Examining Usefulness of Model of Resource Assessment as a Possible Tool for Gaining Public Relations' Influence

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines possible uses of a Model of Resource Assessment (MRA) created by the authors as a basis for developing strategic communication plans as part of an effort to extend research on public relations strategy. MRA conceptualizes PR strategy as the planning process of narrowing disconnects between stakeholders' perceptions of an organization's resources (See figure 1). The fundamental premises of the model were previously tested and supported. The current study investigates 1) whether stakeholders recognize the effectiveness of the public relations strategy model (MRA) and 2) whether the internal members' professional status is related to acceptance of the model by key stakeholders such as upper management.

Approach/methodology – The excellence theory and situational theory have both focused on the role of public relations in strategic management and provided the basic directions of how public relations function could contribute to an organization's strategic management (Grunig, 2006; Bowen, 2006). In the same vein, Dozier (1992) also contends that public relations function should move beyond technique to defend its organizational stature against encroachment. However, public relations professionals have not fully gained their influence in strategic management because of a lack of tools to integrate organizational goals into public relations strategies (Chang, 2000). Therefore, it is critical for public relations research to provide more tools and knowledge related to public relations strategy development. The present research focuses on exploring stakeholders' acceptance of the newly introduced public relations strategy building model (MRA) through a web survey (n = 312) of members of an agriculture college (students/staff/faculty/alumni) at a large Midwestern university. Regarding the research question of how the internal members' professional status influence the acceptation of the model, a part of web survey data (n = 118) of administrative staff and directors was analyzed. Interviews with the college's communication director were also conducted in order to obtain deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics and implications.

Findings – The results support possible use and effectiveness of MRA. There is general agreement that MRA can be effective for realizing the organizational goals. However, there is a significant difference of accepting MRA among two groups of different professional status. Administrative directors are more willing to accept MRA compared to administrative staff.

Practical implication/Originality – This research provides important theoretical and practical values. Communication managers should actively utilize more theory-based public relations strategy development tools such as MRA. The findings show that having more strategic tools for

planning might help public relations function to prove itself worthy of being included in the dominant coalition.

Attaining power and gaining influence has been the center of ongoing conversation among public relations practitioners and scholars. According to the survey conducted by Berger and Reber (2006), the most important issue in public relations listed by professionals was "to gain a seat at the decision-making table" (p.5). The failure of securing a seat at the decision-making table has negatively affected, not only, an individual public relations professionals' self-esteem but also the profession's legitimacy as a strategic management function. The excellence theory and situational theory have both focused on the role of public relations in strategic management and provided the basic directions of how public relations function could contribute to an organization's strategic management (Grunig, 2006; Bowen, 2006). In the same vein, Dozier (1992) also contends that public relations function should move beyond technique to defend its organizational stature against encroachment. Research findings suggest that public relations professionals have not fully gained their influence in strategic management because of a lack of emphasis on manager's role and the skills to promote them. Therefore, it is critical for public relations research to provide more tools and knowledge related to manager's role and competences, such as public relations strategy development. Some studies suggest that public relations professionals' limited access to the dominant coalition is the result of the narrow view of communication strategy research, which only describes the operational planning process of public relations campaign strategy (Steyn, 2003; Moss & Warnaby, 2000). In management and marketing literature, many theory-driven and applicable models for strategy development have been provided. Managers equipped with these theory based models and skills for strategy development have been acknowledged by their organizations to be effective. Thus, there should be many tools and models that can be used for PR practitioners in public relations strategy development.

