

## **TWO SIDES TO EVERY STORY: USING COORIENTATION TO MEASURE DIRECT AND META-PERSPECTIVES OF BOTH PARTIES IN ORGANIZATION-PUBLIC RELATIONSHIPS**

Trent Seltzer and Michael Mitrook

*This study extends the study of organization-public relationships through the development of a new methodology for measuring organization-public relationships. The Hon-Grunig (1999) relationship scale was applied in a coorientational framework to assess agreement between the direct perspectives of both an organization and a stakeholder public. This represents a departure from existing organization-public relationship measurement. Additionally, the meta-perspectives of each party were also included to assess the degree of accuracy and congruency (perceived agreement) between the perspectives of the two parties in the relationship. The effect of time in the relationship on the coorientational relationship variables was also examined.*

### **Introduction**

For more than twenty years, the field of public relations research has been experiencing a paradigm shift toward what has been dubbed the relational perspective (Ledingham, 2003). The impetus for this shift lies in Ferguson's (1984) suggestion that public relations researchers needed a dominant paradigm that they could call their own; this could be accomplished in part by focusing on a new unit of analysis, specifically, the relationship that exists between an organization and its stakeholders – the *organization-public relationship* (OPR). To this end, public relations researchers have sought to extend their understanding of organization-public relationships through the development of measurement scales (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Bruning and Ledingham, 1999) as well as theoretical models outlining OPR antecedents and outcomes (e.g. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 1997). However, there is still a need to continue to refine the methods that are being used to measure these relationships since most research focusing on organization-public relationships typically only include measures of the public's perception of the relationship while leaving out the organization's perspective (e.g., Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ki & Hon, 2007; Kim, 2007; Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999; Yang, 2007).

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*Trent Seltzer, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Public Relations in the College of Mass Communication at Texas Tech University, [trent.seltzer@ttu.edu](mailto:trent.seltzer@ttu.edu).*

*Michael Mitrook, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Relations in the College of Journalism and Communications at University of Florida, [mmitrook@jou.ufl.edu](mailto:mmitrook@jou.ufl.edu).*

This study details the development and application of a relationship-centered method for measuring organization-public relationships by using established relationship measures within a coorientational framework. Building on previous research, this study outlines a method that includes the direct perspectives and meta-perspectives of both the public and the organization to assess the organization-public relationship by combining the coorientational approach advocated by Broom (1977) and Broom and Dozier (1990) with the relationship measures proposed by Hon and Grunig (1999). Applying these relationship measures within the coorientational framework will indicate the degree of agreement, accuracy, and congruency between organizations and their publics in regard to perceptions of the relationship. This approach moves beyond existing methods that consider only the public's direct perspective of the relationship. The effect of time in the relationship on coorientational perceptions is also considered.

## Literature Review

### *The Relational Perspective*

The development of the relationship perspective in public relations research is grounded in efforts to distinguish the study of public relations from other communications fields. Ferguson (1984) laid the groundwork for the relationship perspective by stressing a need for public relations researchers to focus on relationships themselves. Making relationships a primary unit of analysis for studying public relations in turn necessitated the development of methodologies to measure those relationships.

This relationship-focused perspective fits naturally with the development of the two-way symmetrical communication model of public relations. From the two-way symmetrical viewpoint, the purpose of public relations is to develop and manage relationships, not control public opinion through persuasion (Ehling, 1992). This model incorporates a feedback loop to facilitate understanding between an organization and a public to develop mutually beneficial relationships (Grunig & Grunig, 1992). Two-way symmetrical communication has been identified as one of the ways organizations can practice "excellent" public relations (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995; Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002) that increases organizational effectiveness by establishing and maintaining long-term relationships with strategic publics.

Ferguson's (1984) call to focus on relationships as a unit of analysis coupled with Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig's (1995) acknowledgement of the importance of two-way communication in managing OPRs provides the groundwork for the relational perspective. Ledingham (2003) summarized this perspective by suggesting a theory of relationship management that states "effectively managing organization-public relationships around common interests and shared goals, over time, results in mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (p. 190). To identify a common definition of the term *relationship* in the literature Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997), observed that:

The formation of relationships occurs when parties have perceptions and expectations of each other, when one or both parties need resources from the other, when one or both parties perceive mutual threats from an uncertain environment, and when there is either a legal or voluntary necessity to associate...Relationships are the dynamic results of the exchanges and reciprocity that manifest themselves as the relationships develop and evolve, but they can be described at a given point in time (p. 95).

Broom, Casey, and Ritchey (1997) proposed a three-stage model of OPRs consisting of antecedents, relationship state, and consequences. Antecedents include perceptions, motives, needs, and behaviors of parties within the relationship. Consequences include the outputs of relationships that could affect the organization or its environment, such as behavior (Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson, 1999), loyalty (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998), satisfaction (Ledingham, 2001; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998), and attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ki & Hon, 2007). Grunig & Huang (2000) also proposed a three-stage model of OPRs that included situational antecedents, maintenance strategies, and relationship outcomes. Situational antecedents describe the behavioral and situational factors that link publics and organizations. Maintenance strategies include the communication efforts used by the organization to nurture its relationship with the public. Relationship outcomes include goal attainment and perceptions of relationship state.

### *Defining and Measuring Relationships*

Since Ferguson (1984) proposed that relationships should be the primary unit of analysis in public relations, researchers have sought to explicate the relationship concept through the identification of various dimensions of relationships and developing methods to measure them. To date, these efforts have developed in two directions.

