From Messaging to Behavioral Strategy: Constructing a Model of Relationship- and Action-Focused Crisis Communication Principles

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Existing crisis communication theories are useful in guiding organizations to choose crisis responses that help buffer them from a crisis by shaping how publics interpret the crisis. However, in crises, publics who suffer from negative consequences expect organizations to focus on problem-solving behaviors and eventual restoration of relationships. As a reflective theorizing of the perspectives of publics, this study introduces six relationship- and action-focused principles—relationship, accountability, promptness, inclusivity, disclosure, and symmetry (RAPIDS)—that emphasize how organizations should redress the need for problem solving and bridge with publics to build and maintain organization–public relationships before, during, and after a crisis. A survey ($N = 436$) was conducted in the United States to test the construct reliability and validity of RAPIDS for three crises. The findings show conceptual and operational adequacy with an overarching latent construct (a second-order factor structure) encompassing all six principles. Furthermore, the construct is positively associated with forgiveness.

Keywords: crisis communication, crisis management, problem solving, organization–public relationships, strategic-behavioral paradigm

Crisis communication has been extensively researched over the past three decades, covering various crisis situations (An & Cheng, 2012; Manias-Muñoz, Jin, & Reber, 2019). Despite this, crisis communication research has been largely dominated by the replication of impression management theories and has come up short in the development of new theoretical variables and models (Manias-Muñoz et al., 2019). According to Coombs and Holladay (2015), public relations research has put a strong emphasis on

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the concept of relationships, but crisis communication is one of the few specialties whose research has not focused on this concept.

To date, most research on crisis communication has focused on crisis responses using the image repair theory (Benoit, 1997) and the situational crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2016). These theories explain how organizations should use messaging strategically to respond to crisis situations and meet their strategic goals (Page, 2019). In doing so, such theories naturally focus on the concept of image and develop guidelines for choosing symbolic strategies and tactical communication, such as timing and conditional accountability. Although these theories, which are inclined toward adopting a symbolic-interpretive perspective to use communication to manage, shape, or change how publics interpret a crisis, have merit in guiding organizational responses in accordance with the circumstances of crisis situations (Grunig, 2009), such a symbolic-control perspective only seeks to affect how publics interpret a crisis to minimize reputational damage (Cheng & Shen, 2020). Moreover, communication professionals found these crisis communication theories to be either too abstract or overly contingent for responsive communication. When under pressure to make quick but valid judgments, crisis managers prefer simpler guidelines that cover extensive varieties of situations (Claeys & Opgenhaffen, 2016). However, crisis communication textbooks deliver few generic principles for field managers to make effective and agile judgments. The proposed principles for best practices have been conceptual (Grunig, 2011) and explored only from the perspectives of practitioners (e.g., Seeger, 2006).

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this study is to extend crisis communication research by introducing a model of principles that emphasizes organization–public relationships (hereafter, OPRs) and problem-solving behaviors in crisis situations in which an organization seeks to achieve shared goals with its strategic publics. The model consists of six relationship- and action-focused principles: relationship, accountability, promptness, inclusivity, disclosure, and symmetry (RAPIDS). Using three crises as case examples, this study will empirically examine the reliability and validity of the model and the effect of the model on forgiveness.

Strategic-Behavioral Perspective in Crisis Communication

Crisis communication theories, such as the image repair theory and the situational crisis communication theory, have been critical in guiding appropriate crisis responses across different organizational contexts and crisis situations (Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010; Claeys & Cauberghe, 2014; Crijns, Claeys, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). According to Sellnow and Seeger (2020), crisis communication theories "problematize the messages and meaning construction process in all forms of human interaction and coordination that surround these threatening and high uncertainty events" (p. 3). In particular, crisis communication theorists have emphasized "the symbolic nature of the process" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2020, p. 13), seeking to construct meanings that are shared by involved organizations and their publics. This reflects the symbolic-interpretive perspective, which emphasizes messaging, or the provision of information that affects an organization's *image* (i.e., pro-organization strategies; Grunig, 1993), but not *substance*, which is made up of experiences (i.e., pro-publics strategies; Grunig, 1993). The symbolic-interpretive perspective is limited in its focus on "reputation and blame avoidance strategies" (Olsson, 2014, p. 113) and neglects the relational aspect of public relations, whereby an organization should see its publics'

interests to be as important as its own. In fact, a meta-analysis of the situational crisis communication theory found that while attributed responsibility had a strong and negative association with organizational reputation, crisis response strategies had a positive, but weak, association with organizational reputation (Ma & Zhan, 2016). This indicated that publics expect organizations in crises to do more than simply use crisis response strategies to clarify attributed responsibility (Ma & Zhan, 2016).

Liu and Fraustino (2014) suggested that crisis communication moved beyond its focus on image management, and Coombs (2016) recommended that crisis research should be less preoccupied with image repair and pay more attention to outcomes. At present, crisis communication research that examines the relational aspect of public relations has mostly explored the effects of OPRs on perceptions of crises and vice versa (e.g., Bakker, van Bommel, Kerstholt, & Giebels, 2018; Diers-Lawson, Symons, & Zeng, 2021; van der Meer, Verhoeven, Beenties, & Vliegenthart, 2017). The relational aspect is especially prevalent when publics undergo their own appraisal process, which could be different from an organization's process, in coping with the crisis (Jin & Hong, 2010). It is critical to build mutual understanding by aligning organizational strategy with publics' coping mechanisms in crises.

