

Q2

There have been long running disputes about the merits of Grunig and Hunt's (1984) 4 models of PR and whether two-way symmetrical is over-idealistic. Pieczka's criticisms (1996) are addressed in Grunig (2001). Evaluate their arguments and explain which point of view you support, with clear reasons and understanding of both approaches.

Introduction

Grunig and Hunt's *Managing Public Relations* (1984) outlined for the first time their now widely quoted four models of public relations (PR): press agency/publicist; public information; two-way asymmetric and two-way symmetric (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.22).

Drawing on systems theory, Grunig and Hunt's four models are based on their understanding of organisational and management practice. This approach is demonstrated in their definition of PR, which states: "public relations activities are part of the *management of communication between an organisation and its publics*" (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.7-8).

Following further research (Grunig et al, 1992) Grunig began to conceive of a model for 'excellent' public relations based on his two-way symmetrical model. Specifically, Grunig and White argued that for PR to be excellent, it must be "symmetrical, idealistic and critical and managerial" (2002, p.307).

However, some PR academics believe that Grunig's two-way symmetrical model of PR 'excellence' model has become over-idealised leading to shortfalls in both PR theory and practice.

This essay will first seek to define what is meant by the term 'over-idealistic' by examining the Grunig and Hunt's initial intentions for their model of two-way symmetrical communication. Given that the model of two-way

symmetrical communication is positioned by Grunig as a normative model, the essay will also look at the expectations of PR practitioners.

Using this definition of 'over-idealistic' the essay will then evaluate the two-way symmetrical model alongside Pieczka's criticisms (1996) and apply the results of this debate to the wider theoretical and practitioner community, specifically Grunig's responses to Pieczka (2001).

Idealism and over-idealism

In the current academic climate, an examination of the two-way model of symmetrical communication is necessarily conducted with the backdrop of a significant body of critical theory that has challenged Grunig and Hunt's model for its narrow research agenda and idealistic simplicity.

In order to examine fairly and fully whether two-way symmetrical communications has become over-idealised it is first necessary to return to Grunig and Hunt's original text (1984) look at the authors' intentions and attempt to pinpoint when the symmetrical model became over-idealised.

By Grunig's own admission, idealism is and always has been a central part of the two-way symmetrical model of communication and vital to the development of excellent PR - both theoretically and practically (Grunig et al, 1992, pp. 56-57; Grunig et al, 2002, p.307).

Grunig conceptualised two-way symmetrical communications as a normative model which "explains how public relations *should* be practised" (Grunig, 2001, p.13). From the outset Grunig's model set-out the differences between how PR was being practised and how it should be practised. Through research, Grunig intended to develop a theoretical approach to PR which would allow practitioners to achieve this 'ideal' position.

Grunig sets out this idealistic intent in *Managing Public Relations*:

This book will attempt to teach you not only the knowledge and technical skills now available to the practitioner, but also social responsibility and professional ethics. (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.5)

Grunig's model also aimed to make PR more ethical and in turn more effective by establishing an ideal professional model. While this idealism is now possibly seen as naïve, at the time Grunig was contending with a PR industry where 85 per cent of organisational communication was one-way or two-way asymmetric and based on a worldview of persuasion and coercion (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, pp. 21-25).

Grunig wanted to abandon persuasive or asymmetrical communication and develop a model of excellent PR which required PR practitioners to adopt a new theoretical perspective that saw PR as “idealistic”, “optimistic” and “exemplary” (Grunig & White in Grunig et al, 1992, p.56).

From a practical application, this meant practitioners setting as the main communications objective mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. The over-arching aim of professional PR activity now made it possible for publics' attitudes to influence an organisations' behaviour.

Grunig saw this as a significant breakthrough in ethical PR whereby ethics was inherent in the PR process rather than the outcome. Regardless of the eventual outcome, providing all relevant parties were involved in two-way symmetrical dialogue, then the communication was ethical (Grunig et al, 1992, p.308).