The first group of studies utilizes measures developed around the types of relationships that may exist between an organization and a public. Ledingham, Bruning, Thomlison, and Lesko (1997) identified 17 dimensions. Among these dimensions were openness, trust, involvement, investment, and commitment. These five dimensions were later operationalized by Ledingham and Bruning (1998); they proposed that OPRs could be grouped into three categories, personal, community, and professional relationships, which they used to develop a multi-dimensional scale to measure OPR state (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999). Bruning and Galloway (2003) later expanded the scale to include measures of personal and structural commitment.

The second group of studies conceptualizes relationship perception within the Grunig and Huang (2000) model as an outcome of maintenance strategies. Huang (1997) identified trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction as positive relationship outcomes. Hon and Grunig (1999) later developed quantitative measurement scales for these dimensions and found them to be strong measures. These measures have since been found to be reliable in other studies (e.g., Hon & Brunner, 2002; Huang, 2001; Jo, Hon, & Brunner, 2004; Ki & Hon, 2007).

*Control mutuality* is the extent to which the parties in the relationship agree as to who is authorized to exert power and control in the relationship. *Trust* consists of several other concepts including *integrity* (the perception that parties are fair), *dependability* (the perception that parties will follow through on their promises), and *competence* (the perception that parties have the resources necessary to do what they claim they will do). *Satisfaction* is the perception that the benefits of being in the relationship exceed the costs. *Commitment* includes both *continuance commitment* (the feeling that it is worth taking action to maintain the relationship) and *affective commitment* (the emotional energy spent maintaining the relationship) (Hon & Grunig, 1999).

While these dimensions have been applied in a variety of contexts (e.g., Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Huang, 2001; Ki & Hon, 2007), they are typically limited to measurement of the public's perspective of the OPR and ignore the other party in the relationship – the organization. Despite many researchers advocating its inclusion (Broom & Dozier, 1990; Hon & Grunig, 1999; Ledingham, 2001, 2003; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Seltzer, 2006), the organization's perspective remains largely absent from OPR research.

### *Coorientation*

Among the dimensions that Ferguson (1984) suggested for quantifying OPRs, she listed mutuality of understanding, agreement, and consensus, noting that the “coorientational measurement model should prove quite useful in conceptualizing relationship variables for this type of paradigm focus” (p. 17). The use of a coorientational approach has been proposed repeatedly in the public relations literature; however, coorientation was originally suggested for use in assessing how two groups perceive an issue and not how they view the relationship itself (Broom, 1977; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Grunig & Stamm, 1973; McLeod & Chaffee, 1973).

Measuring relationships between two or more parties has been attempted in the interpersonal and mass communications fields. Laing, Phillipson, and Lee (1966) developed an Interpersonal Perception Method for assessing the perceptions of husband-wife dyads. Laing's (1969) Relational Perception Theory proposes that individuals within a relationship continuously influence one another through their interactions and that those interactions draw on three different perspectives. The first is the *direct perspective*, or what an individual in the relationship thinks. The second perspective is the *meta-perspective*, or what the individual thinks the other individual in the relationship thinks. The third perspective is the *meta-meta-perspective* or how a person thinks their direct perspective is perceived by another (i.e., “what I think you think I think”). Laing proposed that the greater the degree of accuracy between these various perspectives of the parties in the relationship, the better those individuals will understand each other and feel they are being understood, which in turn would lead to healthier relationships.

Previous work attempted to extend this interpersonal approach to communication between collectives (McLeod & Chaffee, 1973; Grunig & Stamm, 1973). Grunig and

Stamm (1973) advocated a coorientation paradigm for communication between an organization and another social collective, observing that “if a researcher uses a coorientation paradigm...he can focus his attention on the relationship of sender to receiver in the communication system” (p. 567).

These studies suggest that the relationship is a construct separate from measures of attitudes toward issues, people, and other objects external to the relationship. This important distinction suggests that an organization and a public can hold similar attitudes about an issue of common concern, and yet the relationship between them can still be considered a “poor” relationship. The model also stresses it is not enough to consider what one party in the relationship thinks; both parties have a say in defining the true nature of the relationship through shared meaning. Using a coorientational approach to measure organization-public relationships directly addresses this problem of shared perception.

A coorientational approach to measuring the OPR includes four points of analysis: (1) the organization’s direct perspective of the relationship, (2) the public’s direct perspective of the relationship, (3) the organization’s meta-perspective of the relationship, and (4) the public’s meta-perspective of the relationship. The interaction between direct and meta-perspectives creates three measures of coorientation. *Agreement* indicates the degree to which the organization’s view matches the public’s view of the OPR. *Accuracy* indicates the degree to which the organization correctly estimates the public’s viewpoint, and vice versa. *Congruency (perceived agreement)* is the degree to which the organization’s view matches its perception of the public’s viewpoint, and vice versa. The coorientational model presented in Figure 1 helps to clarify the linkages among these concepts.