Different from the symbolic-interpretive activities "that organizations use to exert their power over publics and to disguise the consequences of their behaviors from publics, governments, and the media" (Grunig, 2011, p. 11), the strategic-behavioral perspective advocates for a relational approach whereby public relations interventions are applied to negotiate the behaviors of both the organization and its publics rather than those of either the organizations or publics alone (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2002; Kim, Hung-Baesecke, Yang, & Grunig, 2013). Many organizational crises lead to negative perceptions of and behaviors toward organizations. Because of the negative consequences they experience, publics engage in communicative behaviors (e.g., searching for more information and sharing the information with others; Kim & Grunig, 2011). Regardless of the causes of crises that affect attribution of crisis responsibility, a strategic-behavioral perspective in crisis communication advocates for the participation of publics and the alignment of publics' expectations with organizational actions (Grunig, 2018). This, in turn, contributes to organizational effectiveness by reflecting the needs of both the organization and its publics. The symbolic-interpretive perspective contributes to an organization's symbolic assets (i.e., image), and the strategic-behavioral perspective contributes to an organization's experiential assets (i.e., relationships and reputations; Grunig, 1993). The strategic-behavioral perspective embraces the symbolic-interpretive perspective inherently—communication management becomes more valuable to both the organization and its publics when communicators conceive of and use communication as a tool for listening, messaging, and constructing strategic behavior among convoluted interests and stakeholders.

According to the strategic-behavioral perspective, public relations practices could and should help management make strategic choices that legitimize chosen decisions and actions in relation to strategic constituencies (i.e., publics; Grunig, 2018; Grunig et al., 2002). Communication is intended to construct intelligence and possible courses of action among related actors or parties. Hence, public relations practitioners communicate with publics to collect their ideas, expectations, and interests regarding impending decisions. Likewise, they also communicate with decision makers to better understand their decision environment and possible consequences for publics. In the process of communicative interactions, public relations become a bridge for reconciling different actors and divergent interests. In such predecisional

and processional communicative efforts, public relations strive to make strategic behaviors acceptable to involved parties and develop relationships among them. Given that the prime value of public relations in the strategic-behavioral perspective is in building and cultivating OPRs through the mentioned process (Grunig & Huang, 2000), crisis communication should seek not only to *influence* publics, but also to "reconcile the organization's goals with the expectations of its strategic constituencies" (Grunig & Huang, 2000, p. 24).

Development of New Crisis Principles

From a strategic-behavioral perspective, this study conceptualizes a theoretical model for crisis management as part of an organization's pursuit of shared goals with its publics before, during, and after a crisis. Effective crisis management is achieved when communication programs are implemented to meet the goals shared by an organization and its publics. The principles proposed can be used across the different stages of a crisis (precrisis, ongoing crisis, and postcrisis), with roots in the generic principles derived from the Excellence Study (Grunig, Grunig, & Vercic, 1998). These new principles emphasize a need for the holistic conception of crises and for putting crises into a historic context of organizational performance and relationships with involved actors. Crisis management is more ethical and effective when management adopts a chronological view of crises, acknowledging that the organization's present crisis started a while ago, and when the goal of crisis managers is not speaking well, but behaving well (Grunig, 2018). This way, what is of most concern to crisis managers is not image restoration, but trust or relationship restoration. Organizations and related actors, such as publics, media, and the government, will know clearly whether a crisis is managed well by evaluating whether the affected or inflicted publics still trust the organization and whether those affected return to normalcy and reinstate their trust in, satisfaction with, and commitment to the organization when the crisis is over. As such, six principles are derived: relationship, accountability, promptness, inclusivity, disclosure, and symmetry. The principles of relationship, accountability, disclosure, and symmetry were previously proposed in a conceptual paper (Grunig, 2011). Two new principles, promptness and inclusivity, are introduced. Together, these dimensions seek to fill the voids of theoretical principles and to propose a detailed application model to meet the managerial philosophy of the strategic-behavioral paradigm. Thus, this study proposes testing the validity and reliability of the RAPIDS model.

The Relationship Principle

Cultivating a good relationship between an organization and its publics is essential to crisis management in the precrisis stage. OPRs and crisis responses both affect the attribution of responsibility in a crisis, but positive relationships are more influential than crisis response strategies (Brown & White, 2010). While organizations cannot adjust their crisis response strategies based on the dynamics of relationships, the relationship principle should be applied before a crisis occurs (Grunig, 2011). The situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) also posits prior relationship reputation as reputational capital that is founded on the quality of relationships that an organization has formed with its publics before the crisis (Coombs, 2007). Thus, the RAPIDS model defines the relationship principle as the extent to which an organization has positive relationships before the crisis and examines the four dimensions of relationship quality (Hon & Grunig, 1999). First, control mutuality is examined as the degree to which the parties in a relationship are satisfied with the amount of control they have over the relationship. Second, satisfaction is examined as the extent to which both parties feel favorably about each other. Third, trust is examined as the level of confidence that each party has

in the other and each party's willingness to open itself to the other. Finally, commitment is examined as the extent to which both parties believe and feel that the relationship is worth maintaining.

