Strategic Communication Practice of International Nongovernmental Organizations

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In the last few decades, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have become influential actors in creating awareness of international social, political, environmental and economic causes in global society. Management scholars have recognized them lately as “high profile actors within public policy landscapes at local, national and global levels” (D. Lewis, 2003, p. 326) and “strategically mature organizations” (Lambell, Ramia, Nyland & Michelotti, 2008, p. 75). Many NGOs, such as Oxfam, Plan International or Reporters Sans Frontières, operate in culturally diverse and institutionally complex contexts. At the same time “as they have looked to expand their role in global governance, NGOs have faced mounting pressure to establish their legitimacy in the eyes of a range of stakeholders, including the media, governments, inter-governmental organizations and other civil society actors” (Lambell et al., 2008, p. 80). Hence, the use of public relations (PR) and other types of strategic communication should be crucial for NGOs to establish and maintain legitimacy as well as to achieve their goals. However, these organizations have not received much attention in research on international PR (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009). NGOs were typically studied in their role as activists; the organization’s perception of being ‘acted’ on was the center of inquiry, rather than the activists’ strategic communication itself (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000).

This is surprising insofar as NGOs are assumed to have tremendous impact on global society (L. Lewis, 2005) and largely use communication to achieve their goals. In many cases, these goals are related to some public purpose or even to the “public good.” International NGOs (INGOs) operate by encouraging voluntary participation at a global and a local level, which presumably makes them the most important agents in global civil society. Therefore, we need to understand how INGOs use and organize PR as a subset of strategic communication in international environments to achieve their goals. This is also relevant because most INGOs have a Western (or Northern) background and influence not only policies and business, but also cultural values and nation images around the world. As the literature does not offer sufficient insights into these issues the findings of a survey of communication professionals in INGOs conducted in 2010 will be reported and analyzed in this chapter.

The research question of this study was: How do INGOs manage PR across borders? This question has three major aspects. First, the study assessed to what extent these organizations implement strategic PR planning and control (Broom, Cutlip & Center, 2009, p. 324). Second, the data sheds light on how NGOs coordinate PR between headquarters and subsidiaries in terms of centralization...
or decentralization. Third, the importance of several contextual national and cultural factors for planning and conducting communication internationally was analyzed to explain strategic choices between global integration and local responsiveness. An understanding of the way INGOs balance the global and the local facilitates assessment of the extent to that INGOs adapt communication programs to participate in their local environments, or rather try to impose ethnocentric views, and goals developed at central units.

**Literature Review**

*Defining NGOs and International PR*

From a normative perspective, NGOs are thought to contribute to the global development of civil society and democracy (Taylor, 2005). They belong to the so-called third sector, which means they are a type of organization that is different from government agencies and business organizations. According to Salamon and Anheier (1999), such organizations have five key common characteristics: (a) they are organized and possess some institutional reality; (b) they are private and institutionally separate from the government; (c) they do not return profits to directors or owners; (d) they are independent and have broad control over their own activities; and (e) they involve a certain degree of voluntary participation at the level of activity or governance.

NGOs form a subset of the larger category of nonprofit organizations as the latter include a wider range of organizations such as museums, schools or universities. Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) argue that the main difference between NGOs and other nonprofit organizations is the significant dedication of NGOs to advocacy. However, NGOs that mainly provide services such as humanitarian relief or social welfare organizations do exist. “The principal point, however, is that service delivery organizations differ from advocacy organizations in the sense that the latter seek primarily to change the status quo” (Young, 1992, p. 4). In many cases, NGOs combine both service provision and advocacy (Lambell et al., 2008). Therefore, we conceptualize NGOs as organizations that fulfill the five characteristics outlined by Salamon and Anheier (1999), which include a focus on service provision and/or advocacy. Many organizations in the broader nonprofit category, in contrast, are owned, financed or controlled by governments and therefore were not included in this study.

In the last two decades, NGOs have had to face several challenges related to globalization, such as major complex emergencies, new forms of global poverty, weakened national governments, outmoded global institutions, the internationalization of business and new pressures to respond globally (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). Many issues on NGO agendas are global in character: for example, world peace, global warming, social justice, or economic prosperity. These issues need to be addressed with operations and communications in more than one country. Young (1992) states: “[I]f voluntary efforts are to have major impacts, they will require cooperation across national boundaries, suggesting the development of international associations” (p. 2). Although some NGOs are based in a single country, trying to resolve issues of global importance, others are truly international in scope and participation (e.g., Oxfam and Amnesty International). International PR is expected to play a major role in these NGOs. They are subsequently termed international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs) and they represent the main object of this study.