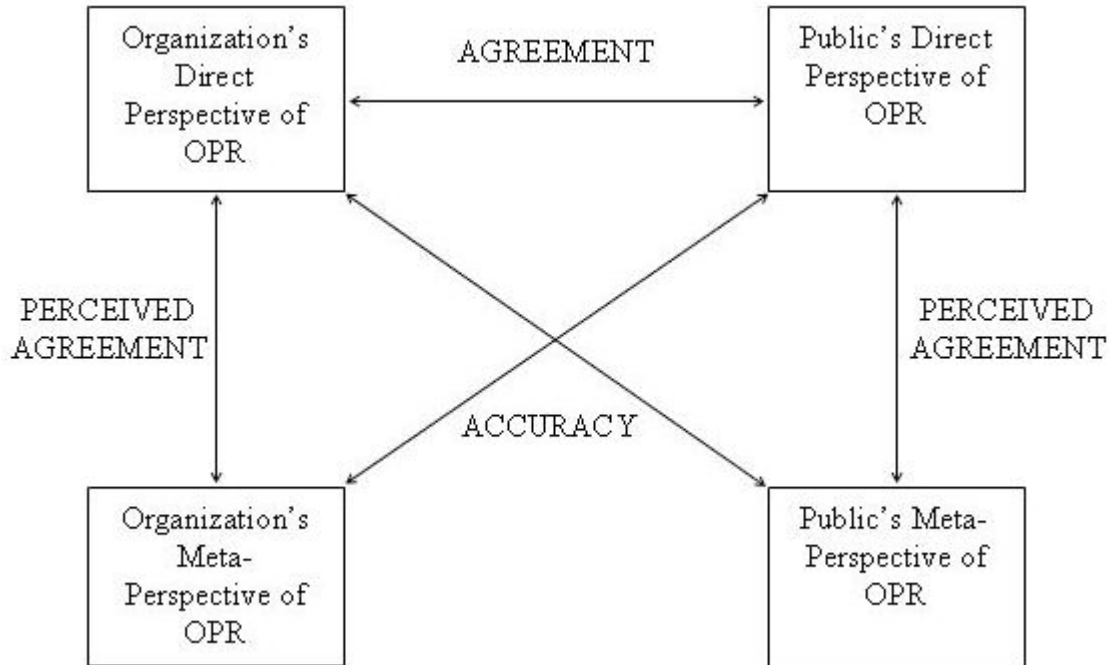


Figure 1. The coorientational model of organization-public relationships adapted from Broom (1977) and Broom & Dozier (1990).

The coorientational model has been used in other fields such as interpersonal communication (e.g., O’Keefe, 1973; Purnine & Carey, 1999), employee communications (e.g. Jo & Shim, 2005), political science (e.g., Hesse, 1976), journalism (e.g., Jones, 1993) and environmental policy (e.g., Connelly & Knuth, 2002), but is usually limited to assessments of one side’s perceptions of the relationship or evaluations of an issue common to both parties. The model has been applied to some degree in a public relations context, but typically ignores the organizational perspective, focuses on issue or attitude assessment, (e.g., Bowes & Stamm, 1975; Broom, 1977; Broom & Dozier, 1990; Cameron & McCollum, 1993; Grunig, 1972; Stegall & Sanders, 1986, Stamm & Bowes, 1972), or omitted the meta-perspectives (e.g., Hon & Brunner, 2002). The coorientational approach has yet to be fully utilized to measure an OPR.

Coorientational relationship measures can provide a snapshot of the whole organization-public relationship in the form of shared perceptions and gaps in perception between the organization’s and public’s direct and meta-perspectives, thereby facilitating a more thorough diagnosis of the relationship and suggesting possible prescriptive actions to improve the relationship if need be. By making comparisons between the four perspectives, it will be possible to gauge the state of the three coorientational variables: accuracy, agreement, and congruency (Broom & Dozier, 1990) Based on these comparisons, one could determine the relationship state that exists between the organization and the public, including *true consensus* (accurate perception of agreement), *dissensus* (accurate perception of disagreement), *false consensus* (inaccurate perception of agreement), or *false conflict* (inaccurate perception of disagreement) (Broom, 1977; Broom & Dozier, 1990).

Being able to assess accuracy, agreement, and congruency, as well as the resulting relationship states of dissensus, consensus, false conflict, and false consensus, could be especially valuable; possibly even more valuable than outcome measures of attitude or relational perception. This is particularly true for relationships that are in a state of false consensus or false conflict in that it may be easier to increase perceptual accuracy between the parties in the relationship by correcting these misperceptions than it is to achieve more traditional public relations objectives, such as attitude change (Broom, 1977).

Based on the literature on the relational perspective, relationship measurement, and coorientation, the following research questions are proposed for investigation:

RQ1: Can the coorientational framework be used in conjunction with existing organization-public relationship measures to measure an organization-public relationship?

RQ2: Can the resulting coorientational measures of accuracy, agreement, and congruency be used to evaluate the state of the organization-public relationship?

#### *Time as a Relationship Antecedent*

Organization-public relationships do not form in a vacuum; antecedents and relationship maintenance efforts can act to influence relationship states and outcomes (Broom, Casey, & Ritchey, 2000; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Hon & Grunig, 1999). Time in the relationship has been identified as an antecedent to formation of perceptions of the relationship (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999). Therefore, measurement of the direct and meta-perspectives of the parties in the OPR should consider the effect of time in the relationship.

Hon and Grunig (1999) acknowledged that one of the benefits of using relationship measurement to evaluate public relations effectiveness is that these measures provide an indication of public relations programming effectiveness over the long term and are a better indicator than short-term outputs and outcomes that measure the impact of a specific, short-term program. Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson (1999) found that time in a relationship influenced perceptions of the dimensions of an OPR, concluding that building the long-term relationships that are desired by public relations practitioners demands a long-term commitment.

While Ledingham, Bruning, and Wilson (1999) looked at the effects of time on the direct perspectives of a relationship, this study looks at the impact of time on the coorientational variables of agreement, accuracy, and congruency. Since longer time in the relationship provides more opportunities to interact with the other party in the relationship, more time in the relationship should lead to a better understanding of the other party's perspective. Therefore:

RQ3: What effect will longer time in the organization-public relationship have on the degree of agreement, accuracy, and congruency among the direct and meta-perspectives of the parties in the organization-public relationship?

## **Methodology**

To measure an OPR using a coorientational approach, an online survey of a university police department and one of its publics was conducted during the spring of 2007 at a large southeastern university. The organization has approximately 130 employees and serves a student body that includes approximately 8,500 students living in on-campus housing. While the use of student samples is typically frowned upon, within the context of organization-public relationship research analyzing the relationship between an organization and a key public, the use of a student sample is justified if students comprise the organization's primary stakeholder public (Ki & Hon, 2007).

