

The Dynamics of Issues Activation and Response: An Issues Processes Model

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A comprehensive issues processes model is outlined, based on a typology of 4 key types of publics found in public relations. These groups differ based on their levels of knowledge and involvement and can be labeled *active* (high knowledge and high involvement), *aroused* (high involvement and low knowledge), *aware* (high knowledge and low involvement), and *inactive* (low knowledge and low involvement). Issue activation encompasses 4 key processes (and a series of subprocesses) that take people from a state of inactivity to activism. Issue response by a targeted organization represents the complementary process. Four principal response strategies are outlined, one for each of the 4 types of publics in the model. These include *negotiation* (active publics), *intervention* (aroused publics), *education* (aware publics), and *prevention* (inactive publics). Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Issue dynamics (i.e., how disputes arise and are responded to by organizations and others in society) are a central concern of public relations. For example, issue management can be defined as a public relations specialization that encompasses an organization's efforts to monitor, analyze, and communicate with strategic audiences about disputes involving the organization.¹

Although issues are central to the field, attempts to examine issue dynamics have been fragmentary at best. For example, situational theory focuses on measuring the likelihood that an individual will engage in information seeking and processing when asked about extant issues (J. E. Grunig, 1997; J. E. Grunig & Hunt,

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¹Some experts contend that issues management should be considered a distinct management that subsumes strategic planning, public policy, government relations, and public relations (see Chase, 1984; Ewing, 1987, 1997; Heath, 1988, 1990, 1997; Heath & Nelson, 1986; Renfro, 1993).

1984). Situational theory is not a general model that attempts to explain how issues develop. Similarly, the Excellence model focuses on normative strategies organizations ought to use when dealing with publics, particularly when an organization and a constituent group are at odds (J. E. Grunig, 1992; L. A. Grunig, 1992).

Public relations lacks a comprehensive or integrated model of issue dynamics. This article takes a first step toward filling that void by proposing a model that examines the processes of issue activation and response. It begins with an overview of the theoretical foundations for examining issue dynamics, then outlines the model and describes the processes in more detail, and concludes by discussing implications.

ISSUE DYNAMICS: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Issue can be defined in a variety of ways. For example, issues have been described as the topics around which publics are formed (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Heath (1997) defined an issue as a dispute between parties based on gaps in facts, values, or policies. For purposes of this discussion, an issue is defined as a dispute between two or more parties over the allocation of resources, which might be natural, financial, political, or symbolic.² Whereas disputes can be private, issues involve disagreements that occur in public. Issues often are debated by the population at large, covered by the news media, and addressed by government.

Issues Originate Out of Individual Human Experience

Most issues evolve from everyday situations. The origins of issues can be traced to the moment an individual identifies a situation as problematic (i.e., the situation poses negative consequences for one or more people). Most often, these situations are attributed to the actions of others and are believed to be unfair (a violation of a right or entitlement) or risky (a hazard that poses a threat to physical, economic, or psychological well-being). Heath (1997) suggested that all issues deal with equality, fairness, security, or environmental quality.

Issues Are Constructed Socially

Whereas problems are outgrowths of individual experience, issues emerge only when people share problems with others through communication as people analyze, define, delimit, and label problems. Issues are social constructions that can

²This approach closely follows Cobb and Elder (1972), who defined an issue as “a conflict between two or more identifiable groups over procedural or substantive matters related to the distribution of positions or resources” (p. 82).

exist independently of the verifiable conditions on which they are based. Heath (1990) described activism as a “contest over social reality” (p. 36).³

Under its classic definition, a public evolves from the process of discussion. Dewey (1927) defined a public as a group whose members face a problem, recognize the problem, and organize to take action. Blumer (1946/1966) similarly defined a public as a group whose members face a problem, are divided in their opinions, and engage in discussion about how to proceed. Yet this discursive approach might be overly restrictive. In particular, there is no absolute level of discussion or action necessary to qualify a group as a public. Instead, a public might be defined better as a group with which an organization wants to build a relationship (Hallahan, in press-b).

Issues Achieve Visibility Through Agenda Building

Issues involve airing opposing viewpoints as the disputants attempt to influence the behaviors of others by altering their knowledge, attitudes, or actions. Dewey (1927) and Blumer (1946/1966) both supported vigorous discussion and debate as critical in modern society.⁴ Such advocacy is healthy and necessary in a democratic society (Mayhew, 1997) and provides a foundation for the notions of pluralism and orderly problem resolution extolled by framers of the U.S. Constitution (Madison, 1789/1961). Yet, private conversations do not just burst onto the public scene in today’s complex world. Habermas (1962/1989) contended that the robust public sphere that characterized 17th- and 18th-century Europe has been transformed with the rise of modern advocacy, including public relations (see also Lasch, 1990; Lippmann, 1922, 1925).⁵ Mayhew called the result the new public.

Researchers who subscribe to the constructionist perspective on social problems argue that issues do not exist until they are labeled as such and then developed through claims-making activities (Best, 1989, 1995; Blumer, 1948; Salmon, 1990; Sarbin & Kitsuse, 1994; Schneider, 1985; Schneider & Kitsuse, 1984; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987). Others describe this same process as agenda-building. An agenda

³The notion that people’s actions are based on socially constructed reality rather than objective reality can be traced through writings of notable social observers such as philosopher Immanuel Kant (1998), psychologist William James (1907/1975), journalist Walter Lippmann (1922, 1925), social psychologist George Herbert Mead (1934/1962), psychologist Kurt Lewin (1951), and sociologist Herbert Blumer (1969). Knowledge itself is thought to be socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Boulding, 1961).

⁴Public opinion can be defined as the process by which attitudes and opinions are formed through discussion and debate. More typically, however, the term *public opinion* is used to describe the valence and other characteristics of beliefs and attitudes (measured in expressed opinions) held by individuals in a particular group or subgroup. Public opinion also can be used to describe what public opinion polls measure. For discussions, see Glynn (1987), Kinder (1998), Price (1988, 1992), and Price and Roberts (1987).

⁵Whether the robust public discussion Habermas (1962/1989) described actually existed has been debated by scholars. For examples of opposing viewpoints, see Robbins (1993) and Schudson (1992).

is a set of topics that receive attention from a person, organization, the public at large, media, or government officials. Cobb and Elder (1972) explained that the scope of influence of issue advocates is limited during an issue's formative period. To expand awareness and public concern about an issue, sponsors must identify the issue in a compelling way, manipulate symbols effectively, and seek media publicity (see also Edelman, 1964/1985, 1988; Elder & Cobb, 1983; Ellul, 1963/1965; Weaver & Elliott, 1985). G. E. Lang and Lang (1983) suggested that agenda building provides the general population with a context in which to think about problems.