International PR is defined in the literature as “the practice of public relations in an international or cross-cultural context” (Culbertson, 1996, p. 2) and refers to the strategic communication efforts of companies, governments and nonprofit organizations to establish mutually beneficial relationships across nations or cultural borders (Banks, 1995; Wilcox, Ault, Agee & Cameron, 2000). This may involve planned and organized communication with host publics in countries where an international organization operates as well as transnational publics that simultaneously act in several locations (Molleda, 2009).
Research on International PR of NGOs

INGOs have been growing in number and importance since the 1990s. They managed to gain high consultation status within major intergovernmental organizations like the UN or the World Trade Organization. In addition, they are among the most important communicators in creating awareness and influencing public opinion with regard to international social, environmental and political issues (Lambell et al., 2008). Between 1960 and 1980, the number of INGOs doubled (Boli & Thomas, 1997), and between 1990 and 2000, they grew by almost 20% (United Nations Development Programme, 2002). Although it has been recognized that effective PR is central to the success of NGOs and that these organizations use communication as a main tool to achieve their goals, “public relations literature on this subject is rather thin” (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009, p. 807). L. Lewis (2005) stated the same conclusion in research on “important managerial and communicative issues” (p. 240) in the broader nonprofit sector.

Most of the research on international PR has been limited to descriptions of the PR practice in a certain country, whereas studies on PR of multinational corporations or nonprofit organizations were rare (Molleda & Laskin, 2005). NGOs have primarily been studied as activist publics from the perspective of for-profit organizations, thus NGOs have not been focused on as organizations in their own right. Only in the last ten years have PR scholars been urged to study NGOs’ unique ways of using strategic communication (Dozier & Lauzen, 2000; Taylor, Kent, & White, 2001).

Most of the studies on NGOs were not explicitly designed to analyze the international dimensions of their strategic communication. The majority of these studies focused on crisis-related case studies of larger NGOs (Murphy & Dee, 1992; Sisco, Collins & Zoch, 2010) and the NGOs’ use of the Internet to communicate with their stakeholders (e.g., Naudé, Froneman & Atwood, 2004; Seo, Kim & Yang, 2009; Taylor et al., 2001). Studies on NGO’s use of the Internet basically come to the same conclusion as Taylor et al. (2001). “The data suggest that activist organization Web sites are not fully employing the dialogic capacity of the Internet as expected” (p. 277).

Regarding their international public perceptions, NGOs seem to be the most trusted institutions, exceeding business organizations, government authorities, and the media (Edelman, 2011). They were considered to be sophisticated communicators that evolved from small brands of activists into the new “super brands” in the global marketplace (Wootliff & Deri, 2001). However, several scandals and critics have seriously challenged the reputation of NGOs. Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) discussed some of the reasons why NGOs, especially INGOs, have to face such problems. In some cases the status of INGOs was abused to achieve latent political or religious goals, or goals that differed from the official mission of an NGO. One of the most prevalent threats to the legitimacy of NGOs is the misuse of financial resources. Embezzlement, misappropriation of funds and fraud are among the most frequently reported cases (Gibelman & Gelman, 2000). With increasing size and complexity, INGOs can become unproductive and bureaucratic. In addition, certain partnerships with multinational corporations (MNCs), the involvement of INGOs in commercial market activities (e.g., the Oxfam–Cafédirect case) or governmental agencies’ influence on NGOs through partial funding (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009) can jeopardize their reputation. Another major threat may result from the culturally heterogeneous environments in which INGOs operate. “Large international NGOs from developed countries sometimes develop standards based on ‘western’ traditions and expect these standards to be universally applicable. The so-called effect of ‘westernizing’ can be observed as a serious image problem” (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009, p. 813).

Public perception problems and growing global competition among INGOs has caused them to increasingly depend on professional and strategic approaches to manage their international PR. This applies to both the internal efficiency of their management processes and the external effectiveness of their communication programs. External effectiveness means that PR goals are achieved with specific relevant stakeholders. INGOs have to address a wide variety of stakeholders from multiple
national and cultural backgrounds, which represents a major challenge. Tkalac and Pavicic (2009) stated:

Given these differences across cultures on various environmental variables, it seems logical that the publics in different countries may have different ways of deciding whom to trust, different levels of involvement toward the same cause, and so on. Considering the lack of relevant research in the area of international public relations of NGOs, this question remains unanswered.

Although INGOs’ need to adapt their communication activities to local stakeholders is widely acknowledged in the literature, little is known about their internal structures, or the strategic communication planning necessary to put this adaptation into practice. PR scholars mainly shed light on MNCs and on how they coordinate, control and conduct cross-national communication activities (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Verčič, 2003; Wakefield, 2000). This stream of research will be reviewed in the next few sections. Although one should be cautious about adopting models and findings produced for international PR of MNCs for INGOs, Blood (2005) argues that they are equivalent on several criteria, such as internal organization or degree of internationalization. Therefore, the findings and concepts of international PR research on MNCs will be used, at least, as a heuristic and starting point for the study of INGOs in the next section of this chapter.

Global Integration and Local Responsiveness in Strategic Communication

Balancing the needs for global integration and adaptation to specific cultural contexts has been one of the most delicate questions in terms of strategic decisions on the communication management of MNCs (Molleda & Laskin, 2010). Therefore, a large body of scholarship has been produced in PR, marketing and the broader field of management studies (Lim, 2010).

