *Opinions* generally are considered to be somewhat like beliefs because they incorporate cognitive judgments (information). According to Perloff (2003), opinions also differ from attitudes because opinions are simpler and more specific. In addition, opinions can be more short lived. For example, people asked a question on a survey may produce an opinion on the spot in order to answer the question. They may not hold that opinion deeply or for long. As a result, some survey specialists ask respondents how strongly they feel about an issue along with how positively or negatively they feel.

Organizations often make the mistake of trying to change people's values, which is usually unnecessary and unrealistic. Values are like life goals. According to Rokeach, who developed a famous values scale still in use today (Rokeach, 1973), people adopt *terminal values*, which embody their ultimate life goals, and *instrumental values,* which represent desired strategies for achieving those goals. As shown in Table 13.4, terminal values include freedom, world peace, security, pleasure, health, excitement, and comfort. Instrumental values include politeness, ambition, obedience, helpfulness,

TABLE 13.4
Terminal and Instrumental Values

Terminal Values	*Instrumental Values*
Comfortable life	Ambitious
Equality	Broad minded
Exciting life	Capable
Family security	Caring
Freedom	Cheerful
Happiness	Clean
Health	Courageous
Inner harmony	Fair
Mature love	Forgiving
National security	Good citizen
Pleasure	Helpful
Salvation	Honest
Self-respect	Imaginative
Sense of accomplishment	Independent
Social recognition	Intellectual
True friendship	Logical
Wisdom	Loving
World at peace	Obedient
	Polite
	Respectful
	Responsible
	Self-controlled
	Trustworthy

self-control, and fairness. A person's *value system* dictates which values are more or less important in relation to one another.

Because values develop early and tend to remain stable, targeting values for change is a divisive strategy, whereas appealing to people's values tends to be a more constructive approach. Attacking the target public's values is especially common among single-issue advocacy groups, such as those focused on animal rights, firearms access and control, abortion, homosexuality, and environmental issues. As Plous wrote (1990), however, value-based campaigns often offend the people they aim to persuade. Some political analysts, for example, suggested that Republicans severely damaged their appeal to mainstream voters in their 1992 national convention when they attacked nontraditional families to embrace a traditional family values platform. The Democrats, on the other hand, used their convention to promote the alternative message, that family values means every family has value. The Democrats had economic issues in their favor, commonly considered a major political asset, which meant that the Republicans could ill afford a strategy that alienated a large portion of the population.

When Republicans swept the presidency, House of Representatives, and Senate in 2004, many analysts interpreted the exit polls shown in Table 13.5 to indicate that the Republicans' appeal to values had worked this time to mobilize their base. Others, however, questioned this result and continued to express skepticism about relying on values as a divisive advocacy strategy. Exit polls indicated that the "most important issues" for Bush voters included "terrorism" (86%) and "moral values" (80%), with "taxes" following at 57%. Among Kerry voters, the "most important issues" included "economy/jobs" (80%), "health care" (77%), "education" (73%), and "Iraq" (73%). Among total voters, however, "moral values," "economy/jobs," and "terrorism" were nearly tied.

TABLE 13.5
2004 U.S. Presidential Exit Polls

Most Important Issue	*Total*	*Voted for Bush*	*Voted for Kerry*
Taxes	5%	57%	43%
Education	4%	26%	73%
Iraq	15%	26%	73%
Terrorism	19%	86%	14%
Economy–jobs	20%	18%	80%
Moral values	22%	80%	18%
Health care	8%	23%	77%

Note: Some observers criticized exit polls for the 2004 presidential election as misleading due to the use of vague terminology that mixed hot-button phrases with clearly defined political issues. The debate illustrated the difficulties of measuring values and of trying to change them.

According to Gary Langer, the director of polling for ABC News, interpreting the results became problematic because the question phrasing used—"moral values"—referred to a hot-button phrase rather than a more clearly defined political issue (Langer, 2004). Dick Meyer, the editorial director of CBS News (Meyer, 2004), noted that the phrase connoted multiple issues with different meanings for different people. If the polling results "terrorism" and "Iraq" had been combined or if "economy/jobs" and "taxes" had been combined, either might have overtaken "moral values" as the top concern. He also noted that polling results in 1996 had "family values" (17%) as second only to "health of the economy" at 21%, when Clinton won re-election. He questioned whether a shift of 5 percentage points on a differently worded question held much meaning and suggested that Republicans would be well advised to treat the values data with caution and concentrate on building their relationship with the voters who considered the economy and jobs as most important. Meanwhile, columnist David Brooks (2004) wrote, "If you ask an inept question, you get a misleading result."

This debate demonstrates the importance of exercising caution both in trying to change values and in interpreting data about values. Accusations that people who disagree with an organization's preferred view hold substandard values make those people defensive and less willing to entertain other viewpoints. Demonstrating a shared value, on the other hand, as the Democrats did in 1992 and as some argue the Republicans did in 2004, can enable adversaries to find common ground on which to build understanding and, ultimately, consensus. It is not easy and it takes time to build trust, but some foes on the abortion issue demonstrated that it could be done, at least for a while. With effort, they realized that both sides wanted to avoid unwanted babies. As a result, they collaborated to form the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice to focus on campaign goals with which they can agree. As one pro-choice activist said in a 1996 article, prevention is the goal they have in common: "No one that I know in the pro-choice camp is in support of abortion" (Schulte, 1996). Projects on which they collaborated from 1993 to 2000 included teen pregnancy prevention, the promotion of adoption, and the prevention of violence in the debate over the issue. The motto of the umbrella organization that helped bring them together, the Common Ground Network, comes from Andrew Masondo of the African National Congress: "Understand the differences; act on the commonalities" (Search for Common Ground, 1999).

In another attempt to make partners among those who typically think of each other as enemies, the Jewish–Arab Centre for Peace (Givat Haviva), the *Jerusalem Times,* and the Palestinian organization Biladi have jointly launched a Palestinian–Israeli radio station called Radio All for Peace (*www.allforpeace.org*). They aim to explore various sides to issues related to the Mideast conflict, break stereotypes, and discuss common interests

such as health, the environment, culture, transportation, and the economy. They want to focus on "providing hope" to the listeners and preparing listeners to coexist in the future. In addition to their broadcasts, they provide online forums in which listeners can participate.

For communication managers seeking to bridge differences to build partnerships, the Public Conversations Project (http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/index.asp) can provide helpful resources. The project's mission is to foster a more inclusive, empathic, and collaborative society by promoting constructive conversations and relationships among those who have differing values, world views, and positions about divisive public issues. It provides training, speakers, and consulting services with support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation along with a variety of other organizations.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Efforts such as the Common Ground Network's embody Plous's (1990) point that "activists will be more effective if they are able to understand and empathize with people whose views differ from their own" (p. 2). Even a pure advocacy campaign can benefit from a symmetrical theoretical perspective on communication. This theoretical framework guides goal setting and planning. Then, within this theoretical perspective, the manager can turn to more specific theories that explain the communication process and communicators themselves. An understanding of these theories can guide strategy development, give a program proposal credibility, and increase the probability of program success. They are the focus of chapter 14.