Issues Are Dynamic and Vary in the Amount of Attention They Receive Over Time

Issues are not static. Rather, issues evolve from a period of inception and growth to maturity (i.e., when the targeted organization responds or the issue receives the greatest amount of attention from the public, media, and government). This process can take a long time; Ewing (1997) suggested 6–12 years. Various attempts have made to describe the life cycle of issues, or predictable and identifiable phases through which issues pass to reach maturity and then recede from the public eye (Bichard, 1998; Downs, 1972; Ewing, 1987, 1997; Griffin, 1952; Oberschall, 1973; Spector & Kitsuse, 1987; Stewart, Smith, & Denton, 1984; Van Leuven & Ray, 1988; Van Leuven & Slater, 1991). For example, Heath (1997; Heath & Nelson, 1986) outlined a five-stage life cycle based on the actions involved: strain, mobilization, confrontation, negotiation, and resolution. Meng (1992) said an issue can be classified as potential, emerging, current, crisis, or dormant. Such natural history (birth-to-death) models have been criticized by various writers (Best, 1989; Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Schneider, 1985). However, the ebb and flow of public attention suggested by these models underscores the ephemeral nature of most issues.⁶

Various Factors Influence the Viability of Issues

Among these are characteristics of the issue itself. Cobb and Elder (1972) suggested that advocates' success in expanding an issue is driven by the issue's inherent social significance, temporal relevance, complexity, and categorical precedence (i.e., how similar issues have been resolved in the past). Another set of factors concerns the expertise and effort of issue advocates. Many issues fail to ma-

⁶When an issue falls out of the limelight, it rarely dies completely. Instead, the issue languishes in obscurity and remains a concern to a handful of people directly affected by the problem. These people wait patiently—sometimes for years—until the time is right for the issue to be rejuvenated. Such opportunities come when some triggering event renews public consciousness of the problem and thrusts the issue back into public discussion (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

ture fully because of a lack of organizing (Alinsky, 1971; Cobb & Elder, 1972), lack of continuous and lasting promotion (Ellul, 1963/1965), failure to exploit the media fully (Fisse & Braithwaite, 1983; Gitlin, 1980; G. E. Lang & Lang, 1983; Ryan, 1991), or a lack of financial resources (Edelman, 1964/1985).⁷

Other researchers emphasize the environmental context in which issues are addressed. Hilgartner and Bosk (1988) reasoned that issues evolve within public arenas of discussion and that the systemic constraints associated with those arenas moderate issue dynamics. Factors identified by them include the carrying capacity of the arenas in which the issues are discussed, competition from other issues, principles of selection, communication patterns across arenas, and efforts by the communities of operatives that form around issues. Separately, Manheim (1987, 1994) proposed a model that focuses on the interaction of the public (systemic), media, and public policy agendas.

Issues Inherently Involve Power and Struggle

Power and struggle are at the heart of classic Marxist theories that call for the proletariat to overthrow the bourgeoisie to achieve social justice (Marx & Engels, 1848/1947; Tyler & Smith, 1998). However, modern struggles manifest themselves in contexts that extend beyond class and ideology. Power involves the exercise of authority in society (i.e., determining who should make critical decisions about resource control). Power is not a function of organization size or the number of members in an activist group. Indeed, a small activist group can attract widespread attention from the public, media, and government and can bring an organization to its knees (Anderson, 1992; Harris, 1982; Mintzberg, 1983; Shaw, 1996). In turn, organizations responding to issue activation efforts can use power resource management in their response (Heath, 1997). Struggle is the way in which disputants vie to have their definitions of problems and their preferred solutions prevail (Pruitt, 1998). Such struggles involve a dialectic process in which the thesis of issue advocates is countered by the antithesis of opponents, often culminating in compromise or synthesis (Hegel, 1807/1971).

Issue Advocates Operate Through a Variety of Organizational Structures

Social movement organizations (SMOs) represent traditional grass-roots organizations formed by citizens to address social problems (J. Freeman, 1983; McAdams, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Molotch, 1979; Tarrow, 1989,

⁷Most issue promoters challenge establishment policies and practices. Critical scholars argue that the power of the business community, government, and the media operates hegemonically (Gramsci, 1971). Thus, challengers are at a tremendous disadvantage in seeking change.

1998; Zald & McCarthy, 1979, 1987).⁸ Special interest groups include extant organizations that get involved in issues on behalf of their members. Examples include trade associations, labor unions, and organizations serving people with particular artistic, cultural, educational, recreational, or personal concerns (Berry, 1989; Burstein, 1998). Political parties advance particular political ideologies. Public interest research groups are self-appointed watchdogs over public affairs, although they often have minimal interaction with the groups they purport to serve. Finally, a variety of quasiofficial government entities have been created in recent decades that combine activism, social work, and entrepreneurship to advance community development (Biklen, 1983; R. Fisher & Romanofsky, 1981; Gittel & Vidal, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1992; Tropman, 1997; Twelvetrees, 1996).

Public Discussions About Issues Constitute a Social Drama

The struggle between issue advocates (protagonists) and the targets of their efforts (antagonists) often constitutes a melodrama in which the parties become actors assuming the roles of heroes, victims, and villains. Goffman (1959) argued that human communication and behavior can be explained using the analogy of a stage play. The parties involved in an issue include the leading actors, a supporting cast, and the audience. The actors indulge in self-presentation in which they claim a face (i.e., a positive social value) and express a front (i.e., how they want and expect to be treated; Goffman, 1959; Schlenker, 1980). The goal of these impression management efforts is to shape the attributions and impressions others form about a person or organization (Tedeschi & Reiss, 1981). The protagonists and antagonists rely on rhetoric to pose persuasive arguments to onlookers, supported by the secondary characters. The resulting narrative constitutes the general public's understanding of the issue and of actors who advance or refute those arguments (Heath, 1994, 1997). Significantly, not all members of the audience care equally about the play. Instead, they can be inattentive or cynical when an issue does not affect them directly. Dionne (1991) noted that many Americans have become disenchanting with politics because the emphasis is on issues, not problem solving: "Problems are solved; issues are merely what politicians use to divide the citizenry and advance themselves" (p. 332).

⁸Sociologists point out that ideology is less important to many of these groups than their desire to obtain needed resources, which leads some sociologists to call these groups new social movements (Laraña, Johnston, & Gusfield, 1994; Tarrow, 1989). American sociologists use resource mobilization theory to explain the process, suggesting that opponents use whatever resources are available to them to effect social change (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

Issues Create Uncertainty

The targets of issue advocacy respond by attempting to eliminate sources of the instability that issues create in their environment (Heath, 1990, 1994, 1997). Their responses can be explained in theoretical terms. System theory suggests that organisms naturally strive for equilibrium and to rectify imbalances (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, *viz.*, chap. 7; B. A. Fisher, 1982). Resource dependency theory argues that organizations strive to control external exigencies that might limit their independence (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). Economic theory suggests that organizations form strategic alliances or other hierarchical arrangements when such arrangements are more efficient than market mechanisms (Williamson, 1975). Political special interest theory suggests that organizations exercise political power to seek favorable public policies to advance themselves (Berry, 1989). Finally, public relations theory suggests that organizations manage communication (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) to create and maintain mutually beneficial relationships (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999; Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Cutlip et al., 2000; J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, 2000).

THE ISSUE PROCESSES MODEL

The model presented here begins with the premise that public relations theorists and researchers must examine issue dynamics in a broad context that extends beyond abstract models of effective interaction between organizations and publics (J. E. Grunig, 1992) or a limited number of specific response techniques such as negotiation and bargaining or conflict resolution (Plowman et al., 1995; Pruitt, 1998; Vasquez, 1996). It also follows calls for public relations researchers to overcome their organization-centric perspective (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000) and examine public relations from more critical perspectives (Karlberg, 1996).

In offering a new perspective, the model defines issue dynamics broadly as both the antecedent processes of how issues are created and the alternative responses that the organizations or institutions might use to respond to issues. Both processes moderate the probability that an issue will reach maturity, and thus these processes are key to understanding issues dynamics.