This study examines possible uses of a Model of Resource Assessment (MRA) created by the authors as a basis for developing strategic communication plans as part of an effort to extend research on public relations strategy. MRA conceptualizes PR strategy as the planning process of narrowing disconnects between stakeholders' perceptions of an organization's resources (See figure 1). The fundamental premises of the model were previously tested and supported. The current study investigates 1) whether stakeholders recognize the effectiveness of the public relations strategy model (MRA) and 2) whether the internal members' professional status is related to acceptance of the model. In order to investigate stakeholders' acceptance of this newly introduced public relations strategy building model (MRA), the present authors conducted a web survey (n = 312) of members of an agriculture college (students/staff/faculty/alumni) at a large Midwestern university. Regarding the research question of how the internal members' professional status influences the acceptance of the model, a part of web survey data (n = 118) of administrative staff and directors was analyzed.

Model of Resource Assessment

Model of Resource Assessment aims to help public relations practitioners perform better with a broader and more accurate directional guide when they develop a communication strategy. According to the resource-based view in management research (Barney, 1991), resources are valuable, rare, not easy to imitate, and non-substitutable organizational assets (capabilities,

organizational processes, information, knowledge, etc.). In this model, resources are defined as an organization's core strengths that become sources of effective public relations campaigns. This Model of Resource Assessment defines a Resources Profile as a unique set of an organization's resources, that shows the subset of its resources, and the area in which the organization can focus to enable further improvements in communication efforts (See figure 1). Based on these key concepts, of Resources and Resources Profile, We suggest a Model of Resource Assessment as a technique to build strategic directions for an annual or multi-year public relations plan for an organization. This Model of Resource Assessment involves the following two phases for public relations strategy development: (1) identifying the list of resources of an organization among key decision makers, (2) examining schema incongruity (the perception gap about an organization's resources between internal and external members) and its impact.

Figure 1: Model of Resource Assessment, A conceptual Matrix

Internal members' perception of the college's resources profile

External members' perception of the college's resources profile
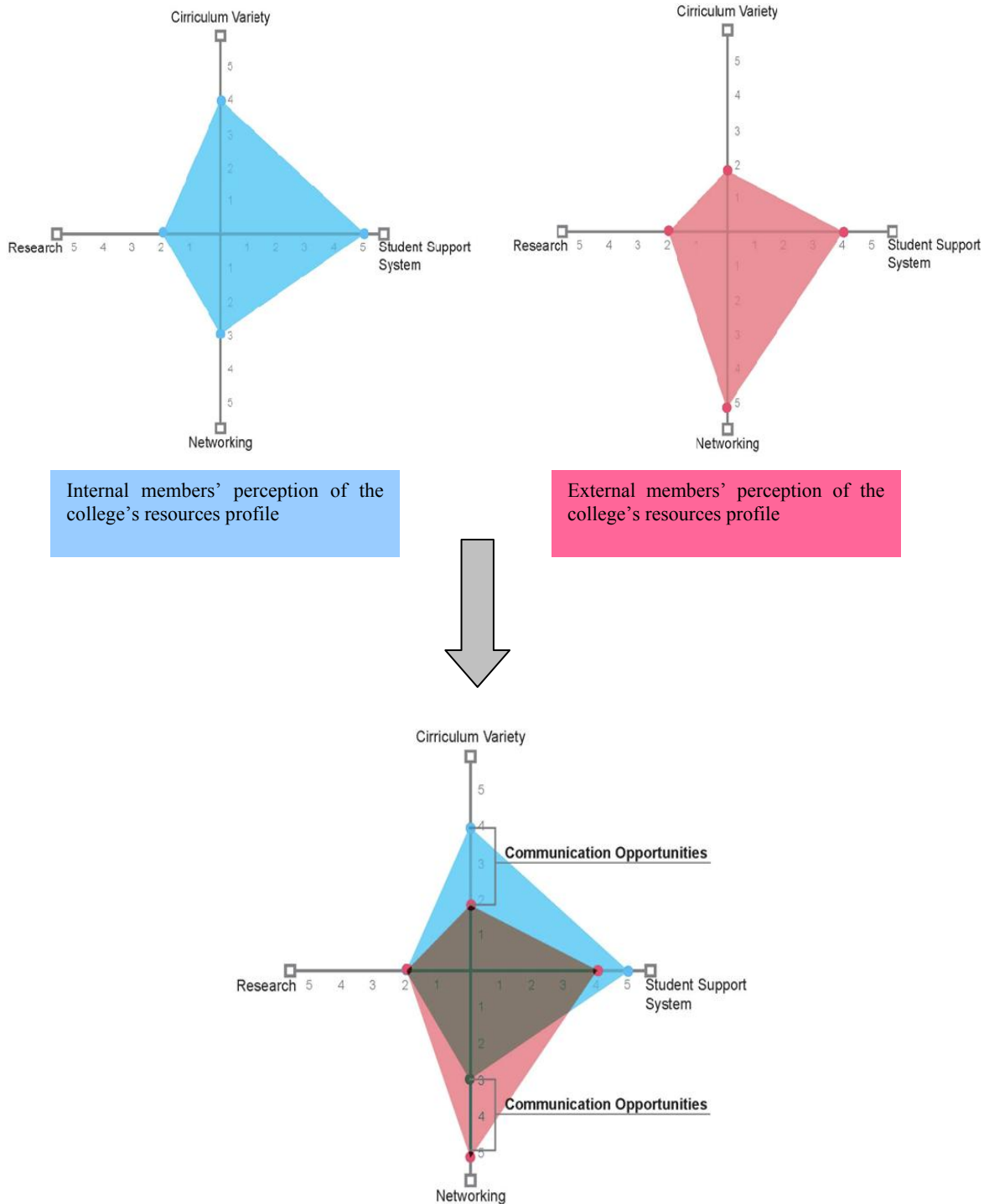
Note: This model involves the following two phases of public relations strategy development: (1) identifying the list of resources (core strengths) of an organization among key decision makers, (2) examining schema incongruity (the perception gap about an organization's resources between internal and external members) and its impact. In this conceptual matrix, 'curriculum variety', 'research', 'student support system' and 'networking' have been identified as a college's resources, The different perceptions about the resource profile have been identified as the area where communication opportunities exist.

