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Title: Towards a more dynamic stakeholder model : Acknowledgning multiple issue arenas

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Towards a more dynamic stakeholder model:

Acknowledging multiple issue arenas

Abstract

Purpose – The paper suggest that corporate communications is becoming less predictable as interaction with stakeholders is moving from organizational control toward 'issue arenas', places of interaction where an issue is discussed by stakeholders and organizations both online and within the traditional media. The role of corporate communications and public relations is broadening beyond the traditional relationship management to issue arena monitoring.

Design/methodology/approach – Theoretical approach with six axioms suggested.

Findings – Several central theories of corporate communications are combined with issues management and stakeholder theory to argue for a multiplicity of new 'issue arenas', which require an increased amount of monitoring. Six axioms are suggested for future research on corporate communications, and a mosaic of multiple strategies for multiple publics moved by multiple issues is recommended.

Research limitations/implications – The axioms suggested require empirical testing with different arenas across contexts and cultures, and the axioms may change over time as the virtual arenas expand. Future studies should focus on the process of arena formation as well as the division of voice on the arenas.

Practical implications – Monitoring becomes central as corporate communication is less controllable. Corporate communication and public relations will play a key role in organizational survival in the future through the processes of finding the right issues and 'issue arenas' for

interaction, facilitating the organization-public debate and through this managing organizational reputation. A change in thinking is required, as identifying issues should precede identifying stakeholders.

Originality/value – This paper argues that organizational survival depends not only on communicating with the right stakeholders, but also on finding the relevant issue arenas in which organizations should participate in discussion.

Keywords – Issue arena, stakeholder theory, issues management, monitoring, corporate communications, strategic planning

Paper type – Conceptual paper

Introduction

Society today is characterized by multiple collectives (Heath, 2006: 95) of different

stakeholders, whose interests are often diverse. These various stakeholders and publics are in a

constant state of flux, which poses new uncertainties for organizations (Holtzhausen, 2000;

Gower, 2006). Stakeholder theories have been developed to map the organizational terrain and to

help organizations identify and balance the different needs and voices around them (Freeman,

1984). With the development of new communication technologies, traditional ways of thinking

about stakeholders are becoming outdated as communication with and among stakeholders is

moving onto new stages outside the organization's control. Today, it is issues and topics, not

organizations that are at the center of communication. Due to various new and social media,

stakeholders can express their opinions to a wider public and build constituencies easier (Kaplan

& Haenlein, 2010). These developments potentially give more power to both organizations and

individual stakeholders as mediators such as journalists use the social media not only for

communication but also as sources (Lariscy et al. 2009; Paine, 2008; Porter, 2009; Solis, 2009).

This paper outlines the complex nature of organizational stakeholder networks and

communication patterns. Analyzing the environment should consist of positioning the

relationships of the different stakeholders to the organization (Wu, 2007; Van Woerkum &

Aarts, 2008), yet in previous stakeholder literature the organization is often given a central place

(Foley & Kendrick, 2006; Jahansoozi, 2007; Steurer, 2006; Rawlins, 2006; Näsi, 1995). It is

risky to suggest that organizations have control over communication (Key, 1999), and the new

operating environment deserves closer investigation. The paper introduces the idea of a

multiplicity of 'issue arenas', places of interaction where an issue is discussed by stakeholders

and organizations. The paper suggests that in the rapidly changing markets where organizations

do not last as long as they have in the past (Burke, 2008), the role of corporate communications and public relations practitioners becomes more than ever linked to organizational survival. Issue arenas are often outside the organization's control; hence the role of corporate communications is broadening beyond the traditional relationship management to issue arena monitoring. Practitioners maintain organizations' ability to function through the processes of finding the right issue arenas, facilitating the public debate taking place in these arenas, and thereby managing organizational reputation. This requires a change in thinking; instead of only seeing who is affected by us or wants to affect us (Freeman, 1984), organizations should also ask strategic questions such as "Which issue arenas are relevant for the future of the organization?" and "Which issue arenas provide opportunities for interaction with specific groups?" This paper suggests that identifying issues should precede identifying stakeholders.