The foundation for the model is found in Hallahan's (in press-b) contention that the traditional definition of public (as a group organized around and actively involved in the discussion of problems) is too narrow. Indeed, publics vary widely in the degree to which they are organized to discuss problems and issues. Some publics are not organized at all. Rather, publics can be categorized along two critical dimensions, based on their knowledge and involvement in a particular topic (which might be a problem, issue, organization, product, service, candidate, or cause). Hallahan identified five key types of publics found in public relations. These serve as the centerpiece for the model and are illustrated in Figure 1.

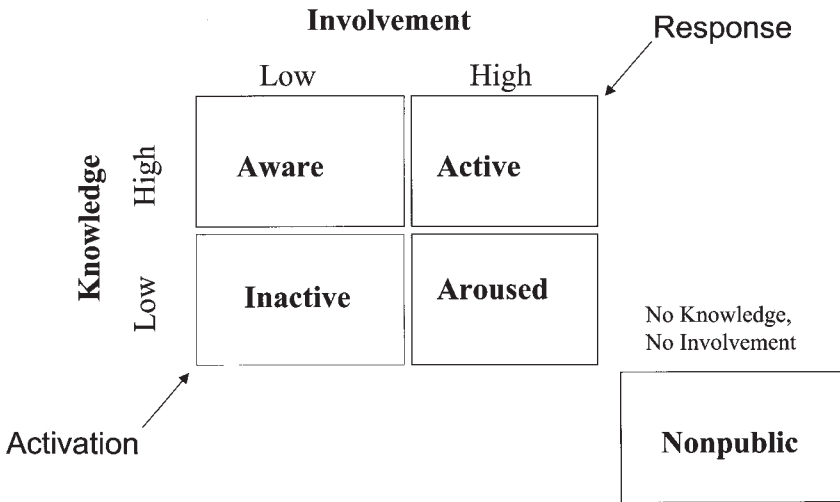


FIGURE 1 Five publics model based on level of knowledge and involvement.

Active publics are defined as individuals and groups who have high levels of knowledge and involvement in a topic. This definition is consistent with the traditional use of the term *public* to define a group of people who have identified a problem and who organize to effect change. High knowledge and high involvement thus are necessary conditions for activism on a particular topic. Activist publics can include the leaders of SMOs, special interest groups, and the other kinds of organizations identified earlier, as well as their close followers who are willing and able to exert personal time and effort to effect change.

Aroused publics are individuals and groups with high levels of involvement but low knowledge about a problem or how to resolve it. Aroused publics include people who have recognized a potential problem or issue but are not prepared to move into an activist role. They are motivated but unorganized and could become active once they have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills and additional motivation to press their case. Aroused publics are akin to attentive publics (Cobb & Elder, 1972) and represent the potential core followers of social movements and activist leaders.

Aware publics include individuals and groups who are very knowledgeable about a problem but are not involved in the problem personally. Aware publics often include groups political scientists call *attention publics* (i.e., the stratum of society knowledgeable about the world and public affairs in general). Members of these aware publics often serve as opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), based on their education, background, or social position. Aware publics also incor-

porate what J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) called *all-issue publics*. Aware publics, left to their own choice, are not likely to mobilize to effect change on a particular issue, but they might join initiatives organized by others.

Inactive publics are composed of individuals who have low levels of knowledge about, and involvement in, a topic. Inactive publics represent the rank-and-file citizenry. Prompting them to act can be a daunting task that entails increasing their motivation, ability, and opportunity to attend to communication (Hallahan, in press-a). Although inactive publics might be stakeholders in an organization (R. E. Freeman, 1984), they might not be predisposed to engage in any organized activity to effect change without being motivated by heightened self-interest. Their lack of initiative can be the result of several factors: belief that no problem exists, failure to recognize a problem, assessment that a problem is not important enough to take action, conviction that others (e.g., government officials) are attending to the problem, or belief that nothing can be done. This last explanation is tantamount to high constraint recognition or low self-efficacy. J. E. Grunig and Hunt (1984) referred to a similar type of fatalistic behavior.

Nonpublics are the default category in the model, representing individuals and groups with no knowledge and no involvement in a particular issue. Theoretically, nonpublics are unlikely to become aware or involved with a particular problem or issue; thus, they can be ignored by both activists and targeted organizations.⁹

The rationale for defining publics based on the two dimensions of knowledge and involvement is grounded in the social psychology literature. Knowledge, an ability factor, refers to beliefs, attitudes, and expertise that people hold in memory about a topic. Individuals with high or low levels of knowledge are better able (high knowledge) or less able (low knowledge) to process information and arguments about a topic. Similarly, evidence suggests that individuals with high knowledge are likely to process information using more sophisticated schematic processing strategies rather than less efficient, piecemeal processing (Sujan, 1985). Stated another way, high-knowledge individuals are better prepared to make sense of an issue.

Involvement, a motivational factor distinct from knowledge, is an individual's predisposition to pay attention to and communicate about a topic. J. E. Grunig (1997; see also J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992) defined involvement in situational theory as the degree to which a person feels connected to an issue. More generally, psychologists define involvement in terms of the degree to which a topic has relevance or consequence for an individual (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981, 1986). Others in public relations have pointed to the importance of involvement as a moderating variable (Cameron, 1993; Heath, 1990; Heath & Douglas, 1990, 1991; Salmon, 1986). People for whom a problem has consequences are more likely to take action.

⁹Hallahan (in press-b) examined how this model differs from J. E. Grunig's (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984) model of active, aware, latent, and nonpublics.

ISSUES DYNAMICS AS PROCESSES OF ACTIVATION AND RESPONSE

Building on this scheme, the model suggests that issue dynamics involve two fundamental, equally important, and oppositional processes: activation and response. Therein lies the power struggle inherent in issues.

Issue activation subsumes all the processes that have been labeled thus far as problem recognition, issue identification, issue expansion, claims making, and activist-initiated advocacy. Issue activation occurs whenever an individual recognizes an inequity in the allocation of natural, financial, political, or symbolic resources and sets about to rectify the problem. Issue response, by contrast, involves activities undertaken by the targets to which these initiatives are directed. Usually, these are organizations or public institutions that are concerned with defending past actions or minimizing changes to current policies and practices.

The dialectic nature of issue dynamics is illustrated in Figure 2. Issue activation is conceptualized as a process that originates among people who are inactive (lower left) but who migrate toward the active state (upper right) as their levels of knowledge and involvement in a problem increase. Arousal and awareness of issues are intermediate or temporary states that can describe an individual or group at any particular time, based on whether they have high knowledge and low involvement (aware publics) or low knowledge and high involvement (aroused publics). Individuals' or groups' states can change as their motivation or ability increases. Significantly, the low knowledge found among aroused publics and the low involvement found among aware publics reduce the probability that these groups will become active on a issue.

ISSUE ACTIVATION

At the heart of issue activation is understanding how issues emerge and how individuals and groups are transformed from states of inactivity to activism. In this model, four distinct steps are involved in issue maturation. Each step is accompanied by a series of distinct subprocesses illustrated in Figure 2.

Members of Inactive Publics Identify Problematic Situations

Issue activation begins with problem recognition. *Problem recognition* occurs when individuals compare their everyday personal experiences with their expectations and find an inconsistency related to the fairness or risks inherent in a situation (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Heath, 1994, 1997).

