Roles and Functions of Public Relations Practitioners in the Resolution of Conflicts in the U.S. and Turkey

Tugce Ertem-Eray
University of Oregon

Eyun-Jung Ki, Ph.D.
University of Alabama

Abstract

This study explores the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in resolving the conflicts between organizations and their publics, drawn from samples from two countries, the U.S. and Turkey. Moreover, this study compares negotiation techniques public relations practitioners use in conflict resolution in the contexts of these different countries. Findings indicate that the roles of public relations practitioners are effective in the resolution of conflicts and both U.S. and Turkish practitioners prefer cooperation to other negotiation techniques. This study suggests that understanding cross-cultural differences has also become an important aspect of conflict resolution for public relations practitioners who work for multinational companies.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, public relations practitioners, roles of public relations, comparative study

Conflicts are prevalent in every organization. A survey shows that 85% of employees at all levels experience conflict to some degree in Europe, the U.S., and Brazil. Employees in the U.S. spend 2.8 hours per week dealing with conflict (CPP, 2008). Today, organizations face even more challenges to resolve conflicts for two reasons. First, new communication technologies have the potential to deteriorate efforts to communicate conflict management strategies (DiNardo, 2002). For example, social media can encourage the threat of conflict by providing a platform for collective behaviors, and it can be more difficult to manage these collective behaviors than individual ones (Moule et al., 2017). Second, conflict between organizations and their publics is seen as having beneficial as well as negative effects. In the past, conflicts were viewed as something to avoid (Song et al., 2006). In the 1970s, however, attitudes about organizational conflict shifted from resolving disputes to managing recurring controversies (Putnam, 1988). Conflict can be part of innovative and creative solutions to problems (Rahim, 2010; Tang et al., 2017). Therefore, conflict management not only plays a significant role in problem solving, but it may also be beneficial to the organization.

Empirical studies have documented that effective public relations help reduce conflict between an organization and the public (Grunig et al., 1998). For example, public relations can contribute to managing conflicts and reducing the cost of conflict that results from regulation and pressure (Huang, 2001). Scholars have investigated effective strategies of conflict resolution (Cameron et al., 2008; Gallicano, 2013; Holtzhausen & Roberts, 2009; Huang, 2009; Murphy, 1991; Plowman, 2005a; Plowman et al., 2004), but most have focused on the value of public relations in conflict resolution and have not addressed the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in resolving conflicts. For example, Huang (2009) analyzed how public relations strategies are functionally related to conflict resolution, and Qiu and Cameron (2007) focused on how strategic conflict management as a public relations tool can be effective in health communication. To fill this gap in the literature, this study will focus on the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in resolving conflicts between organizations and their publics, drawn from samples from two countries.

The conceptualization of public relations practitioners' roles has varied from a manager/technician dichotomy to more varied typologies. Several roles have been identified, including a communication executive role (Wright, 1995), reflective and expressive roles (Holmstrom, 1996), and agency profile (Toth et al., 1998). Recent changes in the business paradigm, such as the development of new communication technologies, have resulted in the emergence of new roles for public relations practitioners. For instance, Steyn (2009) identified four roles (manager, technician, reflective/strategist, and educational) based on the findings of various studies. Later, Steyn (2011) noted that the reflective/strategist role is to avoid or resolve conflicts between organizations and publics. This study draws on Steyn's (2009, 2011) role conceptualization because of its emphasis on resolving conflicts.

Although existing research has focused on the value of public relations in conflict resolution (e.g., Huang, 2009; Kelleher, 2003; Qiu & Cameron, 2007), the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in resolving conflicts between organizations and their publics in different countries still remain open territory to be explored. Moreover, most studies have examined public relations practitioners only in the U.S. (Anderson, 1992; Plowman, 1998, 2004; Shin & Cameron, 2004). To fill the gap in the literature, this study is designed to compare and contrast the roles and functions of public relations in conflict resolution in the U.S. and Turkey to

understand the effect of culture on conflict resolution. The reason for selecting these countries for examination is that they represent different cultural values. Turkey is a collectivist country based on cultural values and a commitment to group and family, while the U.S. is regarded as individualistic (Ayçiçegi-Dinn & Caldwell-Harris, 2011). The findings of this study will help identify similarities and differences of public relations practitioners' roles and functions in resolving conflicts across cultures as well as help improve public relations practice in Turkey and other countries where the field is still developing.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is threefold. First, this study will define the relationship between public relations practitioners' actions and their roles (manager, technician, reflective/strategist, and educational) as revealed by Steyn (2009) in resolving conflicts between organizations and their publics. In addition, since negotiation focuses on finding a solution that is acceptable for both parties in the conflict (Ni et al., 2018), this study will also analyze public relations negotiation strategies. In particular, this study will investigate the negotiation techniques developed by Plowman et al. (2004) that public relations practitioners have used most frequently to resolve conflicts. Third, this study will compare and contrast practitioners' actions and roles as well as negotiation techniques they use in conflict resolution in the contexts of different countries.

Literature Review

Roles and Functions of Public Relations Practitioners

In the literature, the role of public relations has evolved as scholars have extended the manager/technician typology. Broom and Smith (1978) introduced the concept of roles in public relations and conceptualized five roles: the expert prescriber, the technical services provider, the communication process facilitator, the problem solving/task facilitator, and the acceptant-legitimizer.[1] Later, they eliminated the role of acceptant-legitimizer, and only four roles remained. Broom (1979) found a high correlation among three roles: expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator (Dozier, 2005). Dozier (1984) revealed that manager and technician are the two major roles that dominated public relations roles research.