The Accountability Principle

Although SCCT proposes that an organization should accept responsibility for the crisis only when it is confirmed as the primary actor causing the crisis (Coombs, 2007), attribution of responsibility is a dynamic concept that may not be tied to specific crisis types, but to the feelings of offensiveness felt by publics (Page, 2019). Even though apology is not recommended for crisis situations for which organizations are not held accountable, from a strategic-behavioral perspective that seeks publics' inputs in crisis communication, Grunig (2011) recommends that organizations should adopt an accountability principle by accepting some levels of responsibility even if the crisis is not their fault. As long as there are publics who experience negative consequences from the problematic situations and suffer the incurred costs of (un)intended consequences, organizations should make efforts and take actions to prevent additional losses and preserve the interests of those affected. This comes out of the strategic thinking that, regardless of the origins of the crises, an organization should build and maintain relationships with publics by helping them recover from them. Lim (2020) found that, regardless of crisis responsibility, organizations in South Korea were likely to apologize for creating disturbances and offer corrective actions even when they were themselves victims of the crises. Im and colleagues (2021) also found that an apology, combined with an accommodative strategy, such as compensation, was effective during crises, because publics were likely to complain and express dissatisfaction when impacted by a crisis. An apology signals an organization's willingness to listen, thereby fulfilling publics' needs to be heard during crises (Im, Youk, & Park, 2021). Accepting responsibility to help publics recover from a crisis is not equivalent to accepting legal responsibility for causing the crisis, which could be used against the organization in a lawsuit. The accountability principle strives to help organizations turn challenges into opportunities through proactive, preventive, and preservative efforts in taking responsible actions. Johnson and Johnson, for example, accepted some responsibility for the poison placed in Tylenol capsules even though someone else actually put it there. The RAPIDS model defines the accountability principle as the extent to which an organization accepts some level of responsibility for a crisis, regardless of its causes. Two dimensions are suggested: moral (voluntary) responsibility and legal (involuntary) responsibility. Legal responsibility refers to required responsibilities, such as abiding by the law, and moral responsibility refers to responsibilities expected or desired of organizations, such as complying with ethical and social norms (Carroll, 2016).

The Disclosure Principle

From a relational perspective, an organization must disclose what it knows about a crisis. In crises, publics pay attention to increased news coverage, through which their problem and involvement recognitions increase (Aldoory & Grunig, 2012). Because crises are characterized by uncertainty, informational uncertainty after a crisis outbreak may increase publics' susceptibility to rumors (Nekmat & Kong, 2019) and conspiracy theories (Marchlewska, Cichocka, & Kossowska, 2018). To cope with crisis-stimulated stress, publics engage in cognitive coping by obtaining information to gain an understanding of the crisis situation (Jin & Hong, 2010). Thus, Grunig (2011) proposes the disclosure principle to ensure organizational transparency. The disclosure principle's emphasis is on helping affected publics preserve their interests and

restore impaired interests from negative outcomes. This will increase trust, curtail employee dissatisfaction, and diminish reputational risk or damage (Rawlins, 2008). Liu and colleagues (2021) noted the importance of balancing the need for accuracy and transparency with the provision of prompt crisis responses. It is important not only to disclose information, but also to educate publics on how to interpret the information (Liu et al., 2021). The crisis information that publics are initially exposed to could trigger or prohibit further crisis information seeking and sharing (Lu & Jin, 2020). Releasing crisis information that is clear, consistent, and accurate is a critical indicator of ethical communication during crises (Jin, Pang, & Smith, 2018). Thus, the RAPIDS model defines the disclosure principle as the extent to which an organization discloses what it knows about the crisis. If it does not know what happened, then it must promise full disclosure once it has additional information. Such information will enhance publics' conative coping, which focuses on taking action to cope with a situation (Jin & Hong, 2010). Information will help publics psychologically adjust to crisis situations and materially react to cope with the crisis.

The Symmetry Principle

The concept of symmetrical communication has long been dismissed as being idealistic because of its lack of consideration for power differences (e.g., Roper, 2005). Indeed, the symmetry principle is tied to organizational intent to initiate changes in the organization rather than imposing changes on publics (Huang, 2004). González-Herrero and Pratt (1996) proposed a symmetrical model in crisis communication based on the situational theory of publics that prioritizes two-way symmetrical communication with affected publics in a crisis (Grunig, 2005). Organizations should display interest in dialogue and reciprocity during crises (Grunig et al., 2002). When a crisis occurs, an organization must consider publics' interests to be as important as its own and thus engage in dialogue with them, especially with active or affected publics. As J. E. Grunig (1989) notes, the concept of symmetry is built on the assumption that "conflict should be resolved through negotiation, communication, and compromise" (p. 39). In this respect, Liu and colleagues (2021) found, from all 55 higher education leaders interviewed regarding crisis management during the COVID-19 global pandemic, the importance of engaging in deliberative dialogue with stakeholders while also listening and expressing compassion. Although engaging with active publics could be difficult during crises for which organizations are held accountable, long-term symmetrical communication programs could still be developed to reduce damage caused by the crises (González-Herrero & Pratt, 1996). The RAPIDS model defines the symmetry principle as the extent to which an organization considers the interests of publics to be as important as its own. It emphasizes that public relations should be practiced to reduce conflict and work through a process to identify areas of disagreement and to work toward common interests (Murphy, 1991).

The Promptness Principle

During crises, publics experience varied emotions, such as anxiety, as part of their coping strategies; this is especially problematic as organizations focus on crisis management and pay little attention to publics (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2012). Moreover, organizations might be slow in assuming responsibility, admitting fault, or correcting mistakes (Jin et al., 2012). Previous research has emphasized the importance of promptness in an organizational crisis (Huang, 2008; Sillince, 2002; Wei, Zhao, Yang, Du, & Marinova, 2010). Communicating timely information to publics is a core function of crisis communication (Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). The RAPIDS model defines the promptness principle as the extent to which an organization engages in timely communication

about the crisis; this has been considered a general rule in crisis communication practice (e.g., tell it all, tell it early). Timely communication with compensatory and preventive actions is more powerful and more ethical than crisis communication strategies that involve delaying communicative actions (Coombs, 2016; Huang, 2008). It is related to the strategy of stealing thunder, whereby organizations can be the first source to disclose crisis information and immediately prevent publics from experiencing possible harm from the crisis situation (Claeys & Coombs, 2020). Although it is not always effective to use the strategy of stealing thunder because of possible legal liability and backfire effects (Claeys, 2017), it can reduce crisis responsibility (Lee, 2004), increase publics' perceptions of organizational credibility (Arpan & Pompper, 2003), and serve as an ethical and proactive strategy for preventing and minimizing crisis impacts by placing stakeholders' interests above organizational interests (Lee, 2020).