Proponents of global integration of communication programs usually refer to the need of MNCs to achieve higher cost-efficiency and to maintain consistency in creating brands and in disseminating messages globally. As a consequence, such organizations would have to establish strong coordination systems and control between headquarters and local subsidiaries (Bartlett & Ghoshal, 2002; Lim, 2010).

On the other hand, several scholars concluded from their observations that multinational organizations have to understand national and cultural variability across and within countries in which they operate, as international publics respond distinctively to messages and actions. Taylor (2000), for instance, showed that Coca Cola failed with its “one market, one strategy” approach when the company tried to resolve an international crisis in Western Europe. The failure was mainly attributed to the inflexible centralized structures and the lack of understanding of the different cultural contexts that shaped publics’ responses to the crisis in various European countries. Such culture-sensitive aspects, in contrast to ethnocentric approaches, were also advocated by Banks (1995) and Botan (1992). Taylor and Kent (1999) concluded from in-depth interviews with seven PR managers in Malaysia that “for ‘international public relations’ to be truly effective, it must account for the ‘international’ dynamic in various contexts.” Sriramesh and Verčič (2001) proposed a list of contextual variables that presumably influence PR practice in different countries and help practitioners to localize their strategies and tactics. The list consists of three factors that comprise further variables: the infrastructure of a country (including the political system, the level of economic development, the legal environment and the role of activism in a country); the media environment (including media control, media outreach and media access); and societal culture (referring to different dimensions of cultural values as well as corporate culture).
To date, there is some consensus among scholars that the strategic decisions for global integration and local responsiveness in international PR are not either/or choices (Huck, 2005; Lim, 2010; Wakefield, 2001). Rather, MNCs increasingly have to balance the global and the local by means of specific mechanisms of coordination and control between headquarters and subsidiaries. This notion was tentatively supported by Wakefield (2000) who conducted interviews with approximately 80 experts of international PR from more than 30 countries. Based on excellence theory and two qualitative studies, he proposed a normative model of ‘world-class PR’ for MNCs and outlined basic elements of presumably effective PR programs. According to this model, effective organizations have a global instead of a “central-mandate” philosophy. They coordinate communication both at headquarters and internationally. The PR officers they hire are full-time trained experts who represent the diversity of the MNC’s transnational publics. They employ dual-matrix reporting relationships between headquarters and subsidiaries and offer frequent opportunities for informal and formal interaction. PR officers work as a global team with horizontal reporting relationships and a central person who acts as team leader rather than mandate giver.

Lim (2010) suggested: “coordinating between integration and responsiveness can be achieved by giving tactical autonomy to local subsidiaries within the boundary in which the MNC’s mission, goals, and specific program’s themes are kept” (p. 310). Tentative evidence that supports this relationship between the centralization or decentralization of the PR function on the one hand and the standardization or localization of PR programs on the other hand was produced by Huck (2005). This author conducted in-depth interviews with the PR managers of 20 MNCs based in Germany. The findings showed that the more MNCs centralized their communication function and the more headquarters controlled their subsidiaries, the less they localized their PR messages and activities. The more they decentralized their communication function by giving local subsidiaries more autonomy and the more they developed PR programs collaboratively between subsidiaries and headquarters, the more they adapted communication activities to local and cultural contexts. In fact, most companies used decentralized structures and localized their PR efforts to some degree. Molleda (2000) also supported these findings and found that 60% of the MNCs he studied had medium levels of centralization, meaning that headquarters were responsible for 50% of the coordination and control, and local units were responsible for the other 50%. To achieve global coordination, MNCs use integrative communication devices such as annual reports, corporate websites, intranets, teleconferences, newsletters or codes of conduct and ethics (Molleda, 2000). According to Huck (2005), organizations that make use of decentralized PR structures and develop their programs collaboratively between headquarters and subsidiaries reported higher needs of coordination.

Although some knowledge has been produced for MNCs, almost no studies that analyzed how and to what degree INGOs organize, coordinate and localize their international communication activities have been found. For this lack of research, the broader management literature was reviewed to identify different types of INGOs in terms of headquarters–subsidiary relationships and coordination.

Coordination and Control in INGOs

INGOs usually operate in complex and turbulent environments. Together with increasing competition for donations and higher pressure for accountability they need efficient management processes and organizational structures, including the PR functions that are able to accommodate these developments (Tkalac & Pavicic, 2009). They all have in common that for their international scope in membership and operations they “must structure [themselves] in a manner that is effective in developing and maintaining support and coordinated action by participating members in different countries” (Young, 1992, p. 10). In addition, Young (1992) suspected that “those which succeed do so, in part, because they have found organizational structures that accommodate the unique challenges to organizing at an international level” (p. 2). Common problems in this context were
reported to be difficulties in communication between headquarters and local units, and lack of leadership capacity and professional human resources management, as well as problems with financial and institutional planning (Stark Biddle, 1984).