The paper first combines previous theories with elements from issues management and stakeholder theory. The concept of 'issues arenas' is then examined in detail and its implications for both theory and practice are discussed. Focus is also turned toward what issue arenas mean for theory and practice of corporate communication and public relations. To conclude, six axioms are suggested for future research on corporate communications, and the strengths and weaknesses of issue arenas are examined.

<div align="center">ISSUES OR STAKES?</div>

Stakeholder theory has been criticized for assuming the environment is static (Key, 1999; Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010), whereas the issues management literature better addresses change and development. Combining these may provide a more complete overview of the context in which organizations function. An issue becomes an issue when "the battle is joined and conflict occurs" (Schattschneider, 1960, p. 74); hence issues management can be defined as

the proactive identification and subsequent defusing of problems before they escalate into crises (Roper & Toledano, 2005; Heath, 1997). Early mentions of issues management refer to its role in avoiding a 'legitimacy gap' (Sethi, 1979), that is, the discrepancies that may occur between what the organization does and what is expected in society. These can arise as a result of either the organization's actions or how these are perceived, or changes in the societal evaluation of these actions (Bridges, 2004). Issues management is about understanding weak signals and hearing early warnings; it is the antennae an organization should constantly have out to sense changes (Schoonman, 1991). In this, both the external and internal environments within which the organization operates must be understood (Pratt, 2001). Issues management involves understanding stakeholders, as managing issues is often achieved through balancing the organization's interests with the stakeholders' (Heath, 1997).

Stakeholder refers to any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder theory is timely for public relations (Wu, 2007; Van Woerkum & Aarts, 2008), as it concentrates on the long-term social networks and relationships that organizations have (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; Wilson, 2001). Relationship management is believed to contribute to organizational legitimacy, as managing its long-term relationships contributes to stakeholder satisfaction and shapes the organization's reputation (Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Grunig & Huang, 2000; Kiousis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007). In fact, stakeholders' assessments and expectations contribute highly to organizational reputation and legitimacy (Luoma-aho, 2007; Mahon, 2002). The organizational environment of stakeholders is not static, but marked by conflicts of interest. Societal developments are constantly changing the field of forces in which organizations operate (Vos & Schoemaker,, 2005). Foley and Kendrick (2006) speak of the stakeholder environment as a

fragile ecosystem. So far, the dynamic nature of this ecosystem has not been fully addressed (Wu, 2007).

Whether the organization deals with different 'stakes' or 'issues' is an interesting question. In stakeholder theory, stakes refer to some form of investment, interests or affect related to the organization, whereas issues may also be less strongly related to the organization. Stakes can not be separated from the holder, whereas issues do not just belong to one holder and the organization is only one of the parties involved in it. Issue management is rooted in public relations and is connected to the public debate. Stakeholder management originates from strategic management in which the organization has a central place. In stakeholder literature, the concept of a stakeholder is related to an organization rather than to an issue. Here both views are combined, congruent with the holistic approach of corporate communication. One can have something at stake also in a broader issue and in such cases participation in the public discussion is needed. Consequently, it is important to analyse what is at stake for the other participants and to note conflicting interests. Involvement in both organizations and issues can be supported on an emotional, ideological and economic level.

In political science, the writings of Schattschneider (1960) were perhaps the first to highlight the notion of the scope of issue conflict in public policy arenas. Schattschneider (1960) argued that several factors influence the scope of an issue: the number of actors (adherents), visibility in different media, as well as level and intensity of the debate taking place. He considered audience involvement and the scale on which the political game is played to be decisive for the conflict outcome; issues are determined by the scope of its 'contagion' (Schattschneider, 1960). As all conflicts and issues can not be simultaneously discussed in society (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988), there is always competition for the selection of agendas

(Berger, Hertog & Park, 2002; Berger, 2001; Blumer, 1971). In recent years various authors have refined stakeholder theory, adding complexity when analyzing stakeholders and stakes (e.g. Fassin, 2007 & 2008; Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). However, the dynamic nature and multiplicity of environments in which organizations operate have not yet been reflected in current stakeholder models.