The Inclusivity Principle

Organizations need to communicate with publics, such as victims and potential victims, without delay. According to Kim and Jin (2016), publics have empathy for victims who suffer losses from crises. Partnership with publics as legitimate and equal partners is an important practice during a crisis to improve the effectiveness of crisis communication (Seeger, 2006). According to van der Meer and colleagues (2017), "close-working relations with the stakeholders would help to deescalate the crisis" (p. 435) because mutual understanding between organizations and their publics is essential for resolving a crisis. Despite this, van der Meer and colleagues (2017) also noted that there could be resource constraints in maintaining such relationships. Thus, the RAPIDS model defines the inclusivity principle as the extent to which an organization involves victims in resolving crises together. The inclusivity principle reflects a strategy to identify, reach out to, and reassure all (potentially) affected parties among the strategic constituencies. The organization attempts to address all possible losses of interest among those affected, regardless of the extent of loss. Key publics' active participation in the process of problem solving gives them assurances that they may voice their concerns without being excluded or marginalized. Forgiveness plays a pivotal role in reducing conflicts and restoring interpersonal relationships (Beatty, 1970). The restoration of relationships with publics (i.e., victims and close family members) affected by the crisis, as well as with other publics who are influential for the organization's reputation and operation in the long term, should be the ultimate goal of crisis management and communication. It demands active crisis management beyond apologia and image restoration strategies.

Testing Forgiveness as an Outcome Variable

To further explore the effects of the RAPIDS model, this study proposes that the model is positively associated with forgiveness in organizational crises. Prior research has found that forgiveness can offset the negative consequences (Yuan, Lin, Filieri, Liu, & Zheng, 2020). Because crises often result in negative consequences for publics, publics may also experience cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes regarding the organization. As such, Moon and Rhee (2012) proposed forgiveness as a measure of the extent to which publics forgive the offender in a crisis situation. As a dependent variable, they define forgiveness as the efforts made by publics "to reduce negative thinking, overcome unpleasant emotion, and restore their damaged relationship with an organization due to a crisis that affected both the organization and the public" (Moon & Rhee, 2012, p. 680). Forgiveness has three dimensions: The cognitive dimension

examines individuals' abandonment of negative attitudes toward the offender; the affective dimension measures individuals' withdrawal of hatred toward the offender; and the behavioral dimension indicates individuals' willingness to improve their relationship with the offender.

Method

Data Collection and Participants

Upon obtaining approval from the university's institutional review board, an online survey was created on Qualtrics and launched on Amazon Mechanical Turk (M-Turk) in September 2019. M-Turk allows researchers to obtain relatively focused and externally valid samples of large, diverse pool of respondents who are more representative of a population than many other forms of recruitment, such as student or convenience samples (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012). The survey items were written in relation to three crises: Apple's battery crisis, Volkswagen's emissions crisis, and Wells Fargo's account fraud crisis. These three crises, all involving corporate fraud, were selected because they represented a typical case of crises in which publics suffer from negative consequences caused by organizations (e.g., Seawright & Gerring, 2008).

Before deciding whether to complete the survey, respondents were informed on the participant information sheet that they would be asked to respond to questions about their perceptions of and attitudes about the three crises. Respondents had to pass an attention check before they were qualified to respond to the rest of the survey. All respondents were asked if they had experience purchasing or using products and services from Apple, Volkswagen, and Wells Fargo on a nominal scale (Yes/No). Additionally, respondents were asked how often they used products or services from the three organizations on a 5-point Likert scale. Before responding to the survey items about each crisis, respondents were also provided with a brief description of each crisis.

A total of 511 responses were received, but only 436 usable responses were retained for analysis. The average completion time was 21.6 minutes. The final sample size (N = 436) was adequate for model testing to yield a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (Stacks, 2016). Of the 436 respondents, male respondents made up 61% (n = 266) of the sample, and female respondents made up 39% (n = 170). Respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 74 years, with an average age of 30. In terms of ethnicity, 51.1% (n = 223) were White, 7.3% (n = 32) were African American, 38.8% were Asian American (n = 169), and 2.8% (n = 12) were of other ethnicities. Regarding education, 7.1% of respondents (n = 31) completed high school education or less, 23.9% of respondents (n = 104) had a two-year associate degree, 53.4% (n = 233) had a bachelor's degree, and 15.6% (n = 68) had a postgraduate degree. For income, 24.8% (n = 108) of respondents earned $20,000 or less, 24.1% ($n$ = 105) earned $20,000–$39,999, 22.9% (n = 100) earned $40,000–$59,999, 11.7% (n = 51) earned $60,000–$79,999, and 16.5% (n = 72) earned $80,000 or more.

Measurement

All measurement items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). The items for the relationship principle and the symmetry principle were

adopted from Hon and Grunig (1999). The measurement items for the accountability, promptness, inclusivity, and disclosure principles were newly proposed based on the definitions developed in this study. Finally, the three items for forgiveness were adapted from Moon and Rhee (2012). They reflected three dimensions of forgiveness: cognitive forgiveness, affective forgiveness, and behavioral forgiveness. The items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliabilities (α), Means, Standard Deviations, and Estimates of Survey Items (Apple/Volkswagen /Wells Fargo).