The study utilized a Web-based survey instrument to measure perceptions of the organization-public relationship. Couper (2000) points out that one of the greatest drawbacks of using the Internet to survey the general population is under-coverage of target populations. However, this is minimized if the target population is known to have Internet access as in our study (Couper, 2000).

A recruitment e-mail was sent to all members of the university police department ( $N=130$ ) and all students living on campus ( $N=8,175$ ). Multiple contacts were made over a two-week period to improve the response rate (Cook, Heath, & Thompson, 2000; Couper, Traugott, & Lamais, 2001; Groves et al., 2004; Porter & Whitcomb 2003). Forty-four members of the organization completed the survey, a 33.8% response rate for the organization sample. For the student sample, the final completion rate was 5.7% with 468 respondents completing the entire survey.

### *Survey Instrument*

A link in the recruitment e-mail directed respondents to a Web site featuring one of two versions of the survey; students were directed to the public version of the survey, while university police department members were directed to the organization version. The basic structure of both surveys was similar: respondents were asked to provide (1) their direct perspective of the relationship, (2) their meta-perspective of the relationship, and (3) demographic information including how long the respondent had been involved in the OPR.

Time. Members of the organization were asked to indicate how many years they had worked in their current position, how many years they had worked for the department in all, and how many years that they had worked at the university. Students were asked to indicate how many years they had been a student at the university and how many years they lived on campus.

Direct Perspective. Each respondent's direct perspective of the four relationship dimensions of trust, control mutuality, satisfaction, and commitment was measured

using the 21-item Hon-Grunic (1999) relationship scale. Each item was slightly reworded so that they were applicable to the specific organization-public relationship under investigation. Respondents indicated their degree of agreement or disagreement with each item on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 7 (“strongly agree”). The survey software randomized the order of the items for each respondent, thus controlling for question order effects.

Meta-Perspective. After responding to the items measuring direct perspective, the next page of the survey asked respondents to estimate the other party’s view of the relationship (i.e., the respondent’s meta-perspective). This was measured using the same 21-item relationship measures as before. For the organization version of the survey, the scale ranged from 1 (“a student would strongly disagree”) to 7 (“a student would strongly agree”); for the student version of the survey, the scale ranged from 1 (“a member of the university police department would strongly disagree”) to 7 (“a member of the university police department would strongly agree”).

### *Data Analysis*

After the reversed control mutuality item was recoded, Cronbach’s Alpha was calculated for each relationship dimension to ensure the items representing that dimension were reliable. The scale items representing each relationship measure were then averaged to obtain the mean trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment scores for each respondent’s direct perspective and meta-perspective. An overall relationship measure was also calculated using all 21 items for each respondent’s direct perspective and meta-perspective.

Difference scores (d-scores) were calculated for each respondent by subtracting their direct perspective and meta-perspectives ratings from the average direct perspective ratings for the other party. This procedure generated two sets of d-scores: one set of d-scores that indicated accuracy between the respondent’s meta-perspective and the other party’s direct perspective, and one set of d-scores that indicated agreement between the respondent’s direct perspective and the other party’s direct perspective. Congruency was calculated by finding the difference between each respondent’s own direct and meta-perspectives. The absolute value of all d-scores was then calculated so they were positive. Smaller d-score values indicate stronger levels of agreement, accuracy, and congruency while larger d-score values indicate weaker levels.

To address the research questions regarding the type of relationship states that exist between the organization and the public, repeated measures multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used. Follow-up ANOVAs were also used to provide additional information regarding the interaction of the various perspectives. To address the impact of time on the coorientation measures, linear regression analysis was used.

## Results

### *Scale Reliability*

Since the Hon-Grunig relationship scales have been repeatedly validated (several times within a university relationship setting), scale reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha. Using SPSS, scale reliability was assessed for each set of items composing the various dimensions on the Hon-Grunig relationship scale, plus an additional analysis that looked at the reliability of all 21-items as a whole to indicate total relationship perception. The item total correlations were also examined to ensure they were greater than .50, and the inter-item correlations were examined to ensure they were greater than .30.

The Alpha for direct perspective of control mutuality was .858; removing the third control mutuality item improved reliability to .910. Since the third control mutuality item had inter-item and item-total correlations below the acceptable levels, it was dropped. The Alphas for the direct perspective of trust, commitment, and satisfaction were .916, .897, and .94 respectively. The Alpha for the overall direct perspective relationship measure using all 21-items was .971 (.974 after removing the third control mutuality item). The Alpha for the meta-perspective of control mutuality was .84; removing the third control mutuality item improved this to .937. Again, since the inter-item and item-total correlations were below the recommended levels, this item was removed. The Alphas for the meta-perspective of trust, commitment, and satisfaction were .959, .907, and .939 respectively. The Alpha for the meta-perspective relationship measure using all 21-items was .974 (.979 after removing the third control mutuality item).

The remaining 20 items were used to create the summated scales for each direct and meta-perspective relationship dimension, as well as overall direct and meta-perspective relationship measures. Suspecting that multicollinearity among the independent variables may become an issue, it was felt that having one overall measure of the direct and meta-perspective of the relationship might prove useful. Means were generated for each of the relationship measures along each of the four perspectives. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the relationship dimensions and the overall rating of the relationship for each perspective.

Table 1. Comparison of organization and public direct and meta-perspectives.