Young (1989) identified five different types of NGOs placed on a continuum between highly centralized, hierarchical and decentralized, segmented organizations. The unitary model refers to the most centralized type of NGO with strong headquarters that take all decisions for local branch offices in different countries, which have to implement these decisions. In the federation-type of INGOs decision-making mainly resides in central headquarters that set standards and acquire resources, but local units have their own leaders and implementation capacity. Confederations consist of strong affiliates that partially delegate coordination, resource allocation and standard setting to headquarters. However, central decisions are taken by consensus between larger subsidiaries and the central office. INGOs consisting of rather autonomous local organizations that established weak coordinating mechanisms represent the so-called umbrella model. The most decentralized type of INGO does not have any central office with decision-making or coordination authority. In this model separate national organizations sharing a common name are completely autonomous and co-operate on an ad hoc basis.

On the basis of several case studies of bigger INGOs such as Oxfam, Médecins Sans Frontières, or Plan International, Lindenberg and Bryant (2001) observed that some INGOs had abandoned organizational structures that were placed at both ends of the centralization–decentralization continuum. Care USA, for instance, moved from the unitary to the confederation model in the 1980s, and Save the Children changed its structure from separate independent organizations in the 1970s to the confederation model in the late 1990s. Therefore, these authors believed that three dominant forms of Northern relief and development NGOs would emerge: (a) competitive, independent national organizations with a weak umbrella coordinating structure, like Médecins Sans Frontières; (b) federations like Plan International; and (c) confederations like Care International. Young (1992) concluded from a number of case studies on international advocacy NGOs that over time they “will become more decentralized once they have established a formal federal structure.” Although Young assumed that the federation model would be most appropriate for accommodating challenges of national diversity and international coordination, Hudson and Bielefeld (1997) stated that INGOs operating in multiple national settings are most likely to be structured as umbrella organizations. They supported the notion that unitary, hierarchical structures are less common in NGOs, and probably less convenient for them.

How and whether these structures are related to organizing and coordinating international PR at INGOs has not been studied systematically so far and, thus, represents the point of departure for this study.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The main research question of this study was:

RQ1: How do INGOs manage strategic communication across borders in terms of centralization or decentralization of the PR function?

As research on MNCs suggested that major strategic decisions (mission, goals, etc.) should be made co-operatively between headquarters and subsidiaries although local units should be autonomous on the level of tactics (Lim, 2010), we aimed at a differentiated analysis of the different steps in strategic PR planning. In addition, Molleda (2000) found that MNCs employ varying degrees of centralization for different disciplines of international PR such as media relations, shareholder relations or government relations. Similarly, within this chapter different PR disciplines at INGOs (e.g., crisis communication, advocacy, media relations) were examined.
Management research on INGOs found that over time and with growing international scope, INGOs leave behind rigid centralized and hierarchical structures (unitary model) although others strive for a minimum of coordination by abandoning the model of completely independent national organizations that only share a common name. Therefore a first hypothesis was developed:

H1: The older and the more international in scope an INGO is, the more likely its PR function will be structured as federation, confederation or umbrella-type as opposed to completely centralized or decentralized structures.

The second research question refers to the use of integrative communication devices (Molleda, 2000) as an indicator of coordination efforts and interaction between headquarters and local units:

RQ2: Which and how many integrative communication devices do INGOs use to coordinate their international PR programs?

The need for the use of internal communication to coordinate PR between central and local units should rise with increasing levels of involvement of these units in their international communication strategies:

H2: INGOs where decision-making on PR resides in completely autonomous local subsidiaries or highly centralized headquarters implement significantly fewer communication devices or forms of co-operation compared to INGOs that involve both central and local units in strategic communication.

Third, scholars assumed that INGOs have to face substantial pressure to adhere to local standards and the cultural environment in order to avoid being perceived as Western intruders (at least in the case of Northern INGOs) (Tkalcic & Pavicic, 2009). Hence, international PR programs of INGOs to be effective have to be adapted to varying national and cultural contexts. The resulting research question was:

RQ3: To what extent do PR professionals in INGOs account for contextual factors in their strategic and tactical decisions?

As earlier studies on MNCs suggested a relationship between degrees of centralization of the PR function and the degree of local adaptation of PR programs, a third hypothesis was developed:

H3: The more INGOs centralize their PR function the less they will account for contextual factors in their strategic and tactical communication decisions.

Method

Sample and Procedure

To identify different types of INGOs and their ways of managing international communications, an online survey was conducted with professionals who lead international PR departments or programs. The study’s target population was NGOs with substantial international scope in their operations and communications. The Yearbook of International Organizations is a large database that has been proven useful in drawing samples of INGOs (Boli & Thomas, 1997). It provides data on more than 63,000 INGOs and intergovernmental organizations (IGOs) all over the world in all fields. The database is particularly useful for studying transnational actors in PR because it strictly includes only those organizations that are truly “international” based on the following criteria: (a) the aims of an INGO should involve the international level; (b) the membership of an INGO should be of international character; (c) the structure of the INGO should be formal or should have a permanent
office and possess some continuity; (d) the INGO should be independent; and (e) the INGO should not provide profits to its members. These criteria were regarded as being viable in comparison to the NGO definition discussed previously.