The manager and technician typologies have increasingly been criticized, and other scholars have also explored the roles of public relations at the organization level. In the late 1990s, scholars identified several new public relations roles and functions across countries. Wright (1995) described communication executives in the U.S. and Van Riel (1995) emphasized the window and mirror functions of the communications role in the Netherlands. Holmstrom (1996) revealed the reflective and expressive role in Denmark. Meanwhile, Toth et al. (1998)

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[1] The expert prescriber role identifies public relations problems and the solution that should be implemented. It has major responsibility for researching and defining the problem situation and designing the public relations program. Technical services providers provide specialized services the client deems necessary. This role gathers material for clients, helps write reports, edits clients' writing, and helps to package the final reports in attractive presentation formats. The communication process facilitator's primary function is to facilitate the exchange of information so the parties involved have adequate information to deal with each other and make decisions in their mutual interest. The problem-solving/task facilitator role takes place within a collaborative relationship in which the practitioner helps the client apply a systematic problem-solving process. The acceptant-legitimizer role assumes a nondirective, supportive role originating in the field of counseling psychology (Broom & Smith, 1978).

found a third role they called agency profile, while Hutton (1999) defined roles as a persuader, advocate, educator, crusader, information provider, and reputation manager in the U.S. The European Public Relations Body of Knowledge (EBOK) conducted a Delphi study in 25 European countries and found four primary roles of public relations: managerial, operational, reflective, and educational. Steyn and Butschi (2003) provided a view of the African continent and found similarities between different role conceptualizations. They emphasized that the strategist and reflective roles are similar although they are based on different theories and approaches; both roles perform the mirror function. In addition, three of the four EBOK roles (reflective, managerial, and operational) were found to be similar to the South African roles of strategist, manager, and technician (Steyn, 2011b; Steyn & Butschi, 2003).

As the development and popularity of social media transform the way we communicate, collaborate, consume, and create (Aral et al., 2013), social media also transforms public relations practice. This communication technology opens doors for public relations practitioners to communicate with a wide range of stakeholders (DiStaso et al., 2011) in easier, faster, and more effective ways. In light of these advances, Steyn (1999) categorized corporate strategic communication managers into three roles: strategist, managerial, and technician. Later, Steyn (2011) explained the roles of public relations strategists as defining and managing the subjects and expectations of stakeholders and society and determining communication policies to prevent conflict.

Steyn and Green (2006) developed a new theoretical basis for EBOK's reflective and educational roles and measured them among practitioners in South Africa. They conceptualized the role of strategist at the social/environmental/strategic management level and relabeled it as a reflective/strategist role.[2] Thus, Steyn's (2000) strategist role was extended conceptually by adding the reflective dimension (Steyn, 2009). Based on the findings of various studies (e.g., Van Ruler et al., 2001; Vercic et al., 2001) in Europe, the reflective and educational roles are different from each other. As a result, four roles (manager, technician, reflective/strategist, and educational) have been conceptualized in the public relations literature (Steyn, 2009). In consideration of this historical development, this study is based on this conceptualization of the four roles. Steyn (2009) stated that practitioners need to act as an early warning system, initiate dialogue between organizations and their publics, and draw management's attention to the publics' perspectives to prevent and solve conflicts. In this regard, managing conflicts is a key role of public relations practitioners. Therefore, this study asks:

RQ1: What are public relations practitioners' roles in their workplace in the U.S. and Turkey?

Conflict and Conflict Resolution

Definitions of conflict vary. Jeong (2008) defined it as "a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources" (p. 5). Another definition of conflict is "an interactive process manifested in incompatibility, disagreement or dissonance within or between social entities (i.e., individuals, group, organization, etc.)" (Rahim, 2002, p. 207). Conflict arises when parties perceive incompatible interests, goals, resources, prestige, power, and so on (Huang, 2001). McGoldrick and Lynch (2005) stated that conflicts arise when resources are scarce or weak, there is no communication between parties, parties have wrong or biased perceptions of

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[2] The reflective/strategist explains stakeholders' view to management, approaches issues with a concern for both organizations and stakeholders, and solves and avoids conflicts between organizations and the public (Steyn, 2009).

each other, there are unresolved grievances from the past, and power is unevenly distributed. All these definitions emphasize that conflict arises when parties have disagreements about anything specific to their relationships. This study focuses on the conflict that arises from disagreements between organizations and publics; therefore, we identified conflict as a situation that occurs when there is a contradiction between the interests, resources, and objectives of an organization and its publics.

Research in conflict resolution is about ideas, theories, and methods that can improve knowledge about conflict. In this field, theory and practice are linked, and all disciplines create their own way to approach conflict and to resolve it (Bercovitch et al., 2009). Conflict management has received increasing attention from top management, and organizations have been more proactive and strategic in managing organizational conflicts since the 1990s (Aula & Siira, 2010). These developments have made the area of conflict resolution a fast-growing interdisciplinary field in which theory and practice reflect real-world events.

Conflict Resolution in Public Relations

The public relations field previously utilized conflict as a theoretical base for solving problems. There have been several studies on conflict resolution in the public relations field. For example, Gossen and Sharp (1987) viewed public relations as the management of conflict with the aim of a win/win solution. Ehling (1984, 1985) and Lauzen (1986) examined the relationship between conflict resolution and public relations directly. Murphy (1991) proposed a mixed-motive model in which publics and organizations should be in cooperation for conflict resolution. Plowman (1998) explained that conflict resolution could empower public relations practitioners to become members of the dominant coalition of an organization. Anderson (1992) and Grunig (1992) suggested that a two-way symmetrical model of public relations could lessen the conflict between an organization and its publics. Other scholars (Cho & Cameron, 2006; Edafejirhaye & Alao, 2019; Gallicano, 2013; Huang, 2001; Plowman et al., 2004; Shin, 2008; Shin & Cameron, 2004) have investigated different aspects of conflict and public relations. These aforementioned studies focused on different types of negotiation techniques; by contrast, this study is designed to explore the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in the resolving of conflicts in two different countries to fill the gap in the literature. Therefore, this study also asks:

RQ2: What is the relationship between each role and the likelihood of using each conflict resolution strategy in the U.S. and Turkey?

In 1984, Grunig and Hunt (1984) described four models of public relations (press agentry/publicity, public information, two-way asymmetrical, and two-way symmetrical) to describe the historical development of public relations in the U.S. However, they observed that the earlier models did not disappear as the newer ones developed. Murphy (1991) developed the idea of the mixed-motive model and emphasized that organizations try to satisfy their own interest while at the same time trying to anticipate the reactions of their publics. Grunig and Grunig (1992) eventually defined the two-way symmetrical model as normative, the ideal model for achieving excellence in public relations. Grunig (2004) later suggested that using a combination of the two-way symmetrical and asymmetrical models (mixed-motive model of public relations) would increase the effectiveness of public relations in the organization.