Conceptualization

Gaining influence through enhancing public relations manager roles and competences

Power has been described as a capacity to influence organizational activities and resource allocations while influence as the process of how power is exercised (L.A. Grunig, 1992; Pfeffer 1981; Plowman, 1998). Berger and Reber (2006) propose that power and influence should be treated as the same thing, or as "the ability to get things done by affecting the perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions, decisions, statements, and behaviors of other" (p.5). This study will use power and influence interchangeably while stressing the exercise of power through professional competences and strategies.

The multiple sources have been identified as the basis of power and influence. For power, studies have shown that it comes from formal authority, problem-solving expertise and relationships, and enactment of the managerial role, etc (Berger, 2005; Dozier, 1992;Yukl, Guinan, & Sottolano, 1995). Professionals usually consider public relations experts as powerful when they are active participants in strategic planning and decision making process (Berger & Reber, 2006). Also, it has been recognized that influence might come from having the persuasive power to convince the upper management at the decision making table (Coombs, 1998; Serini, 1993). More specifically, the public relations suggestions should be based, not on subjectivity or compulsion, but on rational arguments from research in order to be recognized as a strategic constituent of the organization (Bowen, 2006).

As gaining influence in public relations has become challenging due to many organizational and individual restraints, there have been growing concerns over encroachment – the assignment to non-public relations professionals control of the public relations function (Dozier, 1988). Encroachment has been considered critical because it could adversely affect the advancement of public relations function in a great deal. Despite overall acceptance of the organizational value from the public relations function among upper management, it is less visible at a strategic level and often without a specific budget due to encroachment (Ruler & Lange, 2003). When public relations function is under control of a management department, it is less likely that public relations perspectives will be well presented at the decision-making table.