The yearbook’s online database contains more than 12,000 active INGOs. However, this population was reduced by certain criteria to include only those INGOs with a very strong international orientation. The yearbook divides INGOs into federations of international organizations, universal membership organizations, intercontinental membership organizations, and regionally defined membership organizations. Regionally defined membership organizations containing members from only one continent were not included in the survey, as it was assumed that international PR played a less important role. According to Boli and Thomas (1997), the yearbook is incomplete for the years immediately preceding its publication. They found that it takes 10 years before 80% to 90% of the organizations are included. It was therefore decided that only organizations established before 2000 would be included. As a result, the final population relevant to this study included 5,092 INGOs. The online database provides contact details for all organizations, so we aimed to conduct a census of this population. However, only 4,477 INGOs’ email addresses could be retrieved from the database.

After pre-screening with some PR managers of INGOs, the questionnaire was abridged, and the wording was simplified. On March 23, 2010, personalized email invitations were sent to 4,477 organizations. After the first wave of invitations, several hundred emails were returned undelivered because of inaccurate email addresses or other issues. Alternative email addresses for the respective organizations were investigated, and further invitations were sent. A total of 250 email invitations could not be delivered, meaning that a total of 4,227 organizations received invitations. After an additional reminder email, a total of 485 INGOs completed the questionnaire. Thus, a response rate of 11.5% was achieved. Although such response rates are commonly reported in online survey research (Couper & Bosnjak, 2010), the high dropout ratio is a study limitation in terms of representativeness. Nevertheless, we expected that more than 400 cases would cover a broad range of approaches to international PR within INGOs.

During the process of data collection, the deficiencies of the Yearbook of International Organizations became apparent. Several organizations sent individual responses, claiming that their organization was not an independent entity or was dormant or dissolved. Others had no formal structure, no headquarters or they were not international in scope. Therefore, the yearbook data should be treated with caution. Moreover, a methodological limitation stems from the survey technique. For each INGO only one individual PR professional was expected to be the only information source for his or her international organization including its numerous international subsidiaries. For some INGOs that are very complex in terms of internal structure and international scope, the actual knowledge of these individuals about structures and PR strategies might be limited.

The Questionnaire

The online questionnaire contained questions in four main areas of interest: general questions about the organization, the structure of the international PR function, forms and tools of international coordination, and the importance of environmental variables for planning and conducting international PR. The first area included questions about the structure of communications at organizational headquarters and the extent of international operations, measured by the number of countries and the specific continents the INGOs cover with their operations.

Questions regarding the forms of coordination inquired about how headquarters and local units share responsibilities for each of the following elements in the process of planning and conducting PR (Broom, Cutlip & Center, 2009): (a) carrying out research; (b) setting objectives; (c) definition of target groups; (d) the development of strategies; (e) the development of messages; (f) deciding measures (e.g., press releases); (g) deciding channels; and (h) the evaluation of PR activities.
each element, respondents were asked to indicate the particular leadership at the respective INGO (headquarters, local units, both independently, both collaboratively, or no one). At the same time, this operationalization captures to what extent international PR is planned strategically in INGOs. The same response options were applied to measure where decision-making resides with regard to the following disciplines of PR: advocacy, crisis communication, donor relations, fundraising, marketing, international media relations, local media relations, and the production of materials.

To assess the use of integrative communication devices to coordinate PR between headquarters and subsidiaries (Molleda, 2000) respondents had to state which of the following devices were used in their organization: formal guidelines, global code of practice, global media strategy, regular newsletters, online community, online knowledge base, regular meetings, regular phone conferences, showcasing of examples, skill-share meetings, training sessions, and email lists.

In addition, participants were asked to rate the importance of 21 contextual variables and their influence on strategic decisions in international PR activities (1—not important; 5—very important). These items were derived from Sriramesh and Vercić (2001) who proposed a list of variables that pertain to one of three factors: societal culture, national infrastructure, and the media environment. Based on Fritsch’s (2010) exploratory study, which consisted of in-depth interviews with PR managers of four major INGOs, additional variables were added to that list. These included (a) the history of a country, (b) the relative importance of an issue in a country, (c) national language, and (d) the diversity of languages in a certain country.

Data Analysis

To identify different types of INGOs in terms of their coordination of international PR between headquarters and local units (centralized or decentralized), two-step cluster analysis was used. One advantage is that it can include both categorical and continuous variables simultaneously. The algorithm also easily handles bigger samples and “is thought to behave reasonably well when the assumptions are not met” (Norušis, 2011, p. 394). These assumptions include the use of continuous variables with normal distribution, categorical variables with a multinomial distribution and the independency of all variables. Follow-up analyses of variance (ANOVA), comparing mean values between clusters as well as post hoc tests (Tukey-HSD) were used to test the hypotheses.