Relationship Dimension	Organization direct perspective		Organization meta perspective		Public direct perspective		Public meta perspective	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Control mutuality	5.37 <sup>ae</sup>	.722	4.61 <sup>c</sup>	1.16	3.72 <sup>acd</sup>	1.32	4.80 <sup>de</sup>	1.48
Trust	6.15 <sup>abe</sup>	.595	5.23 <sup>bc</sup>	1.04	4.43 <sup>acd</sup>	1.29	5.28 <sup>de</sup>	1.42
Commitment	5.35 <sup>ae</sup>	.888	4.87 <sup>c</sup>	1.09	3.91 <sup>acd</sup>	1.37	4.70 <sup>de</sup>	1.36
Satisfaction	5.27 <sup>ae</sup>	.860	5.00 <sup>c</sup>	.977	3.65 <sup>acd</sup>	1.46	4.45 <sup>de</sup>	1.48
Overall relationship	5.57 <sup>ae</sup>	.658	4.96 <sup>c</sup>	.990	3.96 <sup>acd</sup>	1.28	4.83 <sup>de</sup>	1.36

Note: Values with the same superscripts indicate means that there are significantly different on a given relationship measure ( $p < .05$ ).

### Sample Demographics

The average age of the students in the public sample was 20.53 years old ( $SD = 4.54$ ). The average respondent had been a student at the university 1.82 years ( $SD = 1.26$ ). In terms of gender, 45.1% were male and 54.9% female. For class standing, 35.9% indicated that they were freshman, 34.2% sophomores, 13.2% juniors, 7.3% seniors, and 9.4% graduate students. These student sample demographics are comparable to the demographic information regarding students living on campus and may help mitigate concerns regarding the low response rate.

For the organization sample, the average age of the university police department respondents was 38.5 years old ( $SD=9.23$ ). In terms of gender, 72.7% were male and 27.3% were female. Respondents indicated that they had spent an average of 4.7 years ( $SD=4.42$ ) in their current position, 10.2 years ( $SD=6.35$ ) with the UPD, and 10.8 years ( $SD=6.30$ ) at the university.

### Results Related to the Research Questions

To investigate RQ1 regarding the use of the coorientational framework in conjunction with existing organization-public relationship measures to measure an OPR, and RQ2 regarding the coorientational measures of accuracy, agreement, and congruency being used to evaluate the state of the OPR, a repeated measures MANOVA was calculated with party membership (organization or public) as the between-subjects factor and perspective (direct or meta-perspective) as the within-subjects factor to see the effect on the respondent ratings of the relationship dimensions. The main effects of party membership ( $F(4, 525)=9.49, p < .01$ ), the main effect of perspective ( $F(4, 525)=5.41, p < .01$ ), and the interaction of party membership and perspective ( $F(4, 525)=22.75, p < .01$ ) were all significant.

The between-subjects main effect of party membership on control mutuality ( $F(1, 528)=13.73, p < .01$ ), trust ( $F(1, 528)=20.20, p < .01$ ), commitment ( $F(1, 528)=17.85, p$

< .01), and satisfaction ( $F(1, 528)=29.55, p < .01$ ) were all significant. The organization rated all four relationship dimensions higher than the public did.

The within-subjects main effects of perspective on control mutuality ( $F(1, 528)=2.39, p > .05$ ), trust ( $F(1, 528)=.117, p > .05$ ), and commitment ( $F(1, 528)=1.82, p > .05$ ) were not significant. There was a significant main effect of perspective on satisfaction ( $F(1, 528)=5.70, p < .05$ ). The direct perspective rating of satisfaction was lower than the meta-perspective rating.

The within-subjects effects of the interaction of perspective and party on control mutuality ( $F(1, 528)=68.79, p < .01$ ), trust ( $F(1, 528)=77.75, p < .01$ ), commitment ( $F(1, 528)=42.85, p < .01$ ), and satisfaction ( $F(1, 528)=29.98, p < .01$ ) were all significant. The direct- and meta-perspectives of the organization and the direct and meta-perspectives of the public differed significantly for the four relationship dimensions.

A repeated measures ANOVA was conducted with party membership (organization, public) as the between-subjects factor and perspective as the within-subjects factor (direct perspective, meta-perspective) to see their effect on respondents' ratings of the overall relationship (i.e., using the overall relationship measure that included all 20 items). Here, the main effect of party membership ( $F(1, 528)=22.69, p < .01$ ) and the interaction of perspective with party membership ( $F(1, 528)=62.29, p < .01$ ) were both significant. The main effect of perspective ( $F(1, 528)=1.51, p > .05$ ) was not significant. The public rated the overall relationship lower than the organization did. Furthermore, direct perspectives and meta-perspectives of the relationship differed among the parties.

To untangle the differences between groups that resulted from the within-subjects factor of perspective interacting with the between-subject factor of party membership, additional MANOVA and ANOVA tests needed to be conducted in such a manner so that the interaction of perspectives and parties and the resulting effect on ratings of the individual relationship dimensions and the overall relationship rating could be clarified through post hoc testing of the individual group means. To facilitate such an analysis, the data set had to be restructured so the direct perspectives and meta-perspectives of each party in the relationship would be separated into four groups. Whereas the preceding analysis treated the direct and meta-perspectives evaluation of each dependent variable as repeated measures, the following analysis treats them as independent measures. Using SPSS, the data set was restructured to create a new independent variable representing the perspective by party interaction. The new variable, *perspective*, could now be treated as a factor with four levels: public's direct perspective, public's meta-perspective, organization's direct perspective, and organization's meta-perspective.

A MANOVA was conducted to see the effects of the new perspective variable on the four relationship dimensions of control, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The main effect of perspective ( $F(12,3837)=22.131, p < .01$ ) was significant. Follow-up univariate ANOVAs indicated that control mutuality ( $F(3, 1280)=73.99, p < .01$ ), trust

( $F(3, 1280)=73.99, p < .01$ ), commitment ( $F(3, 1280)=73.99, p < .01$ ), and satisfaction ( $F(3, 1280)=73.99, p < .01$ ) differed significantly between the four perspectives. Post hoc analysis using Scheffe's test indicated that there were significant differences between the public's direct perspective, the public's meta-perspective, and the organization's direct perspective in regard to control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The organization's meta-perspective was significantly different from the public's direct perspective for all four relationship dimensions, and was only significantly different from the organization's direct perspective regarding trust. Table 1 clarifies the significant differences between the four perspectives.