The concept of conflict resolution in the public relations literature has changed over time because of the criticisms of the four models of public relations. First, conflict resolution in public

relations was developed from the most sophisticated models of public relations: two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical models. The two-way symmetrical model aims to manage conflict and encourage mutual understanding (Plowman et al., 2004). Then, a new model of symmetry was developed by Dozier and colleagues (1995) to highlight a win-win zone that uses negotiation and compromise to find common ground between conflicting interests. In this manner, asymmetrical means were applied to attain symmetrical ends (Plowman, 2005b). Therefore, the mixed-motive model of public relations with negotiation approaches exists in the public relations literature. For example, Plowman et al. (2004) focused on the operational terms of conflict management and discussed negotiation techniques through the two-way models and mixed motives. Van Dyke (2005) also stated that the symmetrical and asymmetrical models of communication could be used together as part of a broader mixed-motive model that aims to find mutual agreement between parties in conflict.

This study utilizes Plowman's (2005a) conceptualization of public relations and conflict resolution incorporating strategic management, mediation, and judgment ability. For public relations professionals to manage conflicts strategically, they need to consider the objectives of the organizations and the long-term effects of organizational actions and advise top management on societal values/norms so that company strategies can be adjusted accordingly. If they want to be successful mediators in conflict resolution, they need to consult top management, play an active role, and establish a dialogue between parties. Finally, public relations practitioners can use their judgment ability successfully by evaluating the consequences for the other party, admitting mistakes, and taking the top management's advice when they cannot solve issues (Plowman, 2005a). Following this conceptualization of public relations and conflict resolution that incorporates strategic management, mediation, and judgment ability, this study also asks:

RQ3: Do public relations practitioners manage conflicts strategically in the U.S. and Turkey?

RQ4: Do public relations practitioners perform their mediator functions in resolving conflicts in the U.S. and Turkey?

RQ5: Do public relations practitioners use their judgment ability in resolving conflicts in the U.S. and Turkey?

Utilization of Negotiation Techniques as Conflict Resolution Strategies in Public Relations

Negotiation techniques are used to find a solution that both parties can accept. Public relations practitioners must know the best negotiation techniques in the conflict resolution process (Ni et al., 2018). There are a few studies on the use of conflict resolution strategies in public relations. Grunig (2004) emphasized that scholars and practitioners need to know much more about strategies than they already know. Plowman and his colleagues (Plowman, 1998, 2007; Plowman et al., 2004; Plowman et al., 1995) reviewed the literature on conflict resolution to identify strategies that could be applied in public relations. Thus, Plowman et al. (1995) adapted the Thomas (1976) model to public relations and arrived at five negotiation techniques: contending, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating.[3] Then Plowman (1998)

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[3] "Contending—involves one party forcing its position on another party. Collaborating—both parties work together to reconcile basic interests and reach a mutually beneficial solution. Compromising—an alternative agreement that stands part way between the parties' preferred positions. Avoiding—one or both parties leave the conflict either physically or psychologically. Accommodating—one party partially yields on its position and lowers its aspirations" (Plowman et al., 1995, p. 239, 249).

added two additional tactics: unconditionally constructive, and win/win or no deal.[4] Later, Plowman et al. (2004) described two more negotiation techniques included in the mixed-motive model: third party mediation, and principled.[5] More recently, Plowman added perseverance[6] as another technique (Plowman & Walton, 2020); however, nine negotiation techniques are the major ones that were used by previous studies (e.g., Plowman, 2005, 2008; Plowman et al., 1995) in the public relations context. The current study examines the usage of nine approaches (contention, cooperation, accommodation, avoidance, unconditionally constructive, compromise, principled, win/win, mediation) in negotiation that have been identified in public relations research.

Scholars have also focused on cultural influences on choosing negotiation techniques. For example, focusing on the cultural role of religion, Shin (2008) indicated that religious public relations practitioners are more likely to use contention, collaboration, and compromise as negotiation techniques in resolving conflicts in accordance with their religious principles. Plowman (2007) stated that cross-cultural differences can make public relations practitioners use mutually beneficial negotiation techniques such as collaboration and win/win because it can be easier to create opportunities for mutual gain in a multicultural environment. However, scholars have not focused on cultural influences on choosing negotiation techniques in two different countries. Therefore, this study also asks:

RQ6: How do the negotiation techniques differ between the U.S. and Turkey?

Public Relations in Turkey

Public relations started to develop as an occupational and academic field in Turkey in the 1980s. During the 1990s, private companies developed their capacity in public relations departments, and the number of communications faculties increased (Okay & Okay, 2007). There was an academic tendency towards public relations research and practice as scholarship in the same era (Erdogan, 2008). However, as the development of public relations started late, compared to other countries and regions, the field is still making efforts to reach the professional level.

Scholars in Turkey have investigated the roles and functions of public relations from different perspectives (Akar, 2011; Hostut, 2013; Karakaya, 2016; Ozkoyuncu, 2014). For example, Ozkoyuncu (2014) aimed to identify the roles of public relations practitioners in Turkey and revealed that such roles vary depending on practitioners' ranks/titles, departments/organizations, experience in the public relations profession, and their organizations' origin. Karakaya (2016) investigated the roles of strategic public relations via the curriculum of a Turkish university to identify how the role typology was reflected in the curriculum. However, little is known of how Turkish public relations practitioners approach conflict resolution.

Cultural Aspects of Conflict Management Strategies

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[4] "Unconditionally constructive means even if the other party in the conflict does not reciprocate, the organization acts in reconciling the strategic interests of both the organization and its strategic public. In win/win situation both parties collaborate in mutually beneficial circumstances or to hold off on any agreement until both parties are ready for a win/win deal to be made. If no solution would benefit both parties, then they would agree to disagree, that is, no deal" (Plowman, 1998, p. 245, 246).