To achieve this it became necessary for PR practitioners to be part of an organisation's 'dominant coalition' or senior management (Grunig & Hunt,

1984, p.22-24). The role of PR as a management function was also a central theme in Grunig and Hunt's original model. Their original definition of PR was "the *management of communication between an organisation and its publics*" (Grunig and Hunt, 1984, p.6-8).

By piecing together Grunig and Hunt's original intentions for their model of two-way symmetrical communication, it becomes clear that at its heart was the assumption that "excellent public relations is based on the worldview that public relations is symmetrical, idealistic in its social role, and managerial." (Grunig & White in Grunig et al, 1992, p.56).

However, this 'worldview' is not without its limitations. Despite the overt idealism within symmetrical communications, the model opens itself to criticism. Firstly, as a normative theory of how PR should be practised the model relates specifically to PR as a management function within corporate organisations.

Edwards argues this narrow approach risks over-simplifying the complicated nature of human behaviour. She suggests that in reality, unofficial organisational hierarchies and internal power struggles are likely to interfere with the function of Grunig's formalised communications process (Edwards, 2006, p.148).

This over-simplification of human and organisational behaviour is also identified by Leitch and Neilson (2001) and Karlberg (1996) who critique the model for failing to take account of publics' multiplicity.

Leitch & Neilson argue that "publics are not fixed categories waiting to be identified but rather are constructed and reconstructed through the discourses in which they participate." (2001, p.138). Karlberg asserts Grunig's organisational model only allows PR practitioners to view the public as

“primarily consumers and the public sphere [as] primarily a marketplace” (1996, p.266).

Not only that, by Grunig's own admission, his model is also culturally specific, restrictively viewing the public sphere as a liberal democratic marketplace in the US. (Szondi, 2006, p.122 & Grunig, 2001, p.11).

But even taking these limitations into account, is there point at which two-way symmetry becomes *over-idealised* as a theoretical and practical model?

It can be argued that such a point arose when Grunig embarked on his 'Excellence Study'. Using \$400,000 of funding provided by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) Research Foundation Grunig continued to research two-way symmetrical communication as the ideal normative model for “excellent” PR.

The 'Excellence Study' had a specific corporate research agenda focussed on economic outcomes: “how does excellent public relations make an organisation more effective, and how much is that contribution worth economically?” (Grunig et al, 1992, p.xiii).

By focussing on specific, economic objectives it can be argued that two-way symmetrical model excluded alternative critical perspectives that challenged it. This view was reinforced when Grunig declared two-way symmetry as “a general theory of public relations”. (Grunig at al. 1992, p.xiii).

In a statement that could almost be aimed directly at Grunig and his research team, Karlberg writes that although researchers have accumulated “a large body of literature and expertise” they show “little interest in the broader social implications of their research” (Karlberg, 1996, p.264).

Pieczka takes criticism of the two-way symmetrical model even further by challenging Grunig's attempt to position two-way symmetry as a PR paradigm (Pieczka, 1996, p.333; 352).

Criticism of two-way symmetry: Pieczka vs Grunig

In *Paradigms, Systems Theory, and Public Relations* (1996) Pieczka critiques the dominance of systems theory in academic PR literature. In so doing she focusses specifically on Grunig's over-idealisation of two-way symmetrical communications using a history of systems theory and contemporary critical argument (Pieczka, 1996, p.347-348).

Instead of highlighting the limitations inherent within Grunig's two-way symmetrical model as it stands, Pieczka critiques the very foundation of Grunig's model. Pieczka begins her critique with an in-depth study of sociological and organisational systems theories and their adoption into academic PR literature.

Using alternative critical approaches to PR theory she demonstrates that Grunig's two-way symmetrical model is built from a hybrid of systems theories. Furthermore, Grunig's model excludes alternative or conflicting critical viewpoints, such as those identified earlier, in order to maintain its theoretical integrity.