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the overall relationship rating within the four different perspectives. A significant difference was found among the perspectives ( $F(3,1280)=62.88, p < .01$ ). Scheffe's test was used for post hoc analysis to identify differences between the individual group perspectives. The public's direct perspective ( $M=3.96, SD=1.28$ ), the public's meta-perspective ( $M=4.83, SD=1.36$ ), and the organization's direct perspective ( $M=5.57, SD=.658$ ) were all significantly different from each other. The organization's meta-perspective of the overall relationship ( $M=4.96, SD=.990$ ) was only significantly different from the public's direct perspective of the overall relationship. Figure 2 presents a model of the OPR that visualizes the interplay between these different perspectives and indicates the pattern of significant differences between each perspective's ratings of the relationship measures.

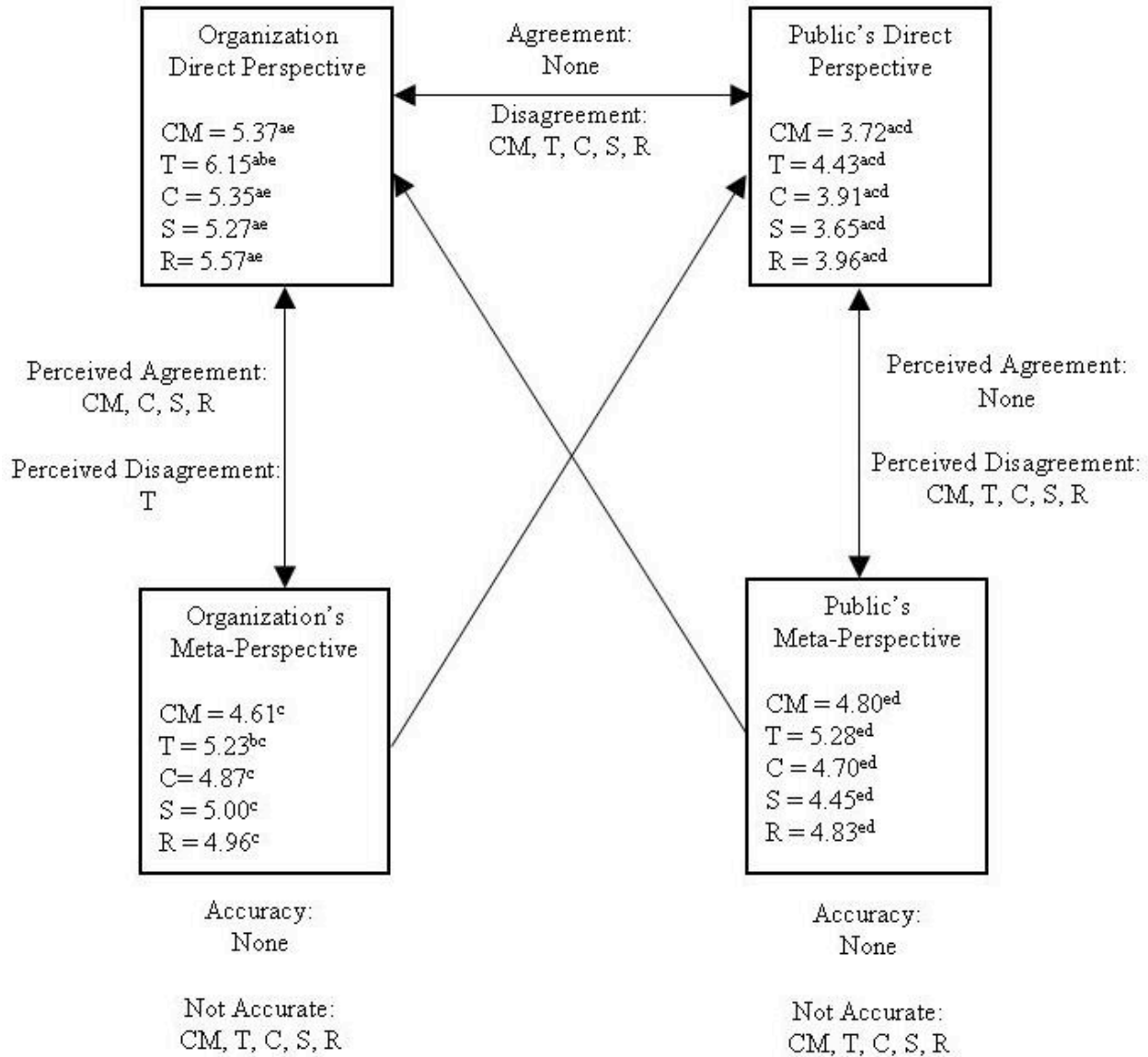


Figure 2. Coorientation model of main study organization-public relationship.  
 Note: Values with the same superscripts indicate means that there are significantly different on a given relationship measure ( $p < .05$ ). In the model, CM = control mutuality, T = trust, C = commitment, S = satisfaction, and R = overall relationship.

To address RQ3 regarding the effect of time on the coorientational variables, a series of linear regression equations were calculated using a dichotomously coded dummy variable to control for party identification (UPD, student), time as the independent variable (years in the relationship), and the following dependent variables: direct perspective of the overall relationship, meta-perspective of the overall relationship, agreement, accuracy, and congruency. None of the linear regression equations investigating the impact of time on the perceptions of the relationship and the coorientational measures were significant.