ISSUE ARENAS

In this paper we introduce a new concept of 'issue arenas', but its roots lie deep in previous theories of corporate communications. In the 1950s, Goffman (1959) addressed, using the language of drama, how individuals presented themselves on the 'stage' in front of audiences. Similarly, organizations aim to present their best assets, through, for example, impression management and framing (Goffman, 1974; Johansson, 2007; Hallahan, 1999). Organizations 'talk' about themselves and give their opinions in a variety of communication arenas, reflecting fragmented, and even conflicting, discourses, ideas and interests (Cheney & Christensen, 2001; Cammaerts (2007). In the 1970s, McCombs and Shaw (1972) noted the importance of the news media as setters of public agenda and discussion, an idea that is still somewhat valuable in the era of online discussions as blogger, for instance, often refer to the news media (Steyn et al., 2010). Sethi (1979) noted that should societal expectations not be met by organizational functions, a gap in legitimacy may result and threaten organizational existence. In the same decade, research in social networks progressed, noting the strategic importance of network placement (see e.g. Granowetter, 1973; Burt, 1992) and informal channels of communication.

In the 1980s, stakeholder theory (see e.g. Freeman, 1984) began to take root with a new focus on stakes not having to be merely financial, and giving voice to the previously ignored different organizational stakeholders. What the stakeholders thought would affect the image of

the organization (see e.g. Bernstein, 1984; Bromley, 1993), and reputation management was suggested to help organizations survive the different stakeholder assessments. In the 1980s, issues-management (see e.g. Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988) was introduced as a way to deal with the various topics of interest that the publics and stakeholders cared about. Similarly, public relations scholars were looking at the situation dependencies under which certain publics became active (Grunig et al., 2002; Vasques, 1993).

Recently actor-network theory (see e.g. Latour, 2005) noted how it is not only the stakeholders who matter, but rather the heterogeneous networks they become part of. Actor-network theory, ANT (Callon, 1986; Latour, 2007) suggests "a theoretical shift in emphasis away from the centrality and primacy of the human subject" (Somerville, 1999) and aims to shed light on the interactions within a larger and less fixed environment than do most social theories, including stakeholder theory. ANT acknowledges that every act of establishing something is linked with the different factors influencing it, such as its surroundings, regulations, other people, technology etcetera. Together these influences produce an actor- network, which is simply a heterogeneous network of aligned interests. Lee and Hassard (1999) note that like actor networks, organizations and their environments today are in constant flux. The observation of their fluid nature and lack of boundaries is an important contribution to present studies on organizational environments (Luoma-aho & Paloviita, 2010). Actors are defined by their relations with others in the network, and the specific focus of ANT is on the formation and maintenance of networks. Similarly, Heath (2006) speaks of "collectively managing risks", as organizations and stakeholders collaborate around specific needs or issues. These theories list the most influential developments in the process toward issue arenas, and are presented in table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Foundations for Issue Arenas

Theoretical foundations of Issue Arenas	Main theorists	Contribution to Issue Arenas	Focus
Presentation of Self	Goffman, 1959; Cheney & Christensen, 2001	Individual actors present themselves on various stages	organization
Agenda Setting	McCombs & Shaw, 1972	The media shape what we think about	discourse
Legitimacy Gap Theory	Sethi, 1979; Carroll, 1991; Heath, 1997	The existence of organizations is challenged when the expectations are not met	organization
Social Network Theory	Granowetter, 1973; Burt, 1992; Lin et al., 2001;	Social ties matter more than organizational structures	networks
Stakeholder Theory	Freeman, 1984; Carroll, 1993; Mitchell et al., 1995	Multiple voices beyond stockholders have a stake in organizations	stakeholders
Situational Theory of Publics	Grunig et al., 2002; Vasques, 1993	Categories of publics that may be more or less active	public groups
Image Theory, Reputation Management	Bernstein, 1984; Bromley, 1993; Weber, 1994; Deephouse & Carter, 2005; Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004	Impressions and reputation may matter even more than reality	stakeholders
Issues Management, Issue life-cycle Theory	Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988; Heath, 1997	Issues arise and decline in public interest	discourse
Actor Network Theory	Latour, 2005; Callon, 1986	Dynamic human and non-human factors influence each other	networks