Inconsistencies or unmet expectations sometimes result from misunderstandings of situations. However, most problems result from a person's perception of

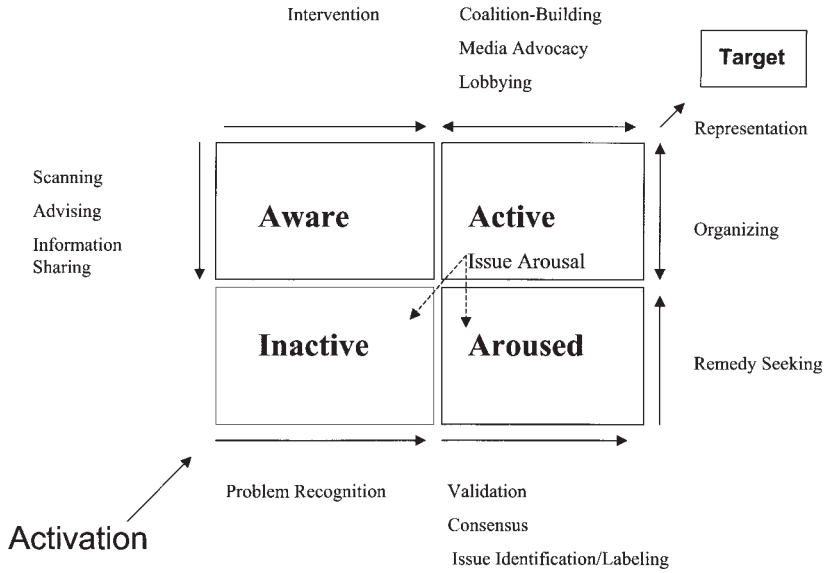


FIGURE 2 Issue activation processes.

underperformance by an organization, based on promises, past experience, or a comparison of an organization’s performance with that of others. Problems also can arise when the performance of an organization, product, service, candidate, or cause appears to be incompatible with generally accepted cultural values and norms.

A variety of factors can influence the probability that members of an inactive public will recognize problems. Individuals with at least moderate levels of generalized knowledge about or involvement in a particular organization, product, service, candidate, or cause tend to identify problems more easily than those who are less familiar or interested. Social judgment theory (Sherif, Sherif, & Nebergall, 1965) explains this phenomenon in terms of latitudes of acceptance. When an organization’s actions fall within a range of acceptability (i.e., consistent with an individual’s expectations), its actions are evaluated positively. But when actions fall out of that range (into a latitude of rejection), people react negatively. People with higher levels of knowledge and involvement are more discriminating and less tolerant of violations. The probability that an individual will identify a situation as problematic is lower in the case of a new issue (i.e., a problem that has not been identified previously as a problem). This is because there are no precedents on which to identify a situation as problematic. Likewise, frequent or recent exposure to other people who have experienced the same or similar problems primes individuals to infer that a situation is problematic when they might not have reached the same conclusion otherwise.

Exposure to issues is particularly important to problem recognition in the case of old issues (i.e., issues already identified that are also the focus of activation efforts by others). Activists use direct contacts, media publicity, and sometimes advertising to encourage and foster problem recognition among members of inactive publics. Activists attempt to recruit followers using issue arousal efforts that include increasing the salience or visibility of a problem so that people are more likely to recognize a problem with which they can identify personally. Such salience raising is a form of personal agenda setting (i.e., shaping the list of what topics an individual thinks about; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Issue arousal also entails framing situations so that prospective followers will think of situations as problems (Gamson, 1992; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Hallahan, 1999; G. E. Lang & Lang, 1983; Protess et al., 1991; Ryan, 1991; Snow & Benford, 1988; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Ghanem and McCombs (Ghanem, 1997) called framing *second-order agenda setting*.

Members of Inactive Publics Become Aroused

Once people recognize a problem, classic theories suggest that they will engage in communication to address the problem (Blumer, 1946/1966; Dewey, 1927). Initially, problem recognition entails simple acknowledgment of consequences. However, as people become exposed to alternative viewpoints, particular attributes of the problem and the problem's relevance become apparent. People for whom the problem has readily identifiable consequences thus move out of inactivity into a more aroused state.

The attendant activities involved take several forms. Active information seeking and passive information processing, which are the dependent variables in J. E. Grunig's (1997) situational theory, involve the active search for or casual monitoring of information about a problem. These information-gathering activities might involve conversations with family, friends, and others about the problem. These also can include exposure to mass media, visits with experts, and heightened attentiveness to miscellaneous sources of information (e.g., overheard conversations).

Aroused publics also engage in a several other important processes. Significantly, these go beyond the communication behaviors on which public relations theorists have focused in situational theory. Judgment processes include *validation* that the problem is genuine and pervasive, *consensus building* with others that the problem is important and not limited to a few individuals, and *confidence building* that the problem can be addressed. Another critical process is *issue identification* or labeling (i.e., giving a name to the problem or issue so that those affected can talk about it easily). Significantly, labeling a problem as an issue imputes its cause and possible solution. These processes are similar to what Gamson (1992; Gamson, Fireman, & Rytina, 1982) identified as the

micromobilization processes within social movements. Gamson (1992) defined micromobilization as “the interaction mechanism by which individual and sociocultural levels are brought together” (p. 72). As a result, members of social movements create a sense of identity, solidarity, and group consciousness (Heirich, 1971).

Aroused Publics Organize to Seek Solutions, Become Active

The ultimate outcome of issue arousal is recognition of the need to take collective action to rectify the problem (Olson, 1982). Remedy seeking ensues. Unlike the generalized information search undertaken earlier, information seeking to identify remedies is purposeful, detailed, and specific. Aroused publics seek information to locate solutions and to share newly acquired knowledge with others affected by the problem. Learning about possible solutions is the obverse of constraint recognition. This model suggests that people learn about alternative solutions and resolution constraints over time. Constraints might remain unknown until well after would-be activists develop a more thorough understanding of the problem during the arousal stage.

Aroused publics enter the activist state when they meet the definitional test of possessing both higher knowledge and higher involvement, usually late in the remedy-seeking process. Importantly, *activism* is a relative term. The time elapsed in the movement of individuals and groups from the aroused state to the active state can vary. Some individuals might make the transition rapidly; others might lag behind. Similarly, not all members of aroused publics become active. Some languish in a frustrated state of arousal, whereas others retreat to inactive status as their interest in problem resolution wanes.

Organizing plays a critical role in transforming the merely aroused to the higher state of activism. Gamson (1992) defined organizing as activities that involve “increasing the capability of potential challengers to act as a unit” (p. 72). Most activist groups—whether SMOs, special interest groups, or political parties—are sustained by how their activities are coordinated. *Organizing* subsumes several aspects: organizational structure, leadership, staffing, and fund development.

Organizational structure involves building a formal entity to carry out activist activities (e.g., a neighborhood watch, club, or association). The existence of structure enables people to readily and positively identify with a cause, permits coordination of activities, and facilitates communication.

Leadership involves the emergence of individuals who will devote the time and talent necessary to achieve desired outcomes. Leaders are essential to issue development because they become the principal agents for advancing an issue, serve as

spokespersons for the cause, and often come to personify the cause in the public debate (Edelman, 1988). The early leaders often are the same individuals who identified the problem originally. Later, however, the founders might entrust the leadership role to others. K. Lang and Lang (1961) suggested that as organizations become institutionalized, the leadership baton is passed from agitators to prophets (visionaries) and then to professional administrators.