Measurement items	M	SD	Estimates
Relationship (trust) α = .90/.90/.93			
1. This company treats people like me fairly and justly.	5.11/4.85/4.67	1.51/1.38/1.62	92/.90/.94
2. This company can be relied on to keep its promises.	5.20/4.77/4.63	1.41/1.41/1.70	
3. I believe that this company takes the opinions of people like me into account when making decisions.	4.94/4.62/4.49	1.63/1.50/1.69	
4. This company has the ability to accomplish what it says it will do.	5.65/5.24/4.98	1.35/1.34/1.54	
5. I feel very confident about this company's skills and the quality of its work.	5.51/5.01/4.72	1.43/1.47/1.65	
6. Whenever this company makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about people like me.	4.97/4.62/4.49	1.58/1.55/1.79	
Relationship (control mutuality) α = .93/.92/.94			
1. This company and people like me are attentive to what the other says.	5.01/4.75/4.45	1.50/1.45/1.66	.95/.93/.94
2. This company believes that the opinions of people like me are legitimate.	5.10/4.88/4.64	1.53/1.47/1.65	
3. This company really listens to what people like me have to say.	5.06/4.74/4.45	1.60/1.47/1.68	
4. The management of this company gives people like me enough say in the decision-making process.	4.63/4.47/4.32	1.71/1.55/1.73	
Relationship (commitment) α = .90/.87/.90			
1. I feel that this company is trying to maintain a long-term commitment to people like me.	5.32/4.91/4.75	1.59/1.52/1.68	.91/.93/.92
2. I can see that this company wants to maintain a relationship with people like me.	5.34/4.99/4.77	1.51/1.50/1.65	
3. There is a long-lasting bond between this company and me.	4.90/4.35/4.24	1.84/1.75/1.92	

4. Compared with other organizations, I value my relationship with this company.	4.93/4.31/4.27	1.76/1.64/1.84	
Relationship (satisfaction) α = .92/.91/.94			
1. Overall, I am happy with this company.	5.29/4.75/4.53	1.59/1.44/1.81	.90/.91/.92
2. This company and I benefit from the relationship.	5.13/4.57/4.51	1.58/1.54/1.74	
3. Most people like me are happy in their interactions with this organization.	5.34/4.90/4.57	1.40/1.37/1.66	
4. Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship this company has established with people like me.	5.20/4.70/4.49	1.52/1.44/1.74	
Accountability α = .84/.86/.88			
1. I believe that this company took moral responsibility for the crisis.	4.62/4.46/4.16	1.76/1.70/1.90	.78/.81/.85
2. I believe that this company took legal responsibility for the crisis.	4.79/4.71/4.41	1.70/1.62/1.80	.78/.77/.81
3. This company admits frankly that it could not control the problem.[a]	3.86/3.89/3.86	1.88/1.72/1.82	.63/.62/.71
4. This company does not attempt to scale down the problem during the issue.[b]	4.49/4.32/4.30	1.75/1.66/1.73	–
5. This company acknowledges fully that it is responsible for the situation.	4.93/4.60/4.41	1.56/1.59/1.67	.65/.79/.79
6. This company accepts its responsibility as it is for the problem and costs incurred to customers.	4.70/4.51/4.39	1.65/1.58/1.74	.79/.81/.83
7. I feel that this company did not excuse itself even for things it is not responsible for.[b]	4.50/4.47/4.41	1.62/1.58/1.67	–
8. This company does (did) not plead its case.[b]	4.22/4.27/4.40	1.57/1.47/1.61	–
Promptness α = .95/.95/.96			
1. This company acted fast to deal with this crisis.[a]	4.68/4.42/4.26	1.68/1.62/1.73	.79/.82/.85
2. This company's CEO rapidly expressed its responsibility for the problem and victims.[a]	4.72/4.49/4.37	1.61/1.58/1.74	.79/.85/.84
3. This company rapidly suggested clear solutions to solve this crisis.	4.63/4.42/4.32	1.73/1.64/1.76	.87/.82/.90
4. This company acted on immediately to the problem.	4.50/4.34/4.24	1.70/1.63/1.81	.89/.86/.90
5. This company did not waver in taking action as early as possible.[a]	4.37/4.18/4.18	1.68/1.66/1.79	.71/.73/.79

6.	The company acted resolutely to identify the victims from the beginning.	4.22/4.14/4.14	1.79/1.73/1.88	.85/.83/.90
7.	The company acted quickly to identify the cause of the problem.[a]	4.50/4.36/4.25	1.77/1.71/1.85	.85/.87/.88
8.	The company's response to the problem was fast and proactive.	4.44/4.25/4.16	1.76/1.68/1.92	.88/.87/.91

Inclusivity α = .95/.94/.96

1.	This company involved customers who were affected when handling the crisis.[a]	4.54/4.39/4.42	1.63/1.56/1.70	.58/.74/.80
2.	This company was willing to reach out to all customers who were affected.	4.45/4.35/4.35	1.73/1.65/1.78	.87/.86/.87
3.	This company was willing to reflect on the voices of victims to solve a given issue.[a]	4.43/4.25/4.24	1.68/1.65/1.78	.85/.85/.89
4.	This company tried to get in touch with all customers who were affected.[a]	4.27/4.25/4.25	1.73/1.69/1.82	.86/.83/.85
5.	The company made efforts to hear all opinions wherever possible.	4.35/4.21/4.17	1.74/1.70/1.78	.86/.84/.89
6.	I feel that all stakeholders involved were allowed to express their opinion on how to deal with the issue.[a]	4.50/4.30/4.28	1.68/1.58/1.72	.78/.77/.78
7.	The company took care of all customers who were affected.	4.33/4.30/4.14	1.77/1.67/1.83	.87/.85/.88
8.	I feel that this company has worked adequately to hear all voices when handling the issue.	4.38/4.31/4.18	1.75/1.59/1.83	.89/.86/.91