Regarding the 21 contextual variables that presumably influence strategic choices in international PR, an exploratory factor analysis (principle component analysis) was used to reduce them to a lower number of underlying dimensions. Oblimin was applied as a method of factor rotation due to the resulting factors being assumed as correlated. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure was used to assess sampling adequacy, with values above 0.8, indicating a reliable factor solution. Bartlett’s test of sphericity assesses whether the data shows sufficient inter-correlations and should be significant (p < 0.05). Factor scores were calculated with the regression method and used for subsequent analysis.

Results

General Findings

After data cleansing, a total of 440 INGOs were included in the analysis. So-called Northern INGOs, stemming from developed countries, clearly dominated the sample. 64% of these had established their headquarters in Europe, 17% in the US or Canada, and 2% in Australia. Among the Southern NGOs, 4% were from Asia, 3% from Africa, and 2% from Latin America; 5% had no permanent headquarters or only rotating headquarters. Most of the INGOs were professional associations or worked in the trade or business fields (27%), followed by organizations in research and education fields (21%), environmental protection (7%), religion (6%), human rights or peace (6%), culture,
sports, or recreation (6%), and health care (5%). Further INGOs in the fields of politics, social welfare, humanitarian relief and development made up groups of approximately 3% each, and 13% of the analyzed organizations simultaneously worked in several fields or fell into another category not specified in the questionnaire.

Regarding their position, most of the respondents identified themselves as CEO or president (26%), head of PR (12%) or senior PR officer (6%). However, a great variety of positions and titles existed among the respondents. Many of them used the open-ended question to specify their position, such as president, vice president, chairman, general secretary, or secretary. Accordingly, for most of the INGOs the CEO or president was responsible for PR (31%). 16% had a separate department. In 12% of the cases, a single PR officer was in charge, and 10% of the INGOs had each department carrying out PR on its own. In 7% of the INGOs, PR was part of the marketing department. A fairly large group of 20% carried out PR through individual part-time employees.

The vast majority of the respondents (94%) said that communication activities of INGOs are very important (69%) or important (25%) for attaining their strategic goals. Only two respondents felt strategic communication is not important for their organization. Hence, strategic communication is highly valued by PR professionals and/or CEOs in these INGOs.

Centralization or Decentralization of International PR (RQ1)

To assess whether systematic differences existed between the INGOs with respect to the degree of centralization or decentralization of international PR all the variables that referred to the elements of the PR management process (research, strategy, target groups, etc.) were entered into a two-step cluster analysis using the Schwarz Bayesian Criterion (BIC). The algorithm calculated a solution with four clusters (Table 30.1). The silhouette coefficient of cohesion and separation, ranging from -1 to +1, indicated a “fair” cluster solution (0.3), meaning that the average distance of a case to members of its own cluster is smaller than the average distance to cases in the other clusters (Norušis, 2011).

The first cluster was the largest and contained 132 INGOs (33.6%). This group was clearly dominated by highly centralized PR functions. For almost all steps in the communication management process, decision-making resided at the INGOs’ headquarters. Decisions on measures, the development of strategies and messages, objective setting and the definition of target groups were the central office’s main tasks. Only in conducting research was the cluster composition more heterogeneous.
In the second cluster, which contained 85 organizations (21.6%), most of the PR planning was performed collaboratively by headquarters and local units, especially the definition of target groups, the development of strategies and messages, and the decisions on measures and channels. Again, conducting research was distributed more heterogeneously.
The third cluster was the second largest with 113 INGOs (28.8%), predominantly containing organizations in which both headquarters and local units coordinated their PR independently. In these cases, the tactical considerations, such as the decisions on measures and channels, primarily fell in this category (approx. 90%), followed by the definition of target groups (75%) and evaluation (74%). Both headquarters and local units also developed strategies, objectives, and messages independently (values above 60%). However, for a considerable percentage of cases, these more strategic functions were coordinated either collaboratively by both units or solely by the central office.

The fourth cluster, containing 16% of the INGOs, was the most diverse in terms of coordinating international PR. It primarily included INGOs whose local units were exclusively in charge of a certain PR function, and those in which the function was not implemented at all. Specifically, research (40%) and evaluation (48%) was not employed at any unit of many INGOs. In most cases local units made tactical decisions about channels (49%) and measures (38%). Decisions about strategies, objectives, and messages were almost evenly distributed among the different forms of coordination.

The descriptive analysis of centralization or decentralization of the PR management process across the four clusters showed that strategy, objective setting and message formulation were the most centralized functions. Decisions on communication channels and research were the most decentralized functions.