As for arenas, Aula and Mantere (2008) define arenas as places of interaction between an organization and its publics, where the reputation of the organization is created. This definition, however, overemphasizes the role of the organization, and we argue instead that organizations and stakeholders should be seen as having an equal stake in the issues discussed in arenas. We call these places of interaction, whether real or virtual, 'issue arenas'. A market arena indicates the field in which organizations compete defined by e.g. the product/market combination (Waarts, et al., 1997). This can be seen as a concrete place, such as a trade fair, or an abstract concept referring to the field of forces in demand and supply (Leeflang & Beukenkamp, 1987).

Similar to an economic market arena where buyers and suppliers meet, a social issue arena is a place for interaction about ideas.

Issue arenas function as spaces for enactment (Weick, 2001) and facilitate 'stake exchange' (Heath, 2006). The players can be more or less actively involved in the public debate (visibly on the stage or not), but if the issue is related to the organization, it must take part. We argue that organizational survival is not dependent on only communicating with the right stakeholders, but also on finding the relevant issue arenas in which to participate. Conversations and arenas left without organizational participation may threaten organizational reputation and through it also organizational legitimacy (Deephouse & Carter, 2005). Moreover, achieving a good reputation is in part becoming the currency of choice for operating in the new media environment, as potential customers and collaborators read online reviews and previous feedback (Hunt, 2009; Shih, 2009; Solis, 2009).

DYNAMICS OF ISSUE ARENAS

The issue arenas are like stages or platforms (Goffman, 1959) in virtual or tangible surroundings; the scenery changes continuously as a result of the interactions between the players and developments in the social environment. Issue arenas are dynamic and require ongoing attention. On issue arenas, ideas and issues are discussed that are of interest to both stakeholders and the organization. There are several potential actors for each arena. Depending on their timing and stance, these actors either want to have a say on the issue and mount onto the stage, or remain passive offstage, in the audience. If an organization fails to give its point of view, some stakeholders' opinions quickly dominate the arena, as in the case of anti-corporate movements by distinct groups that dynamically come together and join large-scale campaigns

(Karagianni & Cornelissen, 2006). (For issue arenas of the nuclear energy debate, see Luoma-aho & Vos, 2009).

The current changes in the media landscape also affect the issue arenas (Phillips & Young, 2009; Miel & Faris, 2008; Solis, 2009). The debate in the issue arena may either take place in tangible, traditional media or virtual, new media. One of these may be dominant, and this may change over time. Furthermore, different actors may be active in the traditional versus the new media. For example, in the debate on nuclear energy governmental and business actors may be more active in the traditional media, while environmental pressure groups dominate the new media environment (Luoma-aho & Vos, 2009). Organizations have participated in debates in traditional media for decades, although mainly from the organization's point of view (see Kiousis, Popescu & Mitrook, 2007) and often in rather predictable settings. In the virtual, new arenas, such as the internet and various social media, organizations and practitioners have only recently been active in debates, using tactics such as search engine optimization and blog measurement. The focus of interest is often in finding patterns in networks of hyperlinked websites (e.g. Elmer, 2006) as well as the connections and interwoven networks in the blogosphere (e.g. Finin et al., 2007). Monitoring the online environment and the actors that are active there is especially important as discussions on the Internet may rapidly change issue priorities (Coombs, 2002). Moreover, the online discussions tend to form at an earlier stage than publicity in the traditional media (Heath, 1998).