Pieczka's work marks a defining moment in the development of PR theory because instead of simply identifying limitations inherent within the two-way symmetrical model as it stands, Pieczka questions the validity of the whole model on two levels: Grunig's development of two-way symmetry and the research agenda from which it emerged.

Basing her argument on the fact that from *Managing Public Relations* (1984) through to the 'Excellence Study' (1992; 2002), Pieczka highlights Grunig has

relied on systems theory to understand how organisations work and how PR functions within that system.

By isolating core systems paradigms, including mechanistic, organisimic and social system models, Pieczka attempts to plot how Grunig has built his own theoretical model.

By working through the origins and history of traditional systems and systems theorists, Pieczka shows that Grunig's adoption of systems to PR theory has been less than methodologically sound.

Highlighting areas of theoretical tension within Grunig's model, Pieczka criticises Grunig for picking and choosing parts of different system paradigms to fit his model: "paradigms rest on different ontological and epistemological bases which simply cannot be ignored" (Pieczka, 1996, p.354).

As a result Grunig produces a model based loosely on system theory which has not been "clearly charted and ... this creates the possibility of contradictory assumptions being built into the model." (Pieczka, 1996, p.357)

One such contradiction occurs when Grunig adopts the different systems theories to explain an organisation's PR function. The two-way symmetrical model views PR's organisational role as 'boundary spanning' which is vital for developing mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics. To achieve this Grunig argues that an open - or organic - system approach is necessary.

However, Pieczka points out that in order to achieve an "ethical dimension of social responsibility" it is necessary to adopt an adaptive system which requires a level of organisational hierarchy and management intervention counter to the open and organic system (Pieczka, 1996, p.351).

Pieczka is also highly critical of Grunig's failure to take alternative critical approaches into account. This allows the model to remain unchallenged and reinforces its over-idealisation: “[T]he lack of challenge leads to the development of a somewhat confused or hybrid form of systems theory achieving the status of ideology.” (Pieczka, 1996, p.357)

Pieczka suggests that this unchallenged methodology may be as a result of Grunig's research agenda and the study's economic objectives. She expresses concern that this organisational approach may limit the study's methodology to systems theory from the outset. Pieczka states that the study:

seems to be designed as a deductive process, so the original selection of literature comes in turn to be translated into hypotheses to be tested empirically at a later stage. (Pieczka, 1996, p. 355)

This “deductive” methodologically is further complicated by Grunig's belief that two-way symmetry is a normative PR theory providing another reason not to deviate too far from a well-established systems-based theory.

Grunig's methodological short-comings also impact on one of the model's core factors of 'excellence': ethics. Grunig positions ethics at the heart of symmetrical communication and removes persuasion from the PR process requiring mutual understanding to be developed between an organisation and its publics. This allows public attitudes to shape organisational behaviour and vice versa (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.22 and Grunig et al, 1992, p.55-61).

Pieczka challenges Grunig's assertion that excellent PR is made ethical by two-way symmetrical communications by taking the idea to its extreme conclusion. She hypothesises that once symmetrical communication has taken place between an organisation and its publics, an ethical and mutual position

may be achieved. But if this position is desired by neither party, how can this be ethical or in the “public interest”? (Pieczka, 1996, p.356)

While Pieczka acknowledges these methodological short-comings may not necessarily affect the validity of Grunig’s study, they do make the symmetrical model relevant to one theoretical worldview.

As Pieczka explains, Grunig's model is “not a bad explanation [of PR theory]; but it is a good one only from a particular point of view.” (Pieczka, 1996, p.355)

Two-way symmetry: Grunig's response

In response to Pieczka's robust critique of two-way symmetry, Grunig mounted a defence of the 'Excellence' model in Heath (2001).

But from Grunig's attempt to assert the validity of two-way symmetry, it seems he merely succeeds in highlighting the same inconsistencies revealed by Pieczka.