Disclosure α = .95/.95/.96

1.	This company is willing to be open to disclosing all information related to the crisis.	4.35/4.27/4.03	1.79/1.63/1.82	.85/.80/.89
2.	This company responds to requests for information with sincerity.	4.44/4.30/4.17	1.73/1.66/1.82	.90/.86/.89
3.	Customers are given adequate information on how to deal with the problems caused by this company.[a]	4.45/4.39/4.22	1.70/1.68/1.78	.83/.80/.89
4.	I feel this company shared all that it knew from the beginning of the problem.[a]	4.10/3.88/3.77	1.90/1.82/1.98	.80/.80/.85
5.	This company released the latest updates frequently.[a]	4.59/4.37/4.17	1.68/1.56/1.73	.75/.80/.85
6.	The company was open to sharing new information throughout the issue.	4.40/4.21/4.11	1.70/1.64/1.78	.86/.85/.90

7. The announcements made by this company were informative and worthwhile to listen to.	4.58/4.42/4.32	1.62/1.58/1.77	.84/.82/.86
8. This company cooperated with media to respond to questions and concerns.	4.69/4.43/4.30	1.58/1.62/1.74	.80/.81/.83
9. This company released relevant information even if it was against its own interests.	4.50/4.35/4.30	1.72/1.69/1.85	.76/.79/.82
Symmetry α = .93/.92/.93			
1. I am comfortable chatting with this company about the issue.[a]	4.74/4.64/4.55	1.73/1.67/1.81	.71/.64/.68
2. This company considers customers' interests to be as important as its own interests when dealing with the issue.	4.32/4.11/4.09	1.87/1.79/1.96	.87/.88/.91
3. Most communication between this company and its customers about the issue is two-way.	4.30/4.17/4.12	1.82/1.73/1.94	.88/.86/.90
4. This company encouraged different opinions from its customers about the crisis.	4.35/1.16/4.12	1.80/1.73/1.87	.87/.84/.88
5. This company communicated with its customers so that it could come up with a better response related to the issue.	4.42/4.19/4.23	1.77/1.69/1.85	.91/.85/.90
6. Customers were informed when the company made changes on how they should deal with the crisis.[a]	4.60/4.49/4.34	1.68/1.60/1.76	.82/.81/.85
7. Customers were not afraid to speak up with corporate representatives and managers about the issue.[a]	4.98/4.70/4.82	1.51/1.55/1.65	.57/.57/.54
Forgiveness α = .86/.85/.90			
1. I can trust the following company's product or service.	4.98/4.62/4.27	1.63/1.59/1.84	.85/.85/.89
2. I am not disappointed by the following company.	4.50/4.25/3.91	1.85/1.77/2.03	.78/.79/.86
3. I would be able to pleasantly use the following company's product or service.	5.03/4.73/4.38	1.62/1.57/1.84	.82/.81/.87

[a] The items were removed when this study examined the effect of the RAPIDS model on forgiveness. The best items were used for the analysis. [b] The items were removed after second-order factor analysis was conducted.

Results

As shown in Table 1, the six dimensions all indicated acceptable levels of Cronbach's alpha coefficients for reliability. First, to refine and evaluate construct validity, for Apple's crisis, exploratory factor analysis was performed using oblique rotation method with PROMAX on the RAPIDS principles, except the relationship principle, which has been extensively empirically tested in previous studies. The results indicated that the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measures of sampling adequacy are as follows: accountability (.838), promptness (.950), inclusivity (.950), disclosure (.952), and symmetry (.933). The chi-square values for Bartlett's tests of sphericity are as follows: accountability (1203.020, $df = 21$, $p < .001$), promptness (2954.140, $df = 28$, $p < .001$), inclusivity (3148.315, $df = 28$, $p < .001$), disclosure (3280.660, $df = 36$, $p < .001$), and symmetry (2333.967, $df = 21$, $p < .001$). The analysis revealed that eigenvalues for the five principles were greater than 1.0, explaining a total of 67.068% of the variance for accountability, 72.761% of the variance for promptness, 74.762% of variance for inclusivity, 71.103% of variance for disclosure, and 70.253% of variance for symmetry. All the items proposed exceeded the minimum of .40 for factor loadings.