Often there is not just one, but several issue arenas that the organization must simultaneously take part in, just as there are several stakeholders. An energy company, for example, may take part in an economic debate about consequences of a recession, but also in environmental discussions. The company, just like its stakeholders, might be active in one arena

and at the same time be part of the passive public in another. The level of activity of the actors depends on what is happening in the issue arenas, a phenomenon that the traditional stakeholder maps fail to describe. The results of what is going on between the actors in the different issue arenas will all be reflected in the reputation of the organization. The idea of multiple issue arenas establishes a new role of the organization as merely one player among many, with the main focus on issues, not the organization. Moreover, the various issue arenas are often interrelated and characterized by competition for space; public attention is unevenly distributed and varies over time (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). When a fierce debate is going on in one arena, it may attract more players on the stage and also a bigger passive audience. Meanwhile, other arenas may lack stage activity and audiences. Attention may also shift from one arena to another, which may cause a change in the perceived relative importance of the various issues. Furthermore, a hot debate in one arena may spread and activate discussion in other arenas connected to the issue (Hilgartner & Bosk, 1988). Consequently, since several issues are reflected in the reputation of an organization, their relative weight may differ in time (Vos & Schoemaker, 2006).

In issue arenas, there is a tug of war between the "co-creation of reality" and "manipulation through propaganda" (Heath, 2006). This is a struggle of power, where all players have their own agendas and strategies. Political actors, for example, can use agenda setting and framing in the debate about issues (Stone, 2001). They can be active in multiple arenas, and may or may not use means consistent with the symmetrical ideals of relationship building (Berger, Hertog & Park, 2002). The goal for the organization's public relations, however, is to maintain mutually beneficial relationships, and this can seldom be achieved without hearing the multiple voices of the actors that are present. Stakeholders who are willing to work together on issues with the organization may add to the organizational social capital (Luoma-aho, 2005).

Organizations can 'shop' for the best suited arenas to participate in and express their point of view (Baumgartner & Jones, 1993). In cases where suitable arenas are few or there are barriers to entry (for example in the case of closed groups e.g. on Facebook), organizations can also try to create new issue arenas or provide a platform for discussion (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Moreover, strategies and tactics used in the issue arenas could attempt to either expand or shrink the scope of the issue arena (Schattschneider, 1960). For example, the issue of nuclear power could involve the CO2-free energy production or rather focus on waste problems only. Meanwhile other actors can also change their behavior, and coalitions can be formed in issue arenas as additional stakeholders provide support (Bridges, 2004).

Stakeholders' expectations formed in the various issue arenas guide how the organization is perceived. Organizations aim to live up to expectations (Wan & Schell, 2007), but beyond that, organizations have to live up to stakeholders' preferences and demands. In fact, corporate social responsibility literature advises to do more than comply with expectations (e.g. Birch, 2008), because demands tend to rise, for example in the case of increased organizational transparency and reporting. To promote shared understanding and to network and negotiate in such a complex and diverse external environment, organizations need to nurture polyphony and diversity in their internal environment (Christensen et al., 2005; Christensen et al., 2008). This means that organizations are no longer at the center of communication and success may require incorporating the voice of actors with diverse perspectives (Carroll & Mui, 2008). Furthermore, organizations have to be aware of and able to interpret various environmental stimuli (Sutcliff, 2001); thus a process of ongoing monitoring of activities in issue arenas is required. Hallahan (2001) suggests beginning dialogue by including 'outreach activities', to establish and maintain contact with influential actors in a community.

CORPORATE COMMUNICATION AND ISSUE ARENAS

Corporate communication and public relations both deal with organizational publics and stakeholders. Public relations co-creates shared social meanings and hence facilitates cooperation (Heath, 2006). This boundary-spanning or interface function (Cornelissen et al., 2006; Cheney and Christensen, 2001) is central for issue arenas, where communication is seen as a bridging activity (Grunig, 2006). The creation of shared meaning lays the foundation for collaboration, although shared meaning can only be realized in part because reality is enacted and changing (Jaatinen & Lavikka, 2008).