In addition to the structural issues related to encroachment, some scholars pay attention to the public relations professionals' roles and competences. Dozier (1992) contended "Encroachment is an inevitable byproduct of a calling that fails to rise above technique" (p.352). Recent roles research has widely quoted Dozier's manager-technician role typology, while focusing on the manager role. This implies that there is a general consensus among scholars and professionals about the needs to emphasize the strategic dimensions of public relations roles. The roles studies based on strategic contingencies theory have suggested that strategic power is rooted in a public relations professionals' manager role because there are positive relationship between manager roles and being an active participant in decision making process (Fiske & Larter, 1983). Furthermore, Lauzen (1992) suggests that increased manager role competencies and manage role enactment could help public relations function to win the intra-organizational power struggle and positively guide an individual professional's perception about the function. Recent developments in studies about manage role inventory that specifically outlines the competences required for the task provide meaningful insights for further advancement of public relations function. Initially, Dozier (1987, 1988) contended that professionals could attain a manger role through research based environmental scanning. More recently, the skills of strategic planning has been recognized as the major competences of the manager. Lauzen (1992) suggest that practitioners undertake strategic planning and policy formation when they pursue the

manager role. Upper managements value decision making and problem-solving skills of their public relations managers more than others (Wakefield & Cottone, 1987). According to Turk and Russell (1991), ninety-six percent of the respondents highlighted strategic planning skills as important or very important. Also, public relations managers must be able to attain the skills and knowledge about organizational management essentials including business model, key performance indicators and the operating system at a level of Board peers (Murray & White, 2005). Gregory further identified the specific competence inventory that is required for effective public relations managers across the industry and strategic dimensions including (2008): strategic/long-term view of thinking broadly and strategically; investigating and analyzing complex issues based on clear analytical thinking; formulating strategies and concepts to provide solutions, etc.

Logic and previous research suggest the importance of attaining manager role competence especially in strategic planning dimension. Thus, we posit that public relations manager should be able to provide strategic public relations plans based on understanding of the organization's business model and goals in order to gain influence in the organization.

Strategy in public relations studies

PR professionals are now expected to provide more insight and leadership in the areas of communication that deal with "management, trends, issues, policy, and corporate structure" (Smith, 2002, p. 1). However, researchers acknowledge a lack of research focused on public relations strategy, as well as a limited view of current research focused only on describing operational planning process of public relations campaign strategy (Steyn, 2003; Moss & Warnaby, 1998). It is evident that public relations research should widen its perspective of strategy from a mere description of the strategy development process to a systematic framework that is applicable to public relations strategy content development.

There is a school of thought emphasizing the formulation of public relations strategy. Some of the members and examples of their work are listed here: Marston (1963) suggested the RACE system (research, action, communication, evaluation), Hendrix (2002) used ROPE (research, objective, programming, evaluation), Kendall (1999) offered RAISE (research, adaptation, implementation strategy, evaluation), Smith (2002) called his strategic planning process the nine steps of strategic public relations (formative research, strategy, tactics and evaluative research). These frameworks have provided a basis for more structured and coherent guidelines of PR planning, while it is often the case that these apparently straightforward processes "do not provide enough information on which to base the plan" (Gregory, 2000, p. 45). The current strategy frameworks offered by public relations research depend heavily on the personal judgment of PR professionals' for incorporating research data into the general strategy and tactics. Thus, it is often hard to claim the public relations strategy was formulated through scientific and rational analysis. In order to enjoy the benefits of strategy in public relations, a more refined approach of strategy and a better tool is needed. There should be a theoretical model that offers an implementation strategy closely connected not only to communication campaigns but also to the organizations' business plans. The current public relations strategy studies are confined to "what" and "how" to communicate the message without providing a broad framework from organizational point of view. Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994) posit a strategy phase after a situation analysis phase, which proposes to answer the question of "what should we do and say, and why?" Smith (2002) defines the strategy as "the process making decisions dealing with the expected impact of the communications, as well as the nature of the

communication itself" (p.10). Despite the benefits of PR strategy emphasizing the link between organization performance and public reputation, most of the strategy development process frameworks and tools have focused only on organization image and message promotion, without delineating the ways to connect organizational objectives and public relations objectives. Public relations research should offer more tools and frameworks to identify the linkage between organizational performance and communication strategy; using the necessary methodology to empirically prove them effective.