Professional staffing is another dimension of organizing. Well-established SMOs—and almost all special interest groups and political parties—eventually become managed by professionals who are experts in skills essential to advancing the cause: legislation and regulation, community outreach, member recruitment, public relations, government relations and lobbying, and development. Finally, effective organizing invariably involves fundraising. Fundraising enables individuals who are concerned with a problem to delegate some of the work to professional staff while they pursue their own livelihoods. It also provides resources necessary to support public communication activities and political action.

Otherwise Uninvolved Publics Become Aware of Issues and Might Become Active

The scheme outlined so far has been limited to individuals for whom an issue has direct personal relevance or consequences. However, others in society can become aware of a problem and become observers of and confederates in the efforts of aroused and active publics.

Awareness of emerging issues by groups not personally affected by a problem stems from their routine and random interactions with people who might be classified as inactive or aroused. Merely aware publics are not posited to seek out problems or issues but rather engage in routine scanning to determine what is happening in the world and thus identify problems.

People in the aware category often are influentials or opinion leaders. They can come from all strata of society. People in certain occupational groups tend to fall into this category: health care professionals, social service workers, teachers and counselors, ministers, lawyers, consultants, and others in service or helping professions. These individuals meet a large number of clients or customers with whom they discuss problems and share advice. Through their education and experience, professionals can recognize problems quickly as being of a particular type and are likely to be familiar with potential solutions. Through information sharing and advising, aware publics thus influence the thought processes of people in inactive or aroused states.

Under certain circumstances, merely aware publics are drawn into the public debate. The transformation of publics from aware to active status occurs primarily

through the processes of intervention and coalition building. Intervention occurs when individuals or groups of aware publics recognize that a problem exists in society that is of sufficient societal (vs. personal) consequence that correction is needed. In general, aware publics intervene only when activist initiatives already have been undertaken. Whereas activists are involved out of self-interest, aware groups usually are motivated by more general ethical or moral concerns, such as professional duty or a legal, religious, or other fiduciary responsibility (Schaller, 1966).

Coalition building is the opposite of intervention and involves direct solicitations by activists to engage aware publics in an issue. Coalition building operates on the principle of mutual self-interest; coalition members can help advance their own professional or other goals by helping promote the interests of others. Coalition-building activities can range from simply providing an endorsement or financial support to deploying volunteers in large-scale, grass-roots advocacy campaigns.

Two other special forms of outreach by activists merit special discussion at this point. Although writers differ about the role of journalists and government officials in the issue process (see Cobb & Elder, 1972; Manheim, 1987, 1994), activist groups often attempt to reach out and involve these groups in their efforts.

Media advocacy entails activist groups appealing to media, as influential aware publics, to devote sympathetic coverage to an issue. Activists routinely seek publicity by writing materials, supplying spokespersons, and staging events (Andsager, 1998; Ryan, 1991; Saltzman, 1998). One of the key skills taught by radicals such as Saul Alinsky (1971) is how to exploit the media and understand the conventions and routines of news work (see also Gans, 1979; Tuchman, 1978; Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, & Thema, 1993). Activists also can use issue or advocacy advertising to raise awareness of their stance. However, most social movement and ad hoc groups lack the funds to sponsor extensive advertising. Such tactics are limited to large, well-established organizations that have perfected fundraising. Lobbying and grass-roots politicking, similar to media advocacy, involve direct efforts by activists to involve government officials in an issue (Wittenberg & Wittenberg, 1994). The goal is to persuade government officials that the problem is within the purview of government oversight and that intervention is merited (Cobb & Elder, 1972). Yet, like journalists, government officials point out that merely examining a problem does not necessarily constitute support.

Efforts by activists to involve aware publics offer several benefits. First, aware publics operate as opinion leaders in society who can reach other influentials and inactive publics. Second, obtaining support—particularly from the media or government—serves as a source of encouragement to already aroused and active publics to become involved or continue the fight. Third, strategic coalitions, media exposure, and government involvement or interest provide much-needed legitimacy for a cause and create the appearance that an issue enjoys a broad base of support. The support of important influentials fortifies the negotiating strength of activists when they confront their adversaries.

ISSUE RESPONSE

The discussion thus far has focused on the issue activation portion of issue dynamics. However, the response of targets to issue activation initiatives plays an equally important role in issue dynamics.

Astute activist groups do not confront organizations without extensive preparation. Instead, they must complete a series of steps that provide them the ability and the motivation to press their claims. These include consensus and confidence building, issue identification and labeling, organizing, and coalition building—and sometimes media advocacy and lobbying. Representation, the culmination of issue activation, entails direct engagement with the adversary. *Representation* is used here instead of *confrontation* because such encounters are not always face to face. Similarly, not all engagements are necessarily confrontational.

A successful activist group must position itself as the sole legitimate representative of people (or other organized groups) affected by a problem. The group also must frame its claims effectively and demonstrate that it can exercise power (e.g., interrupt or otherwise pose a threat to the organization's activities if its concerns are not addressed). Threatened tactics might include work stoppages, boycotts, court injunctions, regulation or legislation, or a variety of other undesirable consequences. The activist group must deploy all the techniques of self-presentation suggested by Goffman (1959), even though the group might not be able to marshal all the people or political or financial resources it wants. However, as radical Saul Alinsky (1971) observed, "It's not how much power you have, it's how much power the opposition thinks you have" (p. 136).

Conventional wisdom suggests that potential targets of issue advocates must monitor emerging issues through a program of environmental scanning, monitoring, forecasting, and assessment (Buchholz, 1990; Tucker & McNeerney, 1988; Winter & Steger, 1998). In this process, organizations must strive to assess an issue's stage of development and any particular group's ability to exercise power and represent the cause. Weick (1979) suggested that organizations must enact their environment accurately.

The model presented here extends previous theorizing about organizational responses by suggesting that an organization's responses can (and should) vary based on the publics to whom the response is directed. Prior theory has focused almost exclusively on activist publics (i.e., how an organization should deal with groups who have high levels of knowledge and involvement in an issue). If it is assumed that groups vary in their levels of knowledge and involvement, strategies that are effective to deal with an active public might be inappropriate or unnecessary in dealing with groups with lower levels of knowledge and involvement. Indeed, organizations have access to—and must use—many more response strategies than current theory suggests. Similarly, organizations might use multiple response strategies simultaneously. Figure 3 outlines 16 responses that an or-

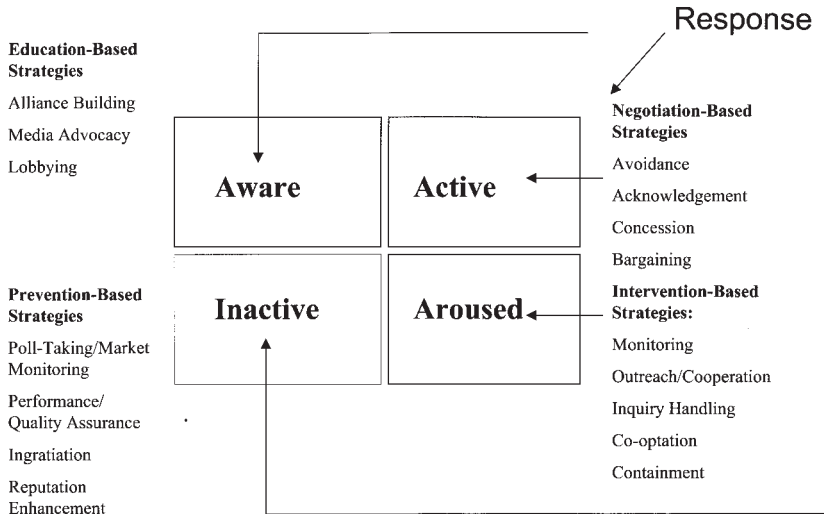


FIGURE 3 Issue response processes.

ganization might pursue when dealing with an issue at different levels of its evolution. These fall into four major categories, each appropriate to one of the four groups of publics in this model.