A second cluster analysis was conducted for the different disciplines of international PR, including advocacy, crisis communication, donor relations, fundraising, marketing, international media relations, local media relations, and the production of materials (e.g., leaflets). A total of 371 INGOs for which the respondents gave answers in each category was clustered into four groups (silhouette coefficient = 0.3; Table 30.2). The fields of donor relations, fundraising and marketing were especially decisive in separating the clusters. A similar pattern was found for PR disciplines compared to the previous cluster solution.

Again, the first cluster contained mostly INGOs that coordinate the different fields of PR centrally from their headquarters, especially donor relations, fundraising and international media relations.

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<th>Cluster 2</th>
<th>Cluster 3</th>
<th>Cluster 4</th>
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<td></td>
<td>68% headquarters</td>
<td>39% both collaboratively</td>
<td>60% both independently</td>
<td>67% no-one</td>
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<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>13% both collaboratively</td>
<td>29% headquarters 16% local units</td>
<td>22% both collaboratively 11% headquarters</td>
<td>16% both independently 16% headquarters</td>
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<td></td>
<td>68% headquarters</td>
<td>44% both collaboratively</td>
<td>51% both independently</td>
<td>81% no-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crisis communication</td>
<td>14% no-one 10% both collaboratively</td>
<td>31% headquarters 13% local units</td>
<td>18% both collaboratively 16% headquarters</td>
<td>9% both collaboratively 5% local units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>82% headquarters</td>
<td>53% both collaboratively</td>
<td>81% both independently</td>
<td>84% no-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor relations</td>
<td>13% no-one 3% both collaboratively</td>
<td>31% local units 11% headquarters</td>
<td>10% no-one 6% both collaboratively</td>
<td>5% both independently 5% headquarters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only local media relations were in some cases assigned to local units (27%) or coordinated between both units (22% collaboratively). This was the largest cluster with 38% of all cases.

The collaborative approach was dominant in the second cluster with 25% of all INGOs. However, the distribution of the different forms of coordination between central and local offices was rather heterogeneous. Advocacy, crisis communication and international media relations were either coordinated collaboratively or exclusively assigned to the central office. Donor relations, fundraising and marketing were either both planned and conducted collaboratively by central and local units or autonomously by the local units. Local units were responsible for local media relations in most cases of INGOs in this cluster (55%), followed by INGOs with a collaborative approach (34%).
The third cluster contained 82 organizations (22%) where central and local units planned and conducted the specific PR functions rather independently. This applied primarily to fundraising, marketing, donor relations and the production of materials. For crisis communication, a considerable proportion of INGOs assigned this function exclusively to their headquarters (16%) or at least involved the central office on a collaborative basis (18%). In the case of international media relations, 31% of the INGOs in the cluster controlled this function from the central office. However, for all the variables organizations with rather independent central and local units represented the majority of cases.

In the fourth cluster most INGOs did not implement the specific communication functions at all. In particular, crisis communication (81% of the cluster), donor relations (84%) and marketing (70%) were not coordinated by any unit. The analysis of the degree of centralization or decentralization across all clusters revealed that international media relations, crisis communication and advocacy were the most centralized PR disciplines in these INGOs compared to the other disciplines. Local media relations and marketing were the most decentralized PR functions.

Besides this descriptive analysis of centralization or decentralization of international PR, we looked for differences between the four clusters in terms of their age and their international scope to test H1. The latter was measured by the number of continents that the INGOs covered with their operations according to the respondents. Hence, older INGOs and organizations with higher degrees of geographical range are most likely to be found in the clusters with collaborative or rather autonomous units as opposed to the centralized INGOs and the residual cluster. ANOVA was used to test this assumption by comparing the mean age and the mean number of continents. The assignment of INGOs to one of the four clusters was the independent variable.

For the age of INGOs no significant relationship was found (F(3, 371) = 2.4; p = 0.06). The operational scope of the INGOs across continents was significantly related to the centralized or decentralized coordination of PR (F(3, 389) = 9.1; p < 0.01). INGOs with local units and central offices that are both involved in the process of communication management and work rather independently had the highest international scope with an average of 4.3 continents that they cover with their operations. Slightly lower values were found for the collaborative cluster (M = 3.6). INGOs with very centralized PR functions were lowest in international scope (M = 2.9), followed by the INGOs in the fourth cluster (M = 3.3). Similar results were calculated for the second cluster solution. Again, the clusters failed to produce a significant effect on the age of the INGOs (F(3, 353) = 1.7; p = 0.17), but the number of continents differed significantly between the four types of organizations (F(3, 367) = 6.5; p < 0.01). The cluster of independent INGOs with both central and local units involved in PR planning showed the highest average of continents (M = 4.3) followed by the INGOs with collaborative units (M = 3.9). The organizations in the residual cluster (M = 3.1) and in the cluster with centralized INGOs (M = 3.2) were lowest in international scope. Thus, H1 was confirmed regarding the international scope of INGOs, although they did not significantly differ with respect to their age.