The resource-based view from management literature is useful for strategy development and clearly shows how excellent organizations utilize their strengths in their strategy. Barney (1991) defines resources as an organization's internal strengths. These strengths enable an organization to succeed at environmental opportunities through better response. Hitt, Nixon, Clifford, and Coyne (1999) highlight the role of resources in a firm's success by presenting evidence of direct relationships among a firm's resources, strategy, and performance. Building on the assumptions that resources are heterogeneous and idiosyncratic, researchers have identified their prominent features; such as value, rareness, uniqueness, and non-substitutability. After analyzing a variety of research done by many other researchers, Barney (1991) proposed a convenient means of classifying resources into three types (p. 101). Physical capital resources include physical assets; such as the technology used in a firm, a firm's plant and equipment, its geographic location, and its access to raw materials. Human capital resources include the capabilities of organization members; such as training, experience, judgment, intelligence, as well as the insight of individual managers and workers. Finally, organizational capital resources encompass organizational process capabilities; such as a firm's formal reporting structure, its formal and informal planning, controlling, and coordinating systems, and informal relations both inside and outside the firm.

Many of the concepts derived from analysis of the resource-based view are useful in explaining how public relations strategies should work to incorporate different resources.

This is because public relations efforts also employ the wide variety of an organization's resources for setting communication goals, drafting the content of its messages, and implementing public relations campaigns. Ni (2006) made the first notable effort to incorporate the resource-based view into public relations research. Ni examined whether or not an organization's relationships with publics can be regarded as resources, and whether or not relationship development contributes to the implementation of organizational strategies through a qualitative research method. Ni concludes that relationships possess the key features of resources; such as value, rareness, uniqueness, and non-substitutability. Ni's research is meaningful as it provided the first empirical evidence proving the link between public relations research and the resource-based view.

The resource-based view provides useful guidelines not only for business but also for public relations strategy development; the resource-based view touches upon the universal question of "with what" and "how to develop a successful strategy." The resource-based view suggests that finding and choosing the right resources has a very close connection to formulating a successful strategy. If resources drive some successful strategies, than the process of identifying, choosing and matching the right types of resources are critical for developing a successful public relations strategy. Specifically, by adopting the resource-based view that provides analysis of an organization's internal strengths, PR strategy can be more closely connected to an organization's business plan. Unlike PR strategy based on situational factors, and external factors such as the target public's overall perception of the organization's image, PR

strategy based on the target public's perceptions of an organization's resources (internal strengths) will provide an explicit and easy way to evaluate both the directions and the goals of a public relations strategy. Furthermore, the resource-based view provides the practical strategy development process of auditing the interaction between key publics and organizations; the resource-based view sees that the interaction between information from consumers and the usage of resources decides the direction of strategy development (Wilson, 1999). Thus, it is an important phase of building PR strategy to investigate both how key public groups perceive an organization's resources, and an organization's reaction to the key publics' perception of its resources. We posit MRA as possible tool for public relations strategic planning and the basic assumptions and propositions have been tested by previous study. Recognizing the gap between the roles research that emphasizing manager roles and competences in strategic planning and the theoretical models offered in public relations literature for strategic planning, it is necessary to test if MRA can be accepted as possible solution for public relations strategy development.

Factors related to acceptance of MRA

The findings from persuasion theories provide meaningful insights and fundamental rules for explaining the acceptance of MRA by an organization's key stakeholders. The relevant psychological theory will help to explain how key public's acceptance of MRA will differ according to one's group identification and professional status.