Respondents Can Use Negotiation-Based Strategies to Address the Claims of Active Publics

Of the four strategy categories, negotiation-based alternatives have received the widest attention and involve direct communication with an activist group seeking remedies to problems (Gossen & Sharp, 1987; Pires, 1989). Although *avoidance* or deferral of contact is possible, it is unlikely that any self-respecting activist group would acquiesce so easily. Mere *acknowledgment* involves an organization recognizing the group and its claims. However, acknowledgment falls short of a meaningful dialogue and often is merely a delay tactic. Acknowledgment by an organization might be mistaken as an indicator of intent to pursue a resolution, when in fact the organization believes that the group or problem will go away or the issue will be resolved another way (such as legislation) that would make negotiation unnecessary. *Concession* similarly is a negotiation-based strategy wherein the organization concurs with the position of activists because its management agrees such an action is legally, morally, or ethically right. However, targets might also concede because they think the underlying problem is inconsequential or the cost of concession is less than alternatives. Indeed, higher costs might be incurred as a result of jeopar-

dized relationships, adverse publicity, protracted negotiations, or cumbersome regulation or legislation.

Bargaining involves the active, face-to-face negotiation of an agreement in which the parties come to terms over an issue through accommodation. Bargaining ensues when concession has been rejected by the organization and involves give-and-take discussions in which parties agree to certain terms, but not others, wanted by the other party. Conflict mediation or resolution is a special type of bargaining in which a third party is imposed between the bargainers to provide structure and encourage timely resolution. Mediators exert moral suasion to get the parties to negotiate in good faith. In the case of arbitration, the mediator or arbiter is empowered by law or agreement to determine resolution of a dispute.

Respondents Can Use Intervention-Based Strategies to Address the Concerns of Aroused Publics

Because activist publics form continuously, one of the biggest concerns to organizations is the possibility that others will join activists in pressing their claims. Organizations in this predicament have the opportunity to moderate the growth of support for an issue by focusing careful attention on aroused publics (i.e., those who have heightened involvement but have not yet moved into the activist category). Four primary response strategies are based on intervening in activist public formation.

Monitoring involves careful screening of the activities of individuals and groups who might be aroused and have already engaged in information seeking and discussions of problems. In local disputes, for example, it is possible to identify specific disgruntled citizens. *Outreach activities*, designed to establish and maintain contact with influentials in a community, are useful to monitor opinions and begin dialogues. *Collaboration* or cooperation involves bringing these aroused or disgruntled individuals into the confidences of the organization before they choose to organize. Regrettably, such efforts can be ineffective if organizations engage in mere showcasing or tokenism intended to allay concerns on a limited or temporary basis.

Effective *inquiry handling* involves an organization's adept response to routine inquiries, which might be in the form of requests for information or complaints from customers, constituencies, or other stakeholders. Such inquiries often result directly from the information- and remedy-seeking activities in which aroused publics participate. Yet, instead of proactively seizing the opportunity to avert trouble, organizations often ignore, rebut, or treat inquirers shabbily. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many aroused publics organize out of frustration after pursuing simple remedies. When this occurs, people do not just get mad—they want to get even. Organizing efforts often begin or escalate. The need to handle routine inquiries astutely underscores the importance of consumer affairs or customer re-

lations functions in organizations, coupled with staff training to deal effectively with disgruntled persons and with mechanisms to track trends.

Co-optation incorporates activities in which an organization engages in the guise of collaboration but actually undermines it. The effect is to make it more difficult for an issue to mature. Such responses often involve questionable ethics. One technique is creation of advisory boards or other entities that give the appearance that the organization is concerned and interested in the problem. However, many advisory groups are shallow ploys used to placate critics. Another co-optation tactic includes hiring activist leaders as employees or consultants, which reduces their personal interest in pressing an issue. Symbol co-optation involves using symbols and slogans or logos (such as the Housing and Urban Development equal opportunity housing symbol) that might be important to a group, thus weakening its symbolic strength as a rallying point for activists. Other techniques include direct attacks that discredit the organization or its leaders in the eyes of current or prospective supporters. Finally, organizations can bypass organizers and make direct appeals to aroused publics with the intent of undercutting the support for and credibility of organizers and the cause (Cobb & Elder, 1972).

Containment strategies include defusing and blurring the issue so that the need for action becomes questionable in the minds of aroused publics. For example, an organization might point out to aroused groups that the organization already has programs designed to address problems or that it has plans to create such programs. Another containment strategy is for an organization to plead that it is powerless to do anything about a problem. Such feigned constraint foists blame on others, such as government, or points to systemic factors in society (e.g., economic conditions) that make change impossible (Cobb & Elder, 1972).

Respondents Can Educate Aware Publics So They Understand the Organization's Position and Are Less Likely to Support Issue Advocates

Although organizations can defuse issue evolution by addressing concerns of aroused publics, an equally important strategy is to enlist support from third-party aware publics. The cluster of potential responses involved here can be characterized as education-based strategies, wherein the organization counters claims made by activists, advances its own position on an issue, or focuses on the legitimacy of its claims or its role (Coombs, 1992). The goal of these education efforts is to fortify an organization's position on an issue by informing uninvolved yet aware publics. In turn, these groups can communicate the organization's position to others.

Alliance building involves reaching out to informed individuals in society at large. These groups can include key external stakeholders of the organization, such as major customers, suppliers, investors, competitors, and union leaders who are not

involved directly in the dispute. Alliance building differs from coalition building because the emphasis is on sharing information and building relationships rather than soliciting these groups to become involved directly in the dispute.¹⁰

Media advocacy and *lobbying* are the direct analogues to the appeals made by activists to involve media workers and government officials. However, in most cases, the responding organization's objective is just the opposite of the activists' goal: to avoid attention or action altogether. If squelching the topic is not possible, respondents want to make sure that their positions get equal or preferential treatment. Issue respondents often find themselves needing to defend themselves against claims created by issue sponsors.¹¹ Unlike their activist counterparts, well-established and well-funded targets are more likely to use issue advertising to reach aware publics (Sethi, 1987; Schmertz, 1986).

Although alliance building, media advocacy, and lobbying are primarily education based, targets of activists can use education in combination with power to sway merely aware publics to support their position on a particular group. Organizations can use various power resources to sway support, including rewards and punishments as well as unobtrusive power resources, including expert, referent, and legitimate power to sway third parties to take sides in an issue (French & Raven, 1959).

Respondents Can Engage in Prevention-Based Strategies Directed to Inactive Publics

The final, often overlooked aspect of issue response deals with efforts directed to inactive publics (i.e., individuals and groups who are only minimally aware or concerned about an issue). Prevention is a strategic goal when addressing people in this category because organizations want to reduce the probability that people will pay much attention to a particular problem. Organizations obviously cannot deny the existence of verifiable situations or problems that garner public attention or media coverage. In such circumstances, organizations are found out rather quickly. Simi-

¹⁰Allies exist primarily to help reinforce public opinion about an organization's position on an issue. If an organization later calls on allies to mobilize support—such as by providing an endorsement or testifying before a government hearing—the process is virtually the same as the coalition building identified as an issue activation process. The resulting group might be called a countercoalition.