[5] "Third party mediation is where an outside party arbitrates the dispute. Principled means to hold to higher ethics that cannot be compromised" (Plowman et al., 2004, p. 305).

[6] The definition of perseverance includes "a combination of humility, will power, persistent determination, theologically, to endure to the end" (Plowman, 2007, p. 98).

The conflict management literature focuses on Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid model, which emphasizes two dimensions (i.e., concern for production and concern for people) in regard to managers' conflict management styles. The degree of these dimensions affects managers' conflict management style. For example, if the degree of concern is low for production and high for people, then the manager is likely to choose an accommodation strategy (Blake & Mouton, 1964). This model has become the foundation of other two-dimensional models that predict conflict management styles, such as Pruitt and Rubin's (1987) dual-concern model and Rahim's Organizational Conflict Inventory-II (Ni et al., 2018).

Two-dimensional models are also influential in communication studies, where scholars have tested and criticized them. For example, Cai and Fink (2002) tested the models' conflict management styles and found that multiple dimensions explain managers' conflict management styles better than two dimensions. Wang and colleagues (2012) tested the relationships between the goals and conflict management styles in the dual-concern model and developed a typology of goals and conflict avoidance strategies. Ni et al. (2018) proposed a new model of public relations conflict management by integrating different theories in intercultural settings. They focused on two elements: organization and public. They indicated that different kinds of organizations can practice intercultural public relations effectively by using different strategies such as environmental scanning, relationship management, and identifying publics. In addition, organizations need to "engage substantial, internal adjustment and change in terms of policies, procedures, and behaviors" (Ni et al., 2018, p. 143) in order to persuade their publics and focus on their publics in their conflict management strategies. Ni et al. also noted that individuals' cultural identity, personal life experiences, societal cultures, and cultural dimensions as well as organizational factors such as how organizations manage conflicts with their publics can affect public perceptions and behaviors toward organizations. Thus, culture can be seen as an influential factor in choosing conflict management styles in conflict situations.

Cultures are typically divided into two categories in cross-cultural studies: collectivist and individualist. The conflict management literature in communication studies has indicated differences in conflict management styles between these two categories. For instance, Cai and Fink (2002) found that avoiding is preferred as a conflict style by individualists compared to collectivists, who tend to prefer compromising and integrating. Holt and DeVore (2005) also found that the choice of a conflict management style varies from culture to culture. For example, collectivist cultures choose the compromising style more than do individualistic cultures.

Hofstede's (1980, 1991) national culture theory is applied frequently in cross-cultural studies to understand the role of culture in public relations practices (Ki et al., 2019). National culture theory identifies five cultural dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism–collectivism, masculinity–femininity, and long–short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1980). These dimensions can also be applied to conflict management studies. For example, Mohammed et al. (2008) found significant links between cultural dimensions and the conflict management styles of international project managers. Gunkel et al. (2016) noted that the uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation dimensions influence preferences for conflict management styles, based on a multinational data set.

To understand the potential influences of cultural dimensions on conflict resolution, the current study explores the differences in the functions of public relations practitioners in resolving conflicts by analyzing Turkey and the U.S., which respectively represent collectivistic

and individualistic cultures and also represent different examples of Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Therefore, this study asks:

RQ7: Do the functions of Turkish and American public relations practitioners in conflict resolution represent different cultural dimensions?

Method

To explore the answers to the aforementioned research questions, the researchers conducted two separate studies to examine how public relations practitioners see their role in resolving conflicts by addressing differences and similarities between two countries, Turkey and the U.S. In the first study, the researchers developed a scale that was pretested and tested in Turkey. In the second study, the scale was administered among a sample in the U.S.

Study 1

Scale Development

The measures for conflict management strategies were developed based on two procedures. In the first phase of Study 1, 10 public relations experts (selected with purposive sampling) were asked open-ended questions face to face, using a semi-structured interview technique. Questions were developed with reference to definitions or terms Plowman (2005a) put forward in his analysis of strategic management. Participants were also asked how they perceived the concept of conflict. We applied content analysis to their responses, then summarized similar or identical expressions in accordance with the goal of the research and converted them into sentences to be used in a survey. In the second phase, we rearranged the statements with reference to Plowman's (2005a) analysis and Steyn's (2009) expressions about the roles of public relations practitioners. Then we transformed these expressions into questions that could be answered using a 5-point Likert scale (e.g., "minimize impacts of consequences for the other party," "initiate dialogue with pressure groups (consumer advocates/legislators) (when applicable)," and "ensure a balance between organizational goals and the well-being of society").

Pretest

We conducted a pilot test to obtain the meaningful responses of 100 Turkish public relations practitioners. Based on the pretest results, we made necessary amendments to the questionnaire. After checking the factor loading scores and Cronbach's alpha values, we dropped six items due to low factor loadings (< .5) and communality for each of the convergent dimensions. After the irrelevant items were eliminated, we conducted the main survey.

Survey Instrument

First, we asked public relations practitioners to rank, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree), which public relations roles they see themselves practicing. Then, we asked which negotiation techniques they use, and participants were given an opportunity to answer multiple-choice questions. A 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree) was also used for the third and fourth questions. In the third question, public relations practitioners were requested to express the degree of their agreement with nine statements about their actions related to conflict situations. They were asked to state their level of agreement with 19 statements about resolving conflict encountered between their organizations and publics in the fourth question. At the end, we asked demographic questions. In Study 1, the survey was administered to Turkish respondents.

Participants

In the first step of the main study, Turkish public relations practitioners were surveyed in June 2015. A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify public relations practitioners working for state organizations and public relations agencies that are members of the Turkish Public Relations Association or the Communication Consultancies Association of Turkey. Participants were invited by an e-mail to the online survey. We sent e-mails to more than 500 public relations practitioners who were working at public relations agencies and public relations departments of public institutions in Turkey. A total of 202 respondents completed the online survey questionnaire.