Personal relevance Roser (1990) suggests that the high involvement with the information leads to more attention to the message and people will translate thoughts about the message into either favorable attitudes or negative attitudes. Liberman and Chaiken (1996) propose "personal relevance directly affects attitudes in the absence of any persuasion attempt" (p. 275). According to their study (1996), high-relevance subjects were either more positive or either more negative depending on the issues.

Based on the findings from the aforementioned research, We suggest that internal members will evaluate MRA higher than external members, because internal members have high involvement with the college's communication activities in comparison to external members. In addition, internal members are more likely to be frequently updated about the changes of the college's resources. The proximity of internal members with the college will likely lead to positive evaluation.

Professional status Tjosvold (1987) posits that people at different professional status are likely to have different perspectives for information processing and evaluation. Research findings indicate that the people at different professional status have different expectations and prior knowledge regarding the issues and those gaps result in different attitude (Eysenck and Keane, 1990). Thus, We expect to find different levels of acceptance of a Model of Resource Assessment dependant on participants' professional status.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to see if a Model of Resource Assessment can be accepted and utilized as a tool to build public relations strategy. Based on the findings about the needs to develop more strategic planning models and the relationship between personal relevance and professional status (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Lee and Schumann, 2004; Tjosvold, 1987), We propose following research questions:

RQ1: Do the evaluations by organization's internal members (students and staff/faculty) and external members (alumni) differ regarding the effectiveness of a Model of Resource Assessment for better communication results?

RQ2: What is the relationship between internal members' professional status and their acceptance of a Model of Resource Assessment?

Method

Interviews and web survey are the two primary methods for this research project. Many researchers have agreed that triangulation strengthens the total research project (Morgan, 1997). Web survey is the main research method that answers the primary question of where disconnects lie between actual resources and perceived resources, and how it should be understood for better communication planning. An agriculture college at a large Midwestern university is the research subject. Besides the college's need to have a strategic approach for public relations campaigns, it is a ideal research subject as the college has dynamic set of resources and various target populations. The college is a leading agriculture college with long history, various academic programs and dynamic internal and external key publics. The communication director of the college was interviewed five times in order to identify and understand the organization's key populations. In the web survey, around 200 internal members (students, staffs and directors) and 76 external members (alumni) were recruited. The Web survey was conducted over three weeks, from March 10 to March 28 in 2008. The URL for the Web questionnaire was distributed to CAFNR students, staff, directors, and alumni. The URLs were https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=aIuHoN11fS_2biGGRfBMk5Mg_3d_3d (for alumni), https://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=_2btBHVR43fRPDRSSDSP5pZQ_3d_3d (for students, staff, directors). Two follow-up emails were sent a week after the first emailing to CAFNR internal members, while three follow-up emails were sent for CAFNR external members. Of the 541 internal members (students, staff/directors) and 450 external members (alumni), the survey yielded 312 total responses for a 31 percent response rate. Among the total responses, 94 responses were students, 142 responses were staff/directors and 76 responses were alumni.

Table 1

Demographic Statistics (N=312)

		INTERNAL (Student/Staff /Directors)		EXTERNAL (Alumni)		TOTAL	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Age	Under 20	10	4.8	0	0	10	3.9
	20-29	87	33.6	2	4.1	89	34.4
	30-39	26	10	3	6.1	29	11.2
	40-49	38	14.7	12	24.5	50	19.3
	50-59	35	13.5	12	24.5	47	18.1

Category		N	%	N	%	N	%
	60 and older	14	5.4	20	40.8	34	13.1
Gender	Female	95	45	10	40.4	105	59.6
	Male	116	55	39	59.6	155	40.4
Education	High school	85	40.1	0	0	85	32.6
	College graduate	31	14.6	0	0	31	11.9
	Master	41	19.3	26	53.1	67	25.7
	Ph.D	44	20.8	20	40.8	64	24.5
	Law or Medical degree	1	.5	3	6.1	4	1.5
	Other	10	4.7	0	0	10	3.8
Contact	Very often	103	49.5	8	16.3	111	43.2
	Often	44	21.2	17	34.7	61	23.7
	Sometimes	21	10.1	18	36.7	39	15.2
	Rarely	32	15.4	5	10.2	37	14.4
	Never	8	3.8	1	2	9	3.5

Notes: Some respondents did not verify their demographic information. Thus, there is some variance per item.