## **Discussion**

### *Implications for the OPR Measurement*

The first research question asked if the coorientational framework could be used in conjunction with existing measurement scales to assess an OPR. This was accomplished by integrating the Hon-Grunig (1999) measures into the coorientational approach advocated by Broom (1977), Broom & Dozier (1990), and others (Hon & Grunig, 1999; Seltzer, 2006). Despite the relationship scales being used with both an organization and a public to measure direct perspectives as well as being used to assess meta-perspectives, they maintained good reliability as measures of how both parties perceived the relationship. Even though the coorientation framework was originally suggested to measure shared attitudes about an issue, it seems to provide a good framework for examining how parties perceive their relationship as well. From a methodological perspective, the scales were straightforward to administer and even though inclusion of the ratings of the meta-perspective doubled the length of the survey instrument, most respondents managed to complete the assessments of both direct perspective and meta-perspective. The added complexity of requiring two samples may be challenging in practical applications, but can be achieved if the organization is supportive.

The use of the coorientational approach also facilitates measurement of the meta-perspectives that are necessary to understand the true state of the relationship that exists between an organization and a stakeholder public. In our study, measuring both the direct perspective of the students and the direct perspective of the university police department, as well as their meta-perspectives of each other, not only made it possible to generate individual measures of agreement, accuracy, and congruency, but it also made it possible to address the second research question regarding identification of the OPR's coorientational state.

Using coorientational measurement appears to be an improvement over the one-way measures of the public's direct perspective that are typically used because it reveals what the shared perspective of the relationship is between the organization and the public. In the present study, the OPR that exists between the students and the university police is more accurately portrayed by using the coorientational approach than by simply relying on the one-way approach that measures the public's perspective. In this case, the public's direct perspective of the relationship was slightly negative with the exception of trust, which the public rated slightly favorable. From the organization's direct perspective, the relationship is viewed somewhat positively, especially in regard to trust. Based on the results, a true state of disagreement exists between the direct perspective of the university police department and the direct perspective of students, with the university police department viewing the relationship more positively than students.

Where coorientational measurement truly reveals its utility in diagnosing the OPR is in the next stage of analysis where the meta-perspectives of both parties are examined. In this case, the meta-perspective of the students was significantly different

from the students' own direct perspective, with the students reporting the university police department would rate the relationship better than students, which was indeed the case. Therefore, there was a perceived disagreement between the students' direct perspective and the students' meta-perspective. Coupled with the direct perspective measures, it becomes clear that students are aware that the two groups disagree. The university police perceive the relationship as being more positive than students – and the students realize this. In fact, the disagreement is greater than students reported. Looking at the accuracy dimension, the student meta-perspective is significantly different from the organization's direct perspective; students know that the university police rate the relationship more positively than students; they just don't understand *how much more* positively the university police department rates the relationship. To put it another way, there is a gap, and the students correctly see the gap, they just underestimate the size of the gap. Taken altogether, from the students' viewpoint, a state of true disagreement exists between them and the police.

Another coorientation-based finding is the disconnect between the public's view and the organization's view of the relationship. The meta-perspective of the university police department is not significantly different from their own direct perspective of the relationship. In other words, the university police department perceived agreement between themselves and the students in how they all view the relationship. This is also reflected in the significant difference between the organization's meta-perspective and the students' direct perspective; the university police department overestimates how favorably students will view the relationship. So, from the university police department viewpoint, students and police both view the relationship favorably; however, there is actually disagreement between them regarding the state of the relationship. From the organization's viewpoint, a state of false consensus exists.

The students rate the relationship more negatively than the organization, and the students report that the UPD would rate the relationship more positively, but the UPD does not realize this. The university police department rated the relationship with its on-campus public as healthy and indicated that students would rate it similarly; meanwhile, students are well aware of the difference of opinion. Therein lies the benefit of the coorientational approach – the relationship is not defined by one party's view, but rather rests on the shared perceptions of both parties in the relationship.

The findings have several implications relevant to the ongoing efforts to develop adequate measures of OPRs. First and foremost, our study serves as another example of the reliability of the Hon-Grunig (1999) relationship measures. However, the present study extends the application of the relationship scale by utilizing these measures to assess not only the public's direct perspective, but also by using them to measure the organization's direct perspective as well as the organization and public meta-perspectives. As has been noted previously, measurement of the OPR by using the coorientational framework to assess both the organization's and the public's direct and meta-perspectives provides for a more comprehensive OPR construct. By considering all four perspectives within the OPR, researchers attempting to use relationships as a unit of analysis will be seeing more of the whole picture of the relationship, rather than

the one-sided view that is provided by only measuring the direct perspective of the public.

In this study, limiting measurement to the students that make up the organization's primary stakeholders would not adequately describe the true state of this organization-public relationship. If strong relationships are built on mutual understanding and agreement, then the use of the coorientational approach provides more valid measurements of OPRs - valid measures that are necessary for the continued development of the relational perspective.

### *Implications for Relationship Management Theory*

This study contributes to public relations theory development primarily by including the coorientational measures that should be used to measure the organization-public relationship to further refine the OPR construct. The continued development of valid, reliable, and descriptive relationship measures is crucial to the advancement of the relational perspective and relationship management theory. If the relationship is going to be the unit of analysis for public relations research and if the relational perspective is to be proffered as a dominant paradigm for the discipline, then every effort needs to be made to ensure that the measurement of that unit is adequate. Therefore, there is a need to measure the whole relationship that results from the shared perspectives of all the parties involved and not just use one side of that equation to represent the entire construct. The relational perspective and relationship management theory should be developed around a comprehensive unit of analysis, and using a coorientational approach to measuring OPRs is a step in that direction.