Second, using the AMOS (Version 25) program, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure the appropriateness of the RAPIDS model. While reliability tests showed the internal consistency of the measures, CFA enables this study to confirm whether the measured variables represent the underlying latent construct (i.e., validity) of the RAPIDS model. Before testing the model as a second-order factor, CFA was first conducted for each principle. Based on Hu and Bentler's (1999) joint-cutoff criteria approach, the final CFA model of the six principles retained valid models. After modifications, including removing several items that showed low factor loadings, second-order CFA was run. Figure 1 shows satisfactory model fit for all three crises. For Apple's crisis, the model fit is as follows; CFI = .927, SRMR = .0395, and RMSEA = .060; $x^2df(769, N = 436) = 1980.256$, $p < .001$. For Volkswagen's crisis, the model fit is as follows: CFI = .934, SRMR = .0832, and RMSEA = .060; $x^2df(773, N = 436) = 1948.367$, $p < .001$. And for Wells Fargo's crisis, the model fit is as follows: CFI = .948, SRMR = .0371, and RMSEA = .058; $x^2df(773, N = 436) = 1893.03$, $p < .001$ Thus, the RAPIDS model was statistically reliable and valid. Furthermore, results from structural equation modeling show that the model is positively associated with forgiveness: Apple's crisis ($\beta = .81$, $p < .001$), Volkswagen's crisis ($\beta = .85$, $p < .001$), and Wells Fargo's crisis ($\beta = .91$, $p < .001$; see Figure 2).
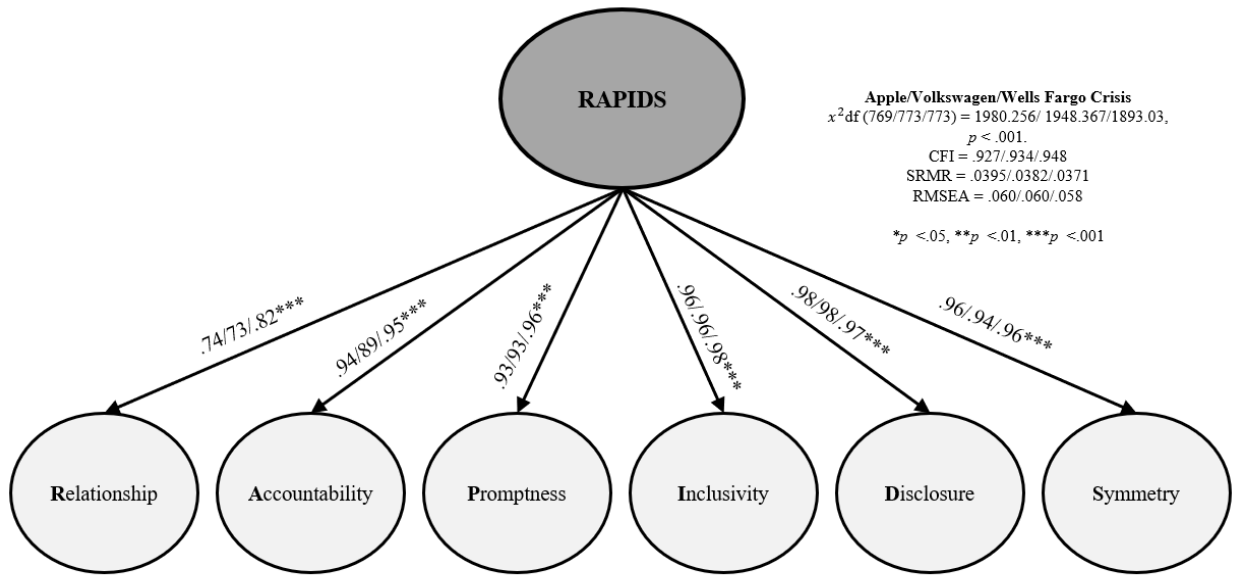
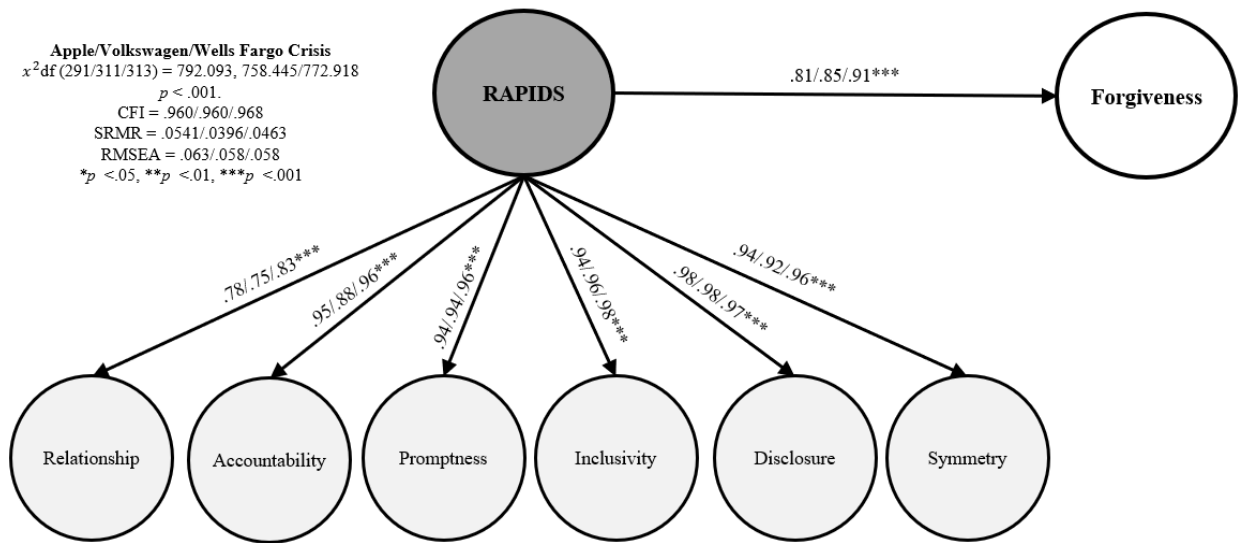**Figure 1. The RAPIDS model in the three crises.**

Figure 2. Effect of the RAPIDS model on forgiveness.

Discussion

Despite the prevalence of the concept of relationships in public relations research, crisis communication is one of the few specialties dominated by theories focusing on image or impression management rather than relationships and the perspectives of affected publics. These theories may be useful in guiding organizations to choose crisis responses that help *buffer* them from a crisis by shaping how publics *interpret* the crisis. However, in crises, publics who suffer from negative consequences expect organizations to focus on problem-solving behaviors and the eventual restoration of relationships. As a reflective theorizing of the perspectives of publics, this study developed the RAPIDS principles as a reflection of the pursuit of effective crisis management underpinning the strategic-behavioral paradigm in public relations. The principles focus on organizational *behaviors* that matter to strategic constituencies and on relationships with those who hold stakes in, and have interests and concerns associated with, crisis situations.