The respondents consisted of 71 men (35%) and 131 women (65%). They mainly consisted of people with undergraduate degrees. About 75% ($N = 151$) work in the private sector and 25% ($N = 51$) in public organizations. Approximately 38% ($N = 76$) were in their 20s, 45% ($N = 91$) in their 30s, and 17% ($N = 35$) were 40 years old or older.

Study 2

The same scale was used in Study 2. Two bilingual individuals who were also experts in public relations translated the items in the scale from Turkish to English. Then, a native speaker of English who is a public relations scholar checked the scale to determine the accuracy of meanings.

Participants

The U.S. data were collected between 2017 and 2019. A purposive sampling strategy was also used in Study 2. First, we identified public relations agencies in the U.S. by consulting the O'Dwyer's website[7] and went through each agency's website to find a contact person, whom we e-mailed a link to the online survey. Second, we applied for an academic research request to use the PRSA membership list. After the project was approved, we sent an e-mail to members including a link to the online survey. A total of 142 respondents completed the questionnaire. The respondents consisted of 40 men (28%), 100 women (70%), and 2 (1%) identified as gender-fluid. The majority of them had bachelor's (54%, $N = 77$) or master's (40%, $N = 57$) degrees. They worked in private-sector (52%, $N = 74$), public-sector (32%, $N = 45$), and nonprofit (16%, $N = 23$) organizations. In terms of age ranges, 11% ($N = 15$) were in their 20s, 13% ($N = 19$) in their 30s, and 76% ($N = 108$) were 40 years old or older.

Results

Roles of Public Relations Practitioners

In response to RQ1, which asks what roles public relations practitioners play in their workplace, participants in both countries answered that they saw themselves practicing all four public relations roles (manager, technician, reflective strategist, and educational) in their current jobs. As indicated in Table 1, public relations practitioners in both countries specified that they decide on communication policy and develop strategies to cultivate relationships with their publics as well as write press releases and organize events. They also analyze changing values and discuss their findings with their colleagues to adjust organizational values and norms regarding social responsibility and legitimacy. In addition to their reflective strategist roles, they

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[7] See https://www.odwyerpr.com/pr_firms_database.

also help their colleagues become communicatively competent to respond to societal demands. Moreover, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to compare public relations practitioners' roles between the U.S. and Turkey. There was a significant difference in performing the reflective strategist [*t* (342) = -5.102, *p* = .000] and educational roles [*t* (342) = -4.59, *p* = .000] between U.S. and Turkish public relations practitioners.

<center>[Insert Table 1 here]</center>

Actions of Public Relations Practitioners When They Confront Conflict or Consider a Potential Conflict

As indicated in Table 2, public relations practitioners in both countries generally take action when confronted with conflict or potential conflict. Most participants from both countries indicated a positive level of agreement with all actions when they confront conflict, with "Listen to the parties" ranking highest for both U.S. and Turkish practitioners (*M* = 4.67, *SD* = .52 for U.S.; *M* = 4.69, *SD* = .57 for Turkey), followed by "Try to minimize the negative outcomes" (*M* = 4.49, *SD* = .72 for U.S.; *M* = 4.60, *SD* = .62 for Turkey). In addition, during the initial interview of 10 professionals in Turkey, most indicated that the first thing they do is listen to the parties. For example, one of the participants stated,

> public relations practitioners must listen to other parties to understand the issue and reasons that cause the conflict. They are the individuals who discover the reasons that cause conflict. And then they start to communicate with other parties to resolve the conflicts.

Turkish practitioners also stated that their most important responsibility is environmental scanning to identify potential conflicts for their organizations.

<center>[Insert Table 2 here]</center>

Actions of Public Relations Practitioners When They Observe Conflict in the Workplace

To address RQ3, RQ4, and RQ5, this study asked whether public relations practitioners take action when they observe conflict in their workplace and what kind of actions they take to resolve conflicts. Most participants indicated that they take action when they observe conflict between the organization and its publics in the workplace, whether or not it affects them. The highest score was given to "Act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge" by U.S. practitioners (*M* = 4.32, *SD* = .77) and "Take the top management's advice" (*M* = 4.54, *SD* = .75) by Turkish practitioners. During the interview, Turkish practitioners also indicated that they develop empathy with the parties and try to perform their mediator role; however, even if they have full responsibility to take action, top management makes the decisions in the end. Therefore, they emphasized that it is better for them to take the top management's advice before they take any action.

<center>[Insert Table 3 here]</center>

Reliability and Validity

Cronbach's alpha values were used to test the internal reliability of the measures. As indicated in Table 4, the Cronbach's alpha values for the nine items of actions that public relations professionals take when they confront conflict are .80 for Turkey and .78 for the U.S., both of which are above the acceptable level of .70 (Pallant, 2013).

To test validity, exploratory factor analyses were conducted. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .84 for Turkey and .82 for the U.S., which is greater than the recommended .60 or above (Pallant, 2013), and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity values

were significant ($p < .00$). The suitability of these data sets was confirmed: factor loadings of each item ranged from .54 to .75 for Turkey and from .59 to .77 for the U.S. (see Table 4). Two items were excluded from the U.S. data because they did not achieve an acceptable value of .50 (Peterson, 2000).

[Insert Table 4 here]

As indicated in Table 5, Cronbach's alpha values were .88 for Turkey and .93 for the U.S. for the strategic thinking measures, .66 for Turkey and .63 for the U.S. for the mediator measures, and .63 for Turkey and .64 for the U.S. for the judgment ability measures. Hair et al. (2010) indicated that a Cronbach's alpha value of .60 or above is acceptable in exploratory research. Therefore, these values were also above an acceptable level.

For the measures of actions of public relations practitioners when they observe conflict in the workplace, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy value was .85 for Turkey and .82 for the U.S., with significant levels of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($p < .00$). As indicated in Table 5, the factor loadings for each item ranged from .54 to .84 for Turkey and from .66 to .87 for the U.S. Three items were excluded from the Turkish data and one item was excluded from the U.S. data, with .50 as the cutoff value, following Peterson (2000).