Another finding that has implications for the relational perspective is that the length of time that respondents had been in the OPR had little effect on their perceptions of the relationship or the coorientational variables. There seems to be an assumption in the relationship management literature that longer time in the relationship will lead to favorable outcomes, such as a greater degree of understanding, agreement, and congruency. However, the present findings indicate that time in the relationship did not seem to have an appreciable effect on views of the OPR. In certain situations, more time in the relationship may indeed lead to increasingly negative perceptions of the relationship if it provides more opportunities to have a negative experience.

In the student-university police relationship, it may be that the longer a student is at the university, the more opportunities there are to form negative perceptions of the university police via direct experience, news coverage, word-of-mouth, etc. Members of the UPD may also view the relationship in an increasingly negative light over time if they become jaded with their job or toward students. Additionally, in a relationship such as the one that might exist between students and university police where the organization is unaware that the public has a negative perception of the relationship, if the public sees that this is the case and that things do not change over time, this view may lead to feelings of resentment by the public that it is not only being misunderstood by the organization, but that the organization has continually ignored the situation.

### *Implications for Public Relations Practice*

One of the main implications of our study for practitioners is that it provides a measurement tool to supplement existing measures of public relations effectiveness such as measuring outputs (e.g., number of press releases distributed) and outcomes (e.g., attitude change). While these measures are indicators of what a particular public relations program produces and what those outputs achieve in the short term, the coorientational relationship measures can help practitioners identify whether the *cumulative* effect of program efforts are achieving long-term public relations goals (e.g., building mutually beneficial relationships) and organizational goals (e.g., creating a favorable operating environment for the organization).

Broom (1977) proposed that the alignment and adjustment of perspectives by both the public and the organization to foster agreement and understanding may be a more appropriate goal for some public relations programs, particularly when a lack of understanding exists between the organization and the public. Standard measures of public relations effectiveness do not assess these types of interactions; however, the coorientational approach does and can suggest strategies for improving the relationship by using strategic communication to target both the public and the organization to increase agreement and understanding.

### *Limitations & Future Research*

While using an online survey did provide many advantages, such as affordability and speed, it may have contributed to a low response rate. The response rate for the student sample was fairly low; it may be that students use e-mail so much in the course of conducting their academic and social relationships that they simply do not have the time or patience to respond. Plus, the prevalence of spam and phishing may lead many recipients to delete unsolicited e-mail.

An additional limitation in our study was that it examined only one specific organization-public relationship. Since the university police department enjoys a large measure of authority and power in comparison to students living on campus and that the median age of the student respondents was below the legal drinking age, it is not surprising that there was the possibility for a contentious relationship between these two groups. However, it should not be assumed that a negative relationship is the only possible relationship in this case. Many opportunities exist for campus police and students to build positive relationships. For example, police can build positive relationships by helping students in need or by working in collaborative efforts with student groups, such as implementing a campus safety program. Still, other types of relationships featuring different organizations and publics may not exhibit the same patterns of perceptual interaction as seen here. Future studies should extend OPR research by simultaneously considering multiple organization-public relationships.

Additional research can also focus on using coorientational measures of the OPR to understand how perceptions of the relationship affect the outcomes of relationship state. For example, Ki and Hon's (2007) study investigating the influence of perceptions

of the relationship measures on resulting attitudes and behavioral intentions could be extended by including the coorientational measures as independent variables.

Another consideration for future research is to conduct more longitudinal studies and to consider the ordering of relationship outcomes. A few studies have begun investigating time's impact on relationship perception (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Ledingham, Bruning, & Wilson, 1999). This avenue of research needs to be continued by including coorientation dimensions. Additionally, the order in which perceptions of the relational dimensions form should be extended. While some studies have begun to investigate the intra-relationship of these dimensions through assessments of public direct perspectives (e.g., Jo, 2003; Ki & Hon, 2007), this line of inquiry needs to incorporate the coorientational approach by examining both organization and public direct and meta-perspectives.

## **Conclusion**

Our study began with the proposition that the current conceptualization of *relationships* and *organization-public relationships* found in the field of public relations as well as the methods for measuring and evaluating these constructs needed refinement. The lack of an adequate definition of organization-public relationships and the limitations inherent in the methods currently used to measure those relationships restricts relationship theory development. However, measurement of organization-public relationships has continued to focus on assessments of the public's direct perspective only. Public relations and interpersonal communication theories suggest that the perceptions of both parties in the organization-public relationship are critical to understanding the nature of the relationship between them. Our study represents an effort to advance theoretical and methodological development in this area of relationship measurement.

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## APPENDIX A

### RELATIONSHIP MEASURES

#### **Control Mutuality:**

1. The organization and public are attentive to what each other say.
2. The organization believes the opinions of the public are legitimate.
3. In dealing with the public, the organization has a tendency to throw its weight around (*reversed*).
4. The organization really listens to what the public has to say.
5. The organization gives the public enough say in the decision-making process.

#### **Trust:**

6. The organization treats the public fairly and justly.
7. Whenever the organization makes important decisions, I know it will be concerned about the public.
8. The organization can be relied on to keeps its promises.
9. I believe that the organization takes the opinions of the public into account when making decisions.
10. I feel very confident about the organization's capabilities.
11. The organization has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.

#### **Commitment:**

12. I feel that the organization is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to the public.
13. I can see that the organization wants to maintain a relationship with the public.
14. There is a long-lasting bond between the organization and the public.
15. Compared to other organizations, the public values its relationship with the organization more.
16. The public would rather work with the organization than not.

#### **Satisfaction:**

17. The public is happy with the organization.
18. Both the organization and the public benefit from the relationship.
19. Most members of the public are happy in their interactions with the organization.
20. Generally speaking, the public is pleased with the relationship the organization has established with the public.
21. Most members of the public enjoy dealing with the organization.