Results and Discussion

Results

Of the 312 participants, only around 260 people provided their demographic information. Among 210 internal members, about 46% (N=97) are under 30 years old as this group includes student participants. In contrary, of the 49 external members, 40.8% (N=20) are older than 60. Among 260 participants who identified their gender, 59.6% (N=155) are male and 40.4% (N=105) are female. For education, 40.1% (N=85) of internal members are with high school diploma as internal group includes undergraduate students. The 93.9% (N=46) of external members are with either master's or doctoral degree. Overall, most of participants reported that they contact the college very often or often. (N=177, 66.9%).

Analysis of RQ1

RQ1 is to examine if there is difference in evaluating the effectiveness of a Model of Resource Assessment between internal and external members. Three different questions were asked to measure the effectiveness of a Model. The Cronbach's Alpha test result (α=.767) has shown that the 3 variables were reasonable to be considered as the same category measuring the effectiveness of a Model of Resource Assessment.

A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on 3 dependent variables (three different questions to measure participant's evaluation of the effectiveness of a Model of Resource Assessment) with the type of group (internal members, and external members) as the independent variable. The results of the MANOVA and univariate ANOVA are shown in Table 2. There is no significant multivariate effect of different group types on the set of dependent variables, $F (3, 260) = .654$, $p < .581$. In addition, there are no significant univariate

effects of different group types on the dependent variables. Means and standard deviations are presented in Table 3.

In conclusion, RQ1 of examining internal and external member's evaluation of a Model of Resource assessment was not supported. However, for both internal and external members somewhat agreed that a Model of Resource Assessment can be effective.

Table 2
Multivariate Analysis of Variance for Group Types (Internal vs. External members)

Source	*Wilk's Lambda*	*F*	*Hypothesis df*	*Error df*	*p*	*Partial Eta Squared*
Group types (internal vs external members)	.993	.654	3	260	< .581	.007

Univariate Analysis of Variance for Group Types (Internal vs. External members)

Source		*SS*	*df*	*MS*	*F*	*p*	*Partial Eta Squared*
The more that the internal members and key public groups are "ON THE SAME PAGE" regarding RESOURCES, the more FAVORABLE will be the attitude toward the college expected (EFF1)							

Group type	1.429	1	1.429	.961	.328	.004
Error	389.602	262	1.487			

If internal members and key public groups are "ON THE SAME PAGE" regarding resources, it is primarily the result of SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION EFFORTS by the college (EFF2)						
Group type	.169	1	.169	.096	.757	.000
Error	460.070	262	1.756			

IF the internal members and the key public groups are "ON THE SAME PAGE' regarding RESOURCES, more UNDERGRADUATE APPLICATIONS to the college can be expected. (EFF3)						
Group type	.221	1	.221	.117	.733	.000
Error	495.900	262	1.893			

Table 3

Mean Scores on Dependent Variables for Group Types

Source	Group	Mean	SD
EFF1	Internal members	5.856	.085
	External members	6.036	.163
EFF2	Internal members	5.635	.092
	External members	5.696	.177
EFF3	Internal members	5.303	.095
	External members	5.232	.184

Analysis of RQ2

RQ2 was to investigate if there is a relationship between participants' professional status and their acceptance of a Model of Resource Assessment. Among participants, only the college's administrative staffs and directors were selected for this RQ. An independent samples *t*-test was conducted on one dependent variable (acceptance of a Model of Resource assessment) with participant's professional status (administrative staff or director) as the independent variable. The results of an independent samples *t*-test are $t(116) = -1.976, p < .05$. There is a significant difference of accepting a Model of Resource Assessment among two groups of different professional status. Administrative directors are more willing to accept a Model of Resource

Assessment compared to administrative staff.