¹¹Despite efforts to affirmatively promote their positions on ongoing issues, systemic biases in both journalistic and government work often favor challengers in the early phases of a controversy. News values that place a premium on conflict, for example, tend to celebrate upstart challengers by giving them prominent coverage. However, critical media scholars point out that any ostensible advantage is outweighed eventually by media bias that favors establishment institutions and widely shared social values (Dreier, 1982; Gitlin, 1980; Olien, Donohue, & Tichenor, 1990; Olien, Tichenor, & Donohue, 1989; Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1980). Activists often are trivialized, marginalized, or portrayed as deviant (Eliasoph, 1988; Ryan, 1991; Shoemaker, 1984).

larly, they cannot prevent inactive publics from coming into contact with informed members of aware publics, seeing media reports, or hearing about government actions. However, organizations can counteract issue activation by shaping the information inactive publics receive through aware publics and can address the levels of concern created among aroused publics. To do so, organizations can pursue at least four strategies.

Poll taking and *market monitoring* are research-based surveillance techniques based on tracking trends in behavior among inactive publics. Poll taking includes conducting surveys to analyze the valence and intensity of public opinion. Market monitoring involves tracking activities, such as purchase patterns, that might serve as alternatives to opinion research as indicators of trends. To the extent that polls suggest that the broad spectrum of the population is only marginally aware or interested in an issue, the respondent organization might be wise to direct its responses to activist, aware, and aroused groups only. Otherwise, direct communications might be called for.

Performance monitoring and *quality assurance* are important, too. Organizations that fear a groundswell of negative public concern should ensure that their organization's performance meets the expectations of inactive publics. As long as an organization meets the public's expectations, activists have difficulty capturing the attention of inactive publics or gaining credibility. However, lapses in performance can foster problem recognition. When an issue is highly visible, such gaps reinforce the claims of activists and, in turn, can prompt arousal and information seeking. Major lapses in performance quality such as an airline crash, train derailment, or food contamination incident serve as triggering events that galvanize public opinion and draw media and government attention.

Ingratiation involves creating ongoing opportunities to gain favorable acceptance by communicating the benefits an organization provides to individuals as customers, investors, donors, employees, or voters. Organizations concerned about the adverse effects of activism can subtly remind inactive publics on an ongoing basis about the value the organization provides them and the importance of their relationship. Indeed, favorable acceptance is the ultimate goal of relationship management in public relations. Such reinforcement can thwart thoughts of switching loyalties or brands or challenging the legitimacy of the organization. An organization might be tempted to provide detailed, substantive arguments about its position on a particular issue to the public at large, but such efforts probably are better directed to aware publics, who have the ability and motivation to consider such arguments. Inactive publics are more likely to be concerned with how the organization serves them (Vavra, 1992). This is the rationale behind most institutional advertising.

Finally, *reputation enhancement* includes activities and messages that focus attention on particular attributes of the organization that the organization would like to promote (Hallahan, 1999). Not surprisingly, the attributes featured are different

from those that are the focal interest of activists. Fundamentally, this is a diversion tactic in which the organization stresses the socially valued activities in which it participates, such as protecting the environment, promoting the arts, or supporting local schools. Such efforts are ethical but are likely to be dismissed or chastised by activist and aroused publics, who remain focused on the problem. However, these efforts might be contemplated by inactive (and aware) publics if they bother to weigh the positive attributes featured against the negative attributes that are the focus of activist claims. In certain cases, reputation-enhancing activities can insulate an organization's reputation from activist claims.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The primary contribution of this model is to integrate within a single framework the numerous processes that constitute issue activation and response. Thus, the model underscores the need for public relations theorists and practitioners to develop a more comprehensive view of how issues evolve and how organizations respond.

As the model suggests, issues are complex and dynamic. Issues involve more than merely a dispute between two parties. In addition to individuals and groups with direct stakes in a dispute, issues can involve people and groups who are merely aroused but not fully involved, who are aware but not motivated to act, and who are neither knowledgeable nor concerned about the problem. To deal effectively with an issue, organizations and their managers need to develop an understanding of both the content (i.e., claims made) and the context (e.g., the activist state of publics) in which a particular issue evolves. Moreover, they must understand the more general pattern of issue activation and response.

Central Focus on Knowledge and Involvement

Although it identifies various subprocesses, this model is useful for theory building and research purposes because it focuses on two molar concepts, knowledge and involvement, as the moderators of issues dynamics. Importantly, knowledge and involvement are concepts that transcend levels of analysis (Pan & McLeod, 1991) and can be used to characterize both individuals and groups. Although four categories of publics are specified here to facilitate discussion, both knowledge and involvement actually are continuous (vs. dichotomous) variables that permit individuals or groups to be located anywhere on the conceptual grid shown in Figures 1–3.

Because issues are conceptualized as social constructions, this model suggests that it is necessary to examine knowledge and involvement in relative rather than absolute terms. No assumptions are made that the parties involved in an issue necessarily define the problem the same way, base their knowledge on conditions that actually exist, or act rationally to resolve disagreements.

The fundamental importance of knowledge and involvement can be traced to the most important step in the issue activation process: problem recognition. Expectancies are posited to originate when people develop mental prototypes with which they compare the performance of organizations, products, services, candidates, or causes. Such prototypes often are culturally based and learned through formal education and everyday experience. When people recognize that these inconsistencies or gaps are sufficiently large or might have consequences for them personally, people are prompted to think and might therefore conclude that a situation is problematic. However, more must be known about how and why certain people are predisposed to recognize problems readily.

Beyond problem recognition, knowledge and involvement serve as the basis on which issue disputants struggle to influence people. Issue activists strive to increase overall awareness of problems among others; they also seek to involve others in their efforts to rectify a problem as the activists have defined it. In turn, issue respondents can counter those efforts by presenting counterarguments, recasting or reframing the problem, or refocusing a public's attention on other, more desirable attributes of an organization. Respondents thus actively attempt to discourage or minimize the need for involvement by the general public (manifested as personal worry), the media (manifested as coverage of the problem), or government (manifested as laws or regulations).

Broadening the Field's Research Perspective on Issue Dynamics

This issue processes model identifies key aspects of issue dynamics that have received little attention in the public relations literature. Although a variety of aspects might be singled out, four ideas merit special discussion.

Interpersonal communication as an antecedent of issue knowledge and involvement. One of the most valuable directions for future research is to better understand the roles of personal influence and interpersonal communication in the identification, development, and expansion of issues. The primary theory in the field, situational theory, focuses on communication as a dependent variable. Active information seeking and passive information processing are hypothesized to result from high levels of problem recognition and involvement coupled with low levels of constraint recognition (J. E. Grunig, 1997). Yet little attention has been paid to the role of communication in creating these conditions. Researchers need to turn the question around: What role does communication play in creating problem recognition, involvement, and constraint recognition? Stated another way, communication can be conceptualized as an independent variable that contributes to issue dynamics.

Critical role of aware publics. Closely related to understanding how people become knowledgeable about and involved in issues, more attention should be paid to the important role of aware publics as influentials who broker issue activation and response processes. Most conceptualizations of issue dynamics incorporate only the two principal parties: claimants (e.g., activists) and respondents (e.g., organizations). The role of third-party influentials has been largely ignored. Although research about opinion leadership (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and innovation diffusion (Rogers, 1995) has become passé, interpersonal researchers continue to examine the influence of interpersonal networks in organizations and small groups. Public relations researchers need to broaden their perspective to think of issues as involving the full spectrum of individuals and groups who are players in disputes.