[Insert Table 5 here]

Correlation Analysis

The Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to check the relationship between variables and to answer RQ2, which asks what the relationship is between public relations roles and the likelihood of using each conflict resolution strategy in the workplace. This study follows Cohen's (1988) suggestions (small $r = .10$ to $.29$; medium $r = .30$ to $.49$; large $r = .50$ to 1.0) to interpret values. As indicated in Table 6, the manager role, reflective strategist role, and educational role are moderately and positively associated with general actions of public relations practitioners when they confront conflict or consider a potential conflict ($r = .36$, $r = .42$, $r = .43$), and strategic thinking when public relations practitioners observe a conflict in the workplace ($r = .36$, $r = .46$, $r = .33$) for Turkish public relations practitioners. In addition, actions of Turkish public relations practitioners when they confront conflict or consider a potential conflict are moderately and positively associated with their strategic thinking ($r = .41$), mediator functions ($r = .40$), and judgment ability usage ($r = .48$) in resolving conflicts in their workplace.

[Insert Table 6 here]

As indicated in Table 7, the reflective strategist role and educational role are weakly but positively associated with strategic thinking for U.S. public relations practitioners when they observe a conflict in the workplace ($r = .30$, $r = .27$). The actions of U.S. public relations practitioners when they confront conflict or consider a potential conflict are moderately and positively associated with their mediator functions ($r = .33$), and weakly and positively associated with both strategic thinking ($r = .22$) and use of their judgment ability ($r = .17$) in resolving conflicts in their workplace.

[Insert Table 7 here]

RQ6 asks which negotiation techniques public relations practitioners use in resolving conflicts. Descriptive analyses show that most public relations practitioners use all nine negotiation techniques. Turkish practitioners use compromising and collaborating more than other negotiation techniques, while U.S. practitioners use collaborating and win/win negotiation techniques more in resolving conflicts.

[Insert Table 8 here]

To answer RQ7, which asks whether there are any statistically significant differences between the functions of Turkish and American public relations practitioners in conflict resolution, independent sample *t*-tests were conducted. The results indicated that even though public relations practitioners in both countries manage conflict strategically, perform their mediator functions, and use their judgment ability in resolving conflicts, there are statistically significant differences between some actions they take when they confront or consider a potential conflict in general and when they observe conflict in the workplace (see Table 2 and Table 3).

Discussion

Scholars (e.g., Cutlip et al., 2006; Grunig, 2001) have emphasized that public relations should be a strategic management process and public relations practitioners should manage this process effectively. Because public relations emphasizes relationships among organizations and their publics, it is also important for public relations practitioners to manage these relationships when the parties disagree with each other (Ni et al., 2018). Therefore, this study analyzed the roles and functions of public relations practitioners in resolving conflicts.

This study used Plowman's (2005a) conceptualization of public relations and conflict resolution, resulting in a model incorporating strategic management, mediation, and judgment ability. Findings indicated that both U.S. and Turkish public relations practitioners manage conflicts strategically and see their duties as acting as an early warning system, explaining to top management the impacts of their interventions in conflict resolution, and even advising management on societal values. Practitioners from both countries also indicated that they perform their mediator functions in resolving conflicts through establishing a dialogue between their organizations and publics, playing an active role, and consulting top management. They use their judgment in resolving conflicts by evaluating the consequences for the other parties, admitting mistakes, and taking the top management's advice when they cannot solve issues. These findings confirm Plowman's (2005a) conceptualization of public relations and conflict resolution that incorporates strategic management, mediation, and judgment ability for both countries. The three main categories of the model were demonstrated by both U.S. and Turkish practitioners in resolving conflicts: public relations practitioners can solve conflicts strategically by performing their mediator functions with good judgment through a mixed model of public relations, which emphasizes symmetrical and asymmetrical models of communication.

Public relations practitioners in both countries indicated that they take the same actions in confronting (potential) conflict. Although participants in both countries indicated that they manage conflicts strategically, they reported taking different actions when they faced conflict in the workplace. For example, Turkish practitioners stated that they take the advice of top management, while U.S. practitioners indicated that they act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge. One reason for this difference might be the organizational culture in terms of how things are done in the organizations (Drennan, 1990). Organizations in Turkey are generally family-run, and their culture is hierarchical (Oney-Yazici et al., 2007). Therefore, practitioners naturally take the advice of top management in resolving conflicts in their organizations. In contrast, top U.S. communication managers have critical roles in many

organizations and sometimes become members of the dominant coalition (Bowen, 2009). Thus, they can act as an early warning system to top management before issues of conflict emerge.

Another reason might be the development stage of the public relations industry in each country. As the development of public relations started late in Turkey, the field is still making an effort to reach the professional level. In addition, public relations practitioners are still trying to be seen as key communicators in their organizations, which may also affect their roles in resolving conflicts. In contrast, as indicated in the Excellence study (Grunig et al., 2002), most communication managers report directly to the top management in three English-speaking countries, including the U.S. Therefore, their voices might be heard more than those of their Turkish counterparts in resolving conflicts.

Since countries have become more diverse, the worldwide public relations industry has started to address issues related to diversity and multiculturalism. In particular, communicating and managing relationships with diverse and multicultural publics in a globalized world has become one of the significant duties of today's public relations practitioners (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2009). Nevertheless, the results of this study indicate that practitioners professed taking different actions when they faced conflict between their organizations and publics depending on their home country. Therefore, it is important for public relations practitioners to know how to manage conflicts in different countries. The findings suggest that practitioners should know the folk culture as well as the organizational culture of the countries they work in and collaborate with local practitioners to resolve conflicts effectively. They can also perform their environmental scanning role to understand the publics of different countries where their organizations are located.

The findings of this study also suggest that the roles of public relations practitioners are effective in resolving conflicts between their organization and the publics of both countries. If public relations practitioners fulfill their managerial and reflective/strategist roles in their organizations, they act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge, initiate dialogue with pressure groups, and explain stakeholders' views to top management. These findings are consistent with Steyn's (2009) conceptualization of roles.