Flynn (2006) suggests a multidimensional perspective where dialogue, collaboration and negotiation with multiple stakeholders occur simultaneously, while maintaining a zone of balance, an equilibrium that satisfies mutual interests. The role of public relations is thus to keep the virtues of 'public discourse' (Heath, 2006), as the debate could be high-jacked by extreme stakeholders, thereby hindering problem solving and collaboration by others, e.g. the current polarization in the immigration debate in Western Europe.

Issue arenas propose a paradigm change, a shift in focus from organization-centered thinking and unilateral relationship management toward monitoring and dialogue on issue arenas that are outside the organization's control. As the traditional media sphere gives way to a growing number of new and social media (Miel & Faris, 2008), the number of potential issue arenas is increasing. The environment has become more complex and quicker to change. The rules of conduct are very different from those guiding traditional PR, and attempts to control an arena in the traditional manner of issues management can even easily lead to conflict and hostility toward the organization. In this new environment, social media reputation as well as search engine reputation (X, 2009) is more important than before. The internet acts as a

collective memory, and words once posted may never be forgotten. Still, a passive attitude is counseled against. The organizational approach should be active, even 'offensive' when the other option is defensive (Kramer & Kania, 2006).

Because various stakeholder interests are often competing, one strategy might no longer be the best alternative; instead different strategies should be applied depending on the needs of each issue arena. In this way, organizations can utilize a mixed-motive perspective and at the same time aim at various positions on a continuum from advocacy or zero-sum, to collaboration and mutual gains (Flynn, 2006; Hoffman et al., 1999). Therefore, various strategies need to be considered, for example by using quadrants suggested by several authors that differentiate strategies depending on the process of meaning creation, e.g. connotation versus denotation, one way advocacy versus two way collaboration, and symmetry versus asymmetry (Van Ruler, 2004; Flynn, 2006; Grunig, 1992). The result should be a dynamic mosaic of multiple strategies for multiple publics moved by multiple issues. Overall, a balance should be maintained that best fits the current organizational environment (Flynn, 2006).

Although the idea of utilizing multiple strategies is not new, the complexity of the situation is greatly increased when one realizes that various dynamic issue arenas with multiple players have to be considered at the same time. Moreover, the strategies utilized should all be adjustable and flexible when changes occur (Carrikk & Mui, 2008). It may be prudent to focus less on an unavoidably great number of stakeholder specific strategies and instead more on "umbrella strategies" for each issue arena that provide common starting points, for example, the profiling strategy an energy company may use to communicate with various stakeholders on an environmental issue. The organization can consider its positioning related to the various issue

arenas, as is customary when positioning the organization in economic markets too. It can clarify its position with key message strategies for each issue arena.

Not just negotiation of meaning but also negotiation of intentions becomes a key task. This can work both ways, as Grunig (2006) advocates communication as a bridging activity, in which organizations build linkages to transform and reconstitute the organization in new ways, rather than using public relations as a buffering activity to justify the organization as it is. As the relevant issue arenas are not always easy to find, organizations wishing to maintain their legitimacy have to monitor the various issue arenas and the different points of view of the players involved (Vos & Schoemaker, 2006). The results of monitoring may lead to a strategy of participation in these arena debates, or it may lead to adaptation of the organization's activities.

DISCUSSION

'Issue arenas' was introduced here as a novel way of looking at and managing the complexities outlined above. Today, it is issues and discussions, often not organizations that are at the center of communication. The interaction between organizations and stakeholders is not new, but through new and social media, stakeholders can express their opinions to a wider public and build constituencies easier. The changing dynamics of the organizational environment need continuous monitoring, since what is important is finding a balance in the relevant issue arenas. This is similar to the birth of 'issues management' in the 1970s as a response to changes in the regulatory and business climates (Berger, 2001). For example, an energy company needs to monitor discussions on green energy but also discussions on energy dependence and many other issues. Looking at issues management in the perspective of multiple arenas in which the organization may not be in the center but needs multiple strategies to communicate with various stakeholders, offers a way to a better understanding of stakeholder interactions of today, as

organizations can no longer expect to be in a dominant role, but instead must find the relevant

arenas for each specific issue. Identifying issues should precede identifying stakeholders. We

suggest the following axioms for further research.