Grunig begins by addressing general criticism that symmetrical communications provides “*the* normative ideal for public relations” (Grunig, 2001, p.12). Drawing on extensive studies of the model, Grunig points out that the 'Excellence Study' confirmed two-way symmetry's use in many cultures and political systems, but that “it also has suggested variations in the model” (ibid).

These “variations” are precisely the alternative critical voices that Pieczka identifies as being left out of Grunig's model. Instead of cementing the normative position of his 'excellence' model, Grunig acknowledges the presence of other “cultural interpretation models” but takes no further action to

investigate the impact of alternative approaches on the model's cohesion (ibid).

Grunig next addresses Pieczka's critique of the two-way symmetrical model in specific detail. However, under scrutiny his rebuttal of Pieczka's arguments fail to adequately defend the two-way symmetry as a normative model of PR.

Pieczka's argument is summarised by Grunig:

Pieczka ... said that using the symmetrical model as a normative ideal is a closed-minded attempt to impose a single point of view on others (Grunig, 2001, p.16)

Grunig defends the validity of the symmetrical model by stating that Pieczka has ignored “the numerous revisions of the theory we have made over the years as a result of research” (Grunig, 2001, p.17). Grunig's argument asks how can the symmetrical model be “closed-minded” and seeking to impose a “single point of view” on public relations research when it is constantly revisited and revised.

But this argument is demolished a few pages later when Grunig updates the symmetrical model to take account of research into game-theory and 'mixed motive' PR.

Grunig begins by discussing research into PR and game theory which sets the position of the dominant coalition and the public at the opposite ends of a communications spectrum.

At the centre of the spectrum lies a 'mixed motive' win-win zone. The goal for excellent PR is for both the dominant coalition and public to move towards each others position. As Grunig describes: “communicators negotiate with

both publics and dominant coalitions to reach an outcome or relationship in the win-win zone.” (Grunig, 2001, p.26)

Although game theory was introduced to PR theory by Murphy (1991), Grunig adapts its key theoretical processes and outcomes to the symmetrical model, referring to this new mixed motive model as: “an excellent two-way model of public relations that subsumes the former two-way symmetrical model and asymmetrical models.” (Grunig, 2001, p.26)

This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, Grunig adapts and then adopts alternative theoretical perspectives to the symmetrical model. Despite Murphy's claims that the 'mixed-motive' model gives a “richer view of conflict and cooperation that that allowed by strict prescriptions for symmetry” (Murphy, 1991, p.126) Grunig still uses her research to falsely reinforce the validity of his symmetrical model.

Secondly, Murphy's model opens up not one model of communications but an endless series of specific situations to which the 'mixed-motive' model can be used to reach an outcome. This recognition of multiplicity is glossed over by Grunig who still views this model as part of his two-way symmetrical normative theory.

Edwards sums this up by observing that while the 'mixed-motive' model:

avoids prescription of a single model of practice as the 'ideal', Grunig does not attempt to address the critical school's assertion that the PR process is inherently imbalanced. (Edwards, 2006, p.150)

The 'mixed-motive' model also recognises that persuasive, asymmetric communications plays in part in the PR process. Having previously established symmetrical communications and mutual understanding as the

normative ideal for excellent PR, Grunig now seems to be advocating that asymmetrical communications still plays a key part in excellent PR.

Far from reinforcing two-way symmetry as a normative PR theory, Grunig's revisions of his model seem to be further fragmenting it and its theoretical framework..

Conclusion: the future of PR theory

Taking discussion of symmetrical communication back to its origins in Grunig and Hunt's 1984 model, it can be seen that idealism was always intended as a central theme.

Two-way symmetry was set-out as a PR model from which Grunig and Hunt sought to build both a normative theoretical and practical theory. Their intention being to both drive forward PR theory and improve the ethics of the PR industry (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p.22; Grunig et al, 1992, pp.56-57).

Grunig's vision of symmetrical communication as a socially and theoretically ideal model of PR was cemented with the IABC 'Excellence Study' which sought to position two-way symmetry as a “general theory” of PR.