Educational roles were also found to be significant in resolving conflicts in terms of performing mediator functions and using judgment. Public relations practitioners facilitate, support, and encourage top management in their responsibility to communicate when they fulfill their educational roles. They also help their colleagues become communicatively competent to respond to societal demands (Steyn, 2009). This study found that both U.S. and Turkish practitioners perform their mediator roles and use their own judgment in resolving conflicts between their organizations and publics as they fulfill their educational roles in their organization. These findings suggest that it is important for organizations to support practitioners in performing their managerial, reflective/strategist, and educational roles so they can be effective in resolving conflicts in their workplace.

Participants in both studies indicated that they usually fulfill the reflective/strategist role in their organizations. Steyn (2009) stated that this role has emerged as a new practitioner role in both the South and East Africa and that it reflects the African collective culture. The current findings intimate that the reflective/strategist role is also emerging within the collectivist culture of Turkey and the individualist culture of the U.S. Therefore, the conceptualization of the roles of public relations practitioners may not be directly related to a nation's culture. Future

researchers may consider exploring this conceptualization in other countries and investigate other factors that may affect it.

Moreover, Plowman (1998) indicated that conflict resolution can empower public relations practitioners to become effective members of management. This study found that public relations practitioners play significant roles in the conflict resolution process. If practitioners perform their manager or reflective/strategist role, then they can be effective in the conflict resolution process. Therefore, this study indicates that this situation works in both cases. Public relations practitioners can become effective members of management both because of their conflict resolution skills and if they have a chance to fulfill their manager or reflective/strategist roles, which include solving problems.

Negotiation is a critical process of conflict management, and public relations practitioners focus more on finding a solution to the conflicts between their organizations and publics when they use negotiation techniques (Ni et al., 2018). The results of this study show that both Turkish and U.S. practitioners prefer cooperation to other negotiation techniques, which facilitates a win/win situation for both the organization and its publics. U.S. practitioners also indicated that they prefer a win/win negotiation technique, which includes the collaboration of both parties in mutually beneficial circumstances. So, it seems that U.S. practitioners focus on more mutually beneficial negotiation techniques to solve conflicts, although they do not have to be on common middle ground. Reaching an agreement in a positive way for both parties is acceptable for U.S. practitioners. However, Turkish practitioners indicated that they prefer compromise as much as collaboration in conflict resolution, which indicates the importance of finding a common middle ground that both parties can accept (Ni et al., 2018). The reason may be that Turkey is a collectivist country that values community over the individual. Turkish practitioners may consider the publics' needs as much as their organizations' interests, so they focus more on finding a common middle ground to resolve conflicts.

Turkish practitioners also prefer accommodation and unconditionally constructive negotiation techniques more than U.S. practitioners. These findings are consistent with other studies (e.g., Gunkel et al., 2016) in which people from collectivist cultures prefer these techniques more than people from individualist cultures. Moreover, these findings are also consistent with Hofstede's (2001) theoretical arguments that countries with cultures high in femininity, like Turkey, tend to prefer integrating styles such as cooperation, compromise, and accommodation more than countries high in masculinity like the U.S.

The current findings suggest that understanding cross-cultural differences has also become an important aspect of conflict resolution for public relations practitioners who work for multinational companies. Plowman (2007) stated that if public relations practitioners understand cross-cultural differences, it becomes easier for them to create mutually beneficial solutions by using cooperation or win/win techniques. Understanding cultural values also allows public relations practitioners who work for multinational companies to realize which negotiation techniques are more suitable and effective to resolve conflicts between their organizations and the publics of the countries they are located in.

This study has some limitations. First, the U.S. participants were limited to public relations practitioners who work at public relations agencies. Therefore, the findings of the study cannot be generalized to public relations practitioners working in other types of organizations in the U.S. Scholars may consider applying this study's framework to other types of organizations

such as nonprofits or governments. Using a purposive sample also limits the generalization of this study's findings because it does not have to be statistically representative of the greater population of interest. In addition, future research featuring interviews with U.S. public relations practitioners could add depth to these findings by garnering insights into practitioners' lived experiences in resolving conflicts.

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Tables

Table 1

Public Relations Practitioners Roles in the U.S. and Turkey

Roles	U.S. Practitioners		Turkish Practitioners		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-test
Manager	4.32	0.85	4.3	0.89	.16
Technician	4.27	1.03	4.09	1.01	1.60
Reflective Strategist	3.37	1.3	3.99	0.93	-5.10*
Educational	3.30	1.31	3.89	1.09	-4.59*

*p<.000

Table 2

Actions of Public Relations Practitioners When They Confront Conflict or Consider a Potential Conflict

Actions	U.S. Practitioners		Turkish Practitioners		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-test
Listen to the parties	4.67	0.52	4.69	0.57	-.40
Prepare communication plans for possible conflicts	4.07	0.92	3.92	0.93	1.48
Try to find a compromise	4.4	0.65	4.32	0.82	1.03
Seek advice from outside	3.97	0.72	4.08	0.86	-1.27
Try to find long-term solutions	4.37	0.71	4.37	0.8	.02
Try to minimize the negative outcomes	4.49	0.72	4.6	0.62	-1.56
Try to find the source of conflicts.	4.38	0.8	4.44	0.74	-.72
I try to balance the communication between parties	4.29	0.88	4.53	0.68	-2.87*
I facilitate an agreement between parties	3.87	0.97	4.4	0.67	-6.05*

*p<.005

Table 3

Actions of Public Relations Practitioners When They Observe Conflict in the Workplace