Table 4

Independent t-Test for Group Types (Staff vs Director)

Source	t	df	Sig (two tailed)	Mean difference
Equal variance assumed	-1.976	116	.050	-.371

Mean Scores on Dependent Variables for Group Types (Staff vs Director)

Source	N	Mean	SD
Administrative staff	68	5.81	1.040
Administrative director	50	6.18	.962

Discussion

This study offered an initial assessment of a proposed Model of Resource Assessment as a useful technique to build a one-year or multi-year organizational communication strategy. Despite our optimistic view about the potential applicability of the model, our focus in this study is on the initial basic research designed to test and validate the framework.

No group difference (staff vs director) was found in the evaluation of MRA's usefulness as a model to build effective communication strategy. It is encouraging that regardless of group type, most of the participants recognized MRA as a productive model to identify key audiences' favorable attitudes and to provide directions for successful communication campaigns. In the current case, strategic shifts based on MRA results might lead to bottom line outcomes such as more applications from prospective students whose perception of the organization better match reality as perceived by management.

Roles research findings centered around promoting and enhancing the manager role and competencies such as formulating strategic planning. The pattern of findings suggested a possible means to fill the virtual void in public relations research to develop applicable tools and models for public relations professionals to undertake strategy development globally for their organizations. Based on the generally positive assessment by both internal and external publics who recognize MRA's usefulness, we posit that MRA can be a possible option for professionals in strategy development.

Building a communication strategy is a political process as well as a scientific process. It involves political decisions about communication direction and resource allocation. Thus, it is interesting that administrative directors are more willing to accept the model than administrative staff. Management literature indicates that people at different professional levels are likely to have different attitudes because of different expectations and prior experience. We assume administrative directors, who are more familiar with visioning and planning for the college, are

more willing to embrace a theoretical model that could create broader, yet still clear, directions for the college's communication efforts. By employing this model, professionals will be able to attain more support from upper management, as they accept the usefulness of the model and understand what MRA suggests. However, in order to fully benefit from the model, it will be necessary to explain what the model can do for an administrative staff when they implement public relations campaigns.

The understanding and acceptance of the model among communication managers and staff is critical. When the incongruity (different perception of the organization's resources) is identified, it is the responsibility of the key decision makers to lessen the incongruity by emphasizing resources that can alter perception or to present alternative schema with new resources that can be better perceived by the public.

In summary, the analysis from the series of interviews and the web survey supports the Model of Resource Assessment as an effective tool of strategy development. An organization using this model can benefit in many ways. Especially, participants recognized MRA's usefulness in the understanding of public relations strategy as the planning process of narrowing the gap between organization's resources and the key public's perception of resources. As Gregory (2000) says, it is important for a public relations strategy model to provide substantial information to guide the communication plan. Arguably, this Model of Resource Assessment provides enough information and direction to guide the communication programs and messages. In addition, the model has some practical implications. Users of this framework will find it easier (1) to share the analysis with the dominant coalition as the model shares the managerial perspectives of organizational core strengths, and also (2) to manage the strategy formulation process with dynamic, yet structured, phases of continuous reality check, organizational consensus making, and strategy reformulation.

Using a different research methodology with another sample at the next stage of model development will further validate the model. For example, experiments or intensive interviews will present more information concerning acceptance of MRA as well as its application in the strategic planning process. In addition, there is a need to test the model with more variant groups. In this research, alumni were defined as the external group. Alumni differ from students and employees, however, because alumni likely have considerable loyalty towards the college. Thus, it was difficult to find meaningful divergence in their attitudes and perceptions. Further research should include groups with greater variance in loyalty, prior knowledge, and involvement with the organization conducting the MRA assessment.

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