1. An issue arena is a place where the public debate about an issue is conducted.

2. The interaction takes place in the traditional or virtual media.

3. The actors can be active or passive, one could say 'on the stage' or 'in the audience'.

4. The arena is dynamic; actors may be more or less active when time passes or leave

   entirely to go to another arena.

5. An organization can be active in multiple arenas, monitoring actions of other parties

   and/or engaging in actively in the interaction.

6. As the arenas are interrelated an organization needs to coordinate and balance its

   communication strategies.

The current complex environment calls for active participation in various issue arenas, to be

involved as a major player in co-producing the outcomes. The underlying assumption is that if an

issue arena is identified early on, the organization has a better chance at becoming one of the

major actors on stage, whereas being the last to know often leads to sitting with the audience (X,

2009). For example, when an energy company would enter a virtual arena on nuclear power late

because it relied on traditional media only, it will be difficult to gain influence when the virtual

arena is at that point already dominated by opponents. Moreover, the complex mosaic of

strategies calls for an integral approach to, on the one hand, utilize strategies that fit different

issue arenas communicating with the various participants in the debate while, on the other hand,

also maintain a balance zone (Flynn, 2006) and a clear identity of the organization when active

in these issue arenas. For example, an energy company needs a strategy that fits the issue discourse on nuclear energy, but at the same time is active in other issue arenas and its profiling strategy and style of operating should not differ too much between the various arenas, as this may lead to an unclear identity. Also, the demand for current organizational training in the new media landscape is growing as many organizations now realize the increased importance of participation in the virtual issue arenas.

The picture this creates is very different from the traditional static stakeholder model centered on the organization. It shows a multifaceted networked organization that operates in a dynamic global environment and actively monitors and participates in various issue arenas with multiple stakeholders using multiple strategies. Because of the interrelatedness of the issue arenas and the conflicting stakeholder views dilemmas will arise.

In this new environment, the role of corporate communications and public relations is broadening beyond the traditional relationship management to issue arena monitoring. Addressing multiple publics involved in multiple issue arenas characterized by non-traditional power relationships could help conceptualize the 'flatter' world that new media and its communities have created. Yet the idea of issue arenas also has its weaknesses. First, it does not simplify the organizational environment, nor does it offer clear advice. Further, it points to the need for multiple strategies, advice that improperly carried out can lead to confusion. Combining stakeholder theory and issue management, however, provides a larger overview than has been available hitherto, and it also describes the organizational environment more accurately than previous stakeholder theories.

In this paper we bring together a number of different perspectives and theories; not all related concepts and theories could be fully explained as this requires further research. The

suggested axioms need further research and empirical testing across cultures and industries. There is also a need for case studies to further clarify the relevance and opportunities related to this shift in thinking towards issue arenas. Instead of trying to define the different stakeholders and their preferred ways of communication, practitioners and academics should focus next on identifying the different issues and understanding the dynamics of the arenas that concern the organization. Recognizing first the relevant issues will lead to the identification of the various stakeholders. Furthermore, an up-to-date overview of the players in the various issue arenas needs to be maintained, in order to enable the organization to develop multiple strategies for multiple stakeholders. This will, however, require a change of mindset because in the new environment it is not so much coordination of messages that is needed, but rather a dialogue to achieve a delicate balance that respects and involves the various actors. Increased monitoring will mean keeping abreast of the debate in the issue arenas, which in turn will mean keeping track of both the physical, traditional media as well as the new, virtual media. New tools will be needed along with more research to better understand this change.

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