Actions	U.S. Practitioners		Turkish Practitioners		
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	*t*-test
Play an active role.	3.56	1.03	4.07	0.76	-5.21*
Ask top management to play an active role	3.4	1	4.05	0.95	-6.08*
Consult to the top management	3.7	0.95	3.73	0.99	-0.22
Establish a dialogue between parties	3.71	0.86	4.22	0.78	-5.67*
Try to act neutral	3.8	0.84	4.39	0.85	-6.3*
The interests of the organization take priority	3.96	0.96	4.14	0.9	-1.78
Try to protect my authority	3.17	1.14	3.82	0.95	-5.71*
Admit my mistakes	4.3	0.6	4.34	0.77	-0.58
Take the top management's advice	3.75	0.78	4.54	0.75	-9.43*
Minimize impacts of consequences for the other party	3.46	0.92	4.17	0.85	-7.36*
Act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge	4.32	0.77	4.14	0.77	2.10*
Initiate dialogue with pressure groups (consumer advocates/legislators)	3.7	1.01	3.8	0.98	-0.85
Explain to top management the impact of their behavior in conflict resolution on key stakeholders.	3.98	0.96	4.12	0.79	-1.52
Explain stakeholders' views to top management	4.25	0.84	4.29	0.68	-0.55
Advise top management on societal values/norms so that company strategies can be adjusted accordingly	3.96	0.89	4.04	0.93	-0.81
Enlighten top management on societal expectations for socially responsible behavior	3.82	1	4.1	0.85	-2.73
Make top management aware of the importance of accommodating perspectives different from their own	4.1	0.9	3.99	0.92	1.25
Influence top management's decisions to ensure that our company is regarded by society as being trustworthy	3.99	0.95	3.87	0.92	1.30
Ensure a balance between organizational goals and the well-being of society	3.96	0.85	4.11	0.79	1.08

*p<.05

Table 4

Reliability and Factor Loadings of Public Relations Practitioners' Actions in Confronting (Potential) Conflict

	Turkish Practitioners	
Actions	Reliability	Factor loadings
Listen to parties		0.63
Prepare communication plans for possible conflicts		0.58
Try to find a compromise		0.58
Seek advice from outside		0.62
Try to find long-term solutions	0.80	0.60
Try to minimize the negative outcomes		0.75
Try to find the source of conflicts		0.54
I try to balance the communication between parties		0.72
I facilitate an agreement between parties		0.67
	U.S. Practitioners	
Actions	Reliability	Factor loadings
Listen to parties		0.59
Try to find a compromise		0.70
Try to find long-term solutions		0.60
Try to minimize the negative outcomes		0.66
Try to find the source of conflicts	0.78	0.69
I try to balance the communication between parties		0.70
I facilitate an agreement between parties		0.77

Table 5

Reliability and Factor Loadings of Actions of Public Relations Practitioners When They Observe Conflict in the Workplace

| | | Turkish Practitioners | |
	Actions	Reliability	Factor Loadings
Strategic thinking	Act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge		0.66
	Initiate dialogue with pressure groups (consumer advocates/legislators) (when applicable)		0.60
	Explain to top management the impact of their behavior in conflict resolution on key stakeholders		0.78
	Explain stakeholders' views to top management		0.67
	Advise top management on societal values/norms so that company strategies can be adjusted accordingly	0.88	0.78
	Enlighten top management on societal expectations for socially responsible behavior		0.82
	Make top management aware of the importance of accommodating perspectives different from their own		0.75
	Influence top management's decisions to ensure that our company is regarded by society as being trustworthy		0.80
	Ensure a balance between organizational goals and the well-being of society		0.67
Mediator	Play an active role		0.80
	Consult to the top management	0.66	0.70
	Establish a dialogue between parties		0.83
Judgment Ability			0.54
	Try to protect my authority		
	Admit my mistakes	0.63	0.69
	Take the top management's advice		0.76
	Minimize impacts of consequences for the party		0.77

| | | U.S. Practitioners | |
	Actions	Reliability	Factor Loadings
Strategic thinking	Act as an early warning system to top management before issues emerge		0.66
	Initiate dialogue with pressure groups (consumer advocates/legislators) (when applicable)	0.93	0.74
	Explain to top management the impact of their behavior in conflict resolution on key stakeholders		0.87

Explain stakeholders' views to top management		0.82
Advise top management on societal values/norms so that company strategies can be adjusted accordingly		0.84
Enlighten top management on societal expectations for socially responsible behavior		0.87
Make top management aware of the importance of accommodating perspectives different from their own		0.86
Influence top management's decisions to ensure that our company is regarded by society as being trustworthy		0.78
Ensure a balance between organizational goals and the well-being of society		0.84
Play an active role		0.87
Mediator Consult to the top management	0.63	0.66
Establish a dialogue between parties		0.74
Judgment Ability		0.78
Try to protect my authority	0.64	
Take the top management's advice		0.77
Minimize impacts of consequences for the party		0.74

Table 6

Correlations Between Variables for Turkish Public Relations Practitioners

	Manager role	Technician role	Reflective strategist role	Educational role	General actions	Strategic thinking	Mediator	Judgment ability
Manager role								
Technician role	.30**							
Reflective strategist role	.47**	0.13						
Educational role	.37**	.20**	.49**					
General actions	.36**	.29**	.42**	.43**				
Strategic thinking	.36**	.19**	.46**	.33**	.41**			
Mediator	.27**	0.14	.27**	.26**	.40**	.46**		

Judgment ability	.27**	0.13	.21**	.26**	.48**	.39**	.33**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 7

Correlations Between Variables for U.S. Public Relations Practitioners

	Manager role	Technician role	Reflective strategist role	Educational role	General actions	Strategic thinking	Mediator	Judgment ability
Manager role								
Technician role	0.05							
Reflective strategist role	0.37**	-0.06						
Educational role	0.19*	-0.11	.57**					
General actions	.18*	0.16	0.14	0.07				
Strategic thinking	.19*	0.04	0.30**	.27**	.22**			
Mediator	0.08	-0.04	0.10	.18*	.33**	.56**		
Judgment ability	0.15	.18*	0.08	.18*	.17*	.41**	.41**	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 8

Negotiation Techniques of Public Relations Practitioners in the Resolution of Conflicts

Negotiation Techniques	U.S. Practitioners		Turkish Practitioners	
	N	%	N	%
Contention	53	37.3	40	19.8
Compromise	76	53.5	143	70.8
Avoidance	14	9.9	13	6.4
Accommodation	7	4.9	117	57.9

Cooperation	112	78.9	156	77.2
Unconditionally Constructive	73	51.4	114	56.4
Mediated	65	45.8	56	27.7
Win/win	88	62.0	94	46.5
Principled	57	40.1	81	40.0