Value of reputation enhancement. The model posits that a large segment of the population is insulated and indifferent to many critical issues in modern society. Researchers need to more fully understand the degree to which inactive publics are affected by public controversies, including their perceptions of and responses to issue activation and issue response initiatives. How impervious is the American public to issue advocacy? Is there a role for reputation enhancement and other image-building activities in countering controversy? Public relations researchers have tended to treat issue responses and reputation enhancement as mutually exclusive activities. In some cases, reputation enhancement efforts have been pejoratively dismissed, even though such efforts can play an important role in managing issues.

Importance of the structural characteristics of activist publics. Finally, the model contributes to the understanding of issue dynamics by pointing out that active publics can organize themselves in a variety of different structures. Public relations theorists generally have overlooked the critical process of organizing and lumped together all categories of active publics. Indeed, we talk about groups and the individuals that constitute those groups interchangeably (Hallahan, in press-b), without regard to how factors such as organization, leadership, staffing, and fundraising affect activist groups' ability to press claims. Not all activists are equally equipped to threaten the normal operation of an organization. Structural components can have a direct impact on the ability of an activist group to enlist others who are merely aroused or aware of an issue. Building on this model, more research is needed to understand how structure moderates agency, or the efforts of activist groups to marshal resources, wield power, and threaten organizations (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000).

Implications for Normative and Contingent Communication Strategies

Much discussion in recent years has focused on the strategies organizations can use in dealing with key publics. Normative theory, represented in the Excellence Study

and other work by J. E. Grunig and colleagues (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 1992; J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000), suggests that public relations is ideally practiced using a two-way symmetric model. In the past decade, various researchers have called for more realistic approaches. Murphy (1991; Murphy & Dee, 1992), for example, suggested that organizations try to satisfy their own interests while trying to help a public satisfy its interests. Murphy's mixed-motive model has been embraced by Grunig and colleagues as being closely akin to the meaning of symmetry (Dozier, L. A. Grunig, & J. E. Grunig, 1995; J. E. Grunig, 2000). Separately, Cameron and his colleagues (Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997; Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999; Yarborough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998) proposed a contingency model that suggests that organizations deal with external constituencies in situation-dependent ways. They suggested that these strategies can be arrayed along a continuum from pure advocacy to pure accommodation.

Although the original purpose of this model was to propose a comprehensive overview of issue dynamics, this model advances the discussion of organizational responses to issues in several ways. First, by identifying involvement and knowledge as central factors in issue activation and response, it suggests that moderating people's levels of knowledge and involvement is the underlying purpose of any response. Advocacy clearly involves altering knowledge, whereas accommodation influences involvement by reducing activists' motivation to press claims. The model suggests that pure accommodation probably will be most prevalent in negotiation-based strategies (e.g., concession) involving highly knowledgeable and involved groups that appear to be capable of marshaling resources from the aroused and aware sectors. However, as knowledge and involvement decrease, advocacy will play an increasingly important role. Table 1 suggests how schemes might be

TABLE 1
Alternative Response Strategies as Forms of Advocacy Versus Accommodation

<i>Public (Strategy)</i>	<i>Mostly Advocacy</i>	<i>Mixture of Advocacy and Accommodation</i>	<i>Mostly Accommodation</i>
Active (Negotiation)	Avoidance	Acknowledgment	Concession
Aroused (Intervention)	Co-optation	Bargaining	Monitoring
	Containment	Outreach	Collaboration
Aware (Education)	Media advocacy	Lobbying	Inquiry handling
Inactive (Prevention)	Ingratiation	Quality assurance	Alliance building
	Reputation enhancement		Poll taking
			Market monitoring

arrayed on separate contingency continua for each of the four key groups of publics identified in the model.

Second, the model extends the debate by proposing that characteristics of publics are fundamental to the interaction that occurs between an organization and publics. The model suggests that organizations are most likely to be confronted by individuals organized in groups with high knowledge and high involvement in a topic. Yet, a wide range of proactive responses are possible when dealing with aroused, merely aware, or inactive publics. By focusing exclusively on characteristics of publics, this model challenges contingency theory by suggesting that characteristics of publics should be the central focus. Cameron and colleagues (Cancel et al., 1997) identified 86 factors on which a response might be contingent. Of these, about two thirds relate to characteristics of the organization, and only 14 pertain to characteristics of external publics. Although level of involvement and involvement of members was included in the list of contingent factors, the knowledge or ability levels of external publics were not—a potentially important omission. Importantly, in their report of factors considered important by practitioners, Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (1999) found evidence that response strategies are influenced heavily by an external public's power to significantly affect a corporation's ability to do business and make money. Other factors included a public's size, level of organization, ability to get media coverage, reputation, clout, or support from influential people or groups.

Third, building on the normative approach advocated by J. E. Grunig (1992) and the call by theorists (Dutton & Jackson, 1987; Heath, 1997) for organizations to be proactive in anticipating and responding to issues, this model enumerates the variety of options available to organizations to manage issues, incorporate the views of others in their plans, and avoid needless confrontation. (Although conflict and negotiation are inevitable in certain cases, most activists and targets would agree that these are not desirable.) This view is consistent with J. E. Grunig's (2000) recent commentary in which he attempted to clarify his meaning of the increasingly muddled concept of symmetry. J. E. Grunig contended that in the two-way symmetrical model of public relations, "practitioners use research and dialogue to bring about symbiotic changes in the ideas, attitudes and behaviors of both the organization and its publics" (p. 32).¹² The model presented here suggests

¹²The notion of two-way symmetrical communication has undergone a series of redefinitions since first proposed by J. E. Grunig (J. E. Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The narrowest definition suggests that two-way symmetrical communication can occur only when two parties have equal power to influence one another. An alternative definition, consistent with this model might be that symmetrical communication can occur only when the two parties have equal levels of knowledge and involvement in the issue or when two parties have equal motivation, ability, and opportunity to communicate. Such circumstances rarely occur in routine communications and might be difficult to substantiate in disputes in which challengers have inherently less power than establishment organizations. For a discussion of the asymmetric nature of corporate-person relationships, see Coleman (1982).

that astute organizations use a combination of advocacy and accommodation throughout the issue activation process, not just when an organization is pressed by a highly knowledgeable, highly involved activist group. Monitoring the issue activation process and deploying appropriate responses at each step of development are consistent with the spirit of symmetry and represent the essence of effective issue management.

Fourth, the model identifies four broad categories of responses (negotiation, intervention, education, and prevention), along with 16 specific response strategies (some with substrategies). Others might be possible. One of the shortcomings of normative and contingency theories is the lack of specificity about the response options available to targets of issues activists. Each of the 16 response strategies outlined here deserves research attention. Significantly, the model suggests that issue activation and response is a dynamic process that changes over time. Consistent with contingency theory, the strategies used by organizations can (and should) change over time as an issue grows or declines. However, the temporal dimension is not addressed in contingency theory. Moreover, because this model specifies that organizations might use multiple response strategies simultaneously with different publics, public relations theorists should abandon any notion that organizations adopt only a single strategy. Most organizations deal with issues on multiple fronts and need to tailor responses to different categories of publics. In some cases, organizations might expend considerable effort and resources. In other cases, following prudent analysis, organizations might opt to not respond at all.

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