Theoretical Implications

The management of symbols or interpretations during crisis situations is important, but it should serve the purpose of increasing clarity, accessibility, and comprehensibility for publics to understand and cope with the crisis. Although crisis communication research has paid attention to crisis response strategies during a crisis, scholars have recently pointed out the importance of instructing and adjusting information as an ethics-based response (Coombs, 2016) and of theory development beyond image repair (Liu & Fraustino, 2014). Ma and Zhan's (2016) meta-analysis of SCCT research also showed that response strategies are not sufficient to protect organizational reputation, indicating that "publics expect more from an organization than simply clarifying who is responsible for the crisis" (p. 116). Additional actions are needed, including assuring publics of the organization's ability to eliminate the negative impact of the crisis and keeping them informed (Ma & Zhan, 2016). This corresponds to the use of the strategic-behavioral paradigm in public relations to derive the six RAPIDS principles. Based on this paradigm, organizations should develop communication programs strategically with relevant publics before, during, and after a crisis, and should factor the problems faced by stakeholder publics into decision making (Grunig, 2018). Particularly, organizations should be open to managing and working with diverse views within publics (i.e., dissensus) rather than seeking consensus (Ciszek, 2016). Crisis communication managers should embrace dissenting voices and disagreement from publics; after all, the diversity of publics' perspectives can contribute to new ways of thinking and can inform communication and management practices (Ciszek, 2016). This study shifts the focus to organizational behaviors for the management of negative consequences and the restoration of relationships with publics. While crisis responses are critical, the RAPIDS principles provide generic guidelines for crisis management as a process, including working with publics in the precrisis (e.g., relationship principle) stage, and working with publics and incorporating their concerns into decision making in the crisis and postcrisis stages.

The RAPIDS principles place a stronger emphasis on the interests of and relationships with affected publics, emphasizing assuming some level of responsibility for the crisis to help them recover from the losses incurred (the accountability principle), disclosing all information to assist them in coping with the crisis cognitively (the disclosure principle), prioritizing their interests to be as important as the organization's (the

symmetry principle), providing timely communication as promptly as possible (the promptness principle), and involving affected publics in joint efforts to find solutions to the crisis situation (the inclusivity principle). The principles reflect the idea that organizations should take an active role to care for their publics, preserve their interests, and restore their interests that were impaired by the negative outcomes of crises.

The RAPIDS principles put the utmost priority on the "problem solving" of "publics." Affected publics often rely on organizations for information or resources to prevent themselves from incurring further loss of interests. It is not just the organizations that need to manage image restoration or reputational loss. Organizations can secure "image" or "reputations" by focusing on helping publics "solve problems" as part of their relationship-building and cultivation strategies.

Theoretically, the RAPIDS principles reinstate crisis managers (public relations) as *strategic action managers* rather than *apologia strategists* primarily concerned with image or symbolic assets. Proactive methods of consequences management are possible when public relations is employed for strategic listening and two-way persuasion aiming to bridge management and publics. The prime value of public relations can be shown through *return on relationships* (RoR), as organizations with strategic relationships can legitimize their operations, become capable of achieving strategic goals, and mobilize necessary resources (Grunig et al., 2002).

By refocusing on behaviors and relationships, crisis managers help organizations construct solutions acceptable to publics and restore relationships with those publics. This way, crisis communication serves a central function of strategic *management,* beyond strategic *messaging*. Successful crisis management requires substantial behaviors in addition to messaging from the organization. Messaging is crucial for reducing feelings of uncertainty during crises (as a pro-public strategy), but gaining forgiveness from publics should not depend only on messaging. The overcoming of the crisis and the return to normalcy could be indicated by a restoration of relationships between an organization and its publics. In this vein, the RAPIDS principles exemplify the value and efficacy of public relations in crisis management.

Practical Implications

Effective crisis management plans should be "simple," not a thick planning manual. According to Claeys and Opgenhaffen (2016), practitioners found theories to be "too abstract and difficult to translate to actual crisis situations with which they are confronted" (p. 242). They are more willing to apply theoretical guidelines in practice, especially when the situations that they encounter encompass various circumstances. The RAPIDS principles reflect effective issue and crisis management based on one fundamental principle: the pursuit of shared goals between an organization and its publics. "Effective" organizations should adopt or cultivate a culture that encourages the sharing of interests and values among organizational decision makers, organizational members, and strategic publics. In this sense, an effective organization runs its crisis planning and management while the crisis happens. Those on the front line of making frequent decisions in crisis management should rely on their "internalized" principles, norms, and values to define priorities and to work with people who are affected.

Ethical and effective crisis communication should be consistent regardless of the power, resources, and knowledge of the affected publics. The RAPIDS principles are in line with the "strategic management of

public relations" that defines public relations' tasks and roles in scanning the environment and anticipating consequences from impending decisions and organizational policy or actions. That way, organizational decision makers can be proactive or preempt potentially troubling consequences for publics. But when crises do occur, the RAPIDS principles advocate a "participative" approach to working *with* publics to negotiate solutions and organizational behaviors, rather than an "effects" approach to change their interpretations. These principles guide organizations in prioritizing key publics (i.e., relationship); accepting responsibility for dealing with the crisis and not passing the blame onto someone else (i.e., accountability); engaging in accurate, complete, and honest communication (i.e., disclosure); and solving the problems in full consultation with publics (i.e., symmetry).

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that can be addressed in future research. It has only examined three organizational crises, all of which involved corporate fraud. To extend its application, the model should be explored with other crisis types. Replication studies are necessary to increase the generalizability of the model. This study has only tested forgiveness as a dependent variable. Future research should examine how the model is associated with other crisis outcomes such as purchase intentions, megaphoning, and reputation. Additionally, because some of the items proposed for RAPIDS were newly developed, their wording could have affected participants' understanding. For example, the words "problem," "crisis," and "issue" were used interchangeably in some of the survey items. Further research should be conducted to refine and ensure the consistency of the items.

Conclusion

Whereas most crisis communication theories are developed based on the symbolic-interpretive paradigm, the present study proposes a theoretical model of crisis excellence based on the strategic-behavioral paradigm. Six generic principles are developed to guide crisis communicators in managing OPRs by balancing the interests of both organizations and publics. This study argues that organizational behaviors are as important as symbolic assets and that organizations should consider publics' participation in crisis solutions. In turn, publics will reciprocate by forgiving organizations in crisis situations.

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