As the symmetrical model became over-idealised as a normative model designed to add economic value to organisations, a number of academic voices began to challenge Grunig's vision.

Pieczka in particular critiqued not only Grunig's vision of two-way symmetry, but the underlying theory on which his symmetrical model was based. This allowed her to reveal inconsistencies and highlight the absence of alternative critical perspectives within the model. In response to Pieczka's criticism, however, Grunig's arguments merely reinforced the model's theoretical intransigence in the face of modern critical theory.

In order to take the PR debate forward it is not sufficient to state that Grunig's model of two-way symmetry is simply over-idealised. Although Pieczka revealed the limitations of the model, she also acknowledged that it is “carefully constructed, and offers coherent explanations of a range of problems” (Pieczka, 1996, p.354).

While Grunig once offered a fresh approach to thinking in PR theory, Pieczka has shown the need to see two-way symmetry as part of an ongoing discourse, rather than as the normative theory he originally proposed.

Leitch and Neilson summed up the changing landscape in PR theory when they wrote that with Grunig's organisational and system approach “the focus has been on the surface characteristics of the relationship [in PR] rather than on its underlying structure or goals viewed from within a broader sociocultural context” (Leitch & Neilson, 2001, p.134).

Grunig's model will undoubtedly have a role to play in the future of PR theory, but it will be as one voice among many in the debate rather than an over-arching, over-idealised 'general theory' of PR.

Word count: 2981

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paradigm says that if PR is to be taken seriously as a central concept (Moloney, 2006, p.3-5). But at the same time it revises the model it challenges it all the same.

This

GRUNIG HAS TAKEN THE PR DEBATE UP TO A POINT, Pieczka HAS CHALLENGED, SHOWN THEORETICAL DEFICITS NOW DEBATE IS MOVING ON

yes, model is idealistic, but meant to be = normative and ethical goal of excellent PR.

But presumption that 2ws can be made a general theory of excellent PR while excluding challenging and multiplicitous arguments caused the model to become over-idealised.

Pieczka showed that there are theoretical tensions underlying the model and while it may be a voice in the ongoing theoretical debate is is just that, ONE VOICE in the debate.

Grunig responded to criticisms by trying to explain how the model had revised in line with conflicting critical assumptions,. But all this achieved was reinforcing the dominant position of his over-idealised model.

Say that P thought model not bad and grunig has moved PR debate forward. But now need to explore the debate further (leitch Q)

then look to going beyond Grunig's 4 model/2ws and look at moloney?

Since the emergence of two-way symmetrical communication over 20 years ago a multiplicity[??] of arguments have challenged and supported Grunig's normative model of PR.

Pieczka has demonstrated most robustly the limitations of Grunig's model and by extension systems theories in general.

risen to tand of it is worth reminding ourselves that Pieczka acknowledged the model is “carefully constructed, and offers coherent explanations of a range of problems” (Pieczka, 1996, p.354)

Where the model is questioned is in its refusal to acknowledge contradictory critical approaches such as Marxism, Post Modernism, Rhetorical and Critical Theory.

While Grunig once offered a fresh approach to thinking in PR theory Pieczka clearly demonstrates the need to see two-way symmetry and 'excellent' PR as part of an ongoing discourse, rather than an over-idealistic, normative theory.

But where do we go from here, with Grunig's over-idealised symmetrical and mixed motive models so deeply entrenched in PR's academic canon?

Leitch and Neilson summed the changing landscape in PR theory when they wrote that with Grunig's organisational and system approach “the focus has been on the surface characteristics of the relationship [in PR] rather than on its underlying structure or goals viewed from within a broader sociocultural context” (Leitch & Neilson, 2001: 134). GRUNIG HAS TAKEN THE PR

DEBATE UP TO A POINT, Pieczka HAS CHALLENGED, SHOWN
THEORETICAL DEFICITS NOW DEBATE IS MOVING ON

Such a context has already been addressed by Moloney (1996) who has proposed an alternative model of PR based on rhetoric theory and translating Grunig's four models into the public sphere.

QUOTE FROM MOLONEY AND END BY SAYING PR COME LONG WAY
THROUGH GRUNIG'S ORIGINAL IDEAS, THROUGH PIECZKA'S
CRITIQUE AND ONTO THE FUTURE OF PR THEORY...

say that while Grunig's model has been shown to have limitations and has been over-idealised by academics, it has thrown open the theoretical debate in PR studies which is necessary and has led to a range of alternative perspectives.

Word count: XXXXX

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Crowbar Moloney in Moloney

Combined with the alternative approaches listed above they have

However, the onslaught against Grunig's symmetrical model since its conception over 20 years ago it is worth reminding ourselves that Pieczka acknowledged that the model is “carefully constructed, and offers coherent explanations of a range of problems

“the focus has been on the surface characteristics of the relationship rather than on its underlying structure or goals viewed from within a broader sociocultural context” (Leitch & Neilson, 2001: 134)

G then draws on a rather weak argument that the excellent tws model has in fact been the mixed motive model all along, but that in choosing the wrong name for it (QUOTE, p28) it has set off an academic debate that has really missed the point.

Gruning then petulantly criticises Pieczka for her academic presumption which...

that the symmetrical model is a hybrid of systems theories that excludes alternative viewpoints to maintain internal consistency

concluding remarks when she summarises the fundamental problem with Grunig's two-way symmetrical model

[This idea of ethical PR and negotiated outcomes is also held to be a key driver for effective PR.]

DO MORE ABOUT EFFECTIVENESS OF EXCELLENT PR?? OR LINK TO EFFECTIVENESS OF 2 WAY SYMMETRY USING MORE EGS FROM GRUNIG 2001 AND MURPHY 1991, P122???

ledtwo-way symmetry's = ethical eg. Of systems... leads to thical Q and then link to effectiveness...

- Methodological – 1. loaded q's / pre-defined parameters ie. Not going into research with open mind but ready stated set of answers; - Q on p.352 links systems approach aritue with implicit agenda 2. systems theory made up – cf. kish-mash of systems theyry on bottom of 351???need eg of how theories are made up!!
- Ethical – problem of which spefici system: eg. Best tws model is general open system but this doesn't sit with all ethical systems (cf. relevan authors) which tend to be closed and (ethical) goal oriented
- GOOD END QUOTE = P.354 last para

Criticim still restricts study to the tws model even though it is critiquing...
Pieczka says as uch with her quote about “critiquing not building...”

Intro: Grunig and Hunt’s Four Models as critical battleground

Grunig and Hunts Four Models: an overview

Making Two Way Symmetrical the ‘dominant coalition’

- ‘Excellence’ study starts to idealise two way symmetry

Symmetrical PR – Over-idealised

- Asymmetric research agenda Two way symmetry hogging the research limelight (Karlberg)
- Murphy (1991) – inventing game theory to improve two way symmetrical model
- Research not focussing enough on power or relationships (Plowman?)

Undermining two way symmetry: Piezcka’s critique

Grunig 2001 - explains misunderstandings of two way symmetrical model

- NOT equilibrium ...

This idealism is central to the two-way symmetrical model as this model “provides the normative ideal for public relations in most situations” (Grunig, 2001: 13). By definition “a normative model explains how public relations *should* be practised” (ibid).

Before deciding whether two-way symmetrical communication is *over-*idealised it is worth looking to Grunig and Hunt's original intentions for the fourth model.

From a purely historical perspective

/Grunig

Other critics

Practitioners

Suggests that it is associated with ethical and effective communications practices, critics have argued that it is an idealistic model which misrepresents the comms process | reality (Edwards cited in Tench and Yeomans, 2006, p.148)

In particular, their two-way symmetric approach to PR has become a battleground