The Use of Integrative Communication Devices (RQ2)

With the second research question we were interested in the communication devices and forms of co-operation that central and local units at INGOs use to coordinate their international communication activities. Out of a list of 12 such devices respondents were asked to indicate which were used in their organizations. On average they used four communication devices (M = 4.0; s = 2.5). Regular meetings, online communities and regular newsletters were most frequently used in almost half of the INGOs (Table 30.3). Online knowledge databases (34%), formal guidelines (28%), email lists (26%) and regular phone conferences (24%) were less common. Even less used were global codes of practice (20%) or skill-share meetings (17%).

In addition to the overall use of coordination methods, we compared the four different clusters of INGOs in terms of the total number of integrative communication devices they use. The highest average
coordination efforts were found for the clusters with INGOs that involve both central and local units in the coordination of their international communication efforts, either collaboratively ($M = 4.6$) or rather independently ($M = 4.6$). The lowest use of integrative communication devices made the organizations in Cluster 4 ($M = 3.3$) where either no-one or the local units alone are responsible for international PR. INGOs in the cluster of centralized PR functions used on average 3.7 devices. These differences were significant ($F(3, 389) = 6.6; p < 0.01$). Post-hoc tests showed significant differences between highly centralized and highly decentralized INGOs on the one hand (Clusters 1 and 4) and INGOs with collaborating central and local units (Clusters 2 and 3) on the other hand. H2 was confirmed.

The difference in the use of integrative communication devices between these clusters was most notable in the cases of regular meetings ($\chi^2(3) = 12.5; p < 0.01$) as well as online communities ($\chi^2(3) = 12.3; p < 0.01$). These communication devices were used much more often in INGOs that involve both central and local units in the PR management process (Clusters 2 and 3) compared to highly centralized INGOs and INGOs with autonomous local units and/or missing PR functions (Clusters 1 and 4).

**Local Responsiveness and the Centralization or Decentralization of International PR (RQ3)**

Besides levels and forms of centralization and coordination we analyzed to what extent practitioners at INGOs consider contextual factors in designing and implementing their communication strategies. To test H3, the list of 21 context variables was first reduced to a lower number of dimensions with principal component analysis. A reliable solution with three factors was obtained with a total explained variance of 67% ($KMO = 0.94$; Bartlett’s test: $\chi^2(210) = 6886; p < 0.01$). With some restrictions, this factor solution is comparable to the three factors of contextual variables proposed by Sriramesh and Verčič (2001). The first component predominantly contained characteristics of the national media systems and public communication (Table 30.4). However, legal restrictions on activism and public attitudes towards activism loaded on this factor. The second factor that emerged was most similar to the factor of societal culture suggested by Sriramesh and Verčič (2001). However, respondents provided similar answers with respect to the importance of language, recent issues and events, history and corporate culture in the local units. The levels of economic and technological development, the political system and legal restrictions on communication formed the third component. With the exception of the activism variables, the third component corresponds roughly to the factor of national infrastructure described by Sriramesh and Verčič (2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communication device</th>
<th>Total ($N = 440$)</th>
<th>Total in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regular meetings</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online community</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular newsletters</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>45.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online knowledge base</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal guidelines</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>27.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email lists</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>25.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular phone conferences</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training sessions</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global code of practice</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill-share meetings</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showcasing of examples</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global media strategy</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All factor scores were calculated with the regression method and were used as dependent variables to test H3. The four cluster solutions regarding the centralization or decentralization of the PR management process were used as the independent variable. The three factors of contextual variables (media, infrastructure, and culture) were used as dependent variables. The results showed significant effects on all three contextual factors with the strongest effect on the social/cultural context \((F(3, 389) = 7.2; p < 0.01, \text{Eta}^2 = .005)\). The different models of centralization or decentralization also influenced the INGOs’ consideration of the media/communication context \((F(3, 389) = 3.0; p < .05; \text{Eta}^2 = 0.02)\) as well as the national infrastructure \((F(3, 389) = 3.1; p < 0.05; \text{Eta}^2 = 0.02)\).

The lowest scores for all three contextual factors were found in Cluster 4 where the PR function was exclusively assigned to local units or was not implemented at all. The media factor and the culture factor were both rated as most important by respondents in the two clusters of collaborative and rather independent units. Lower scores were calculated for the cluster of centralized INGOs. For the consideration of national infrastructure, however, the INGOs with a strongly centralized PR function had the highest scores, followed by the cluster with collaborative units. Hence, for the media and the culture variables lower degrees of centralization were related to higher degrees of local responsiveness of communication programs. The INGOs in Cluster 4 with autonomous local units and/or a complete lack of certain PR functions were the exception as they operate on a highly decentralized basis, but nevertheless do not consider contextual factors to be important for their international PR activities. For the national infrastructure, an opposite relationship was found. These

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Contextual variable</th>
<th>Structures and dynamics of public communication/media</th>
<th>Social and cultural context</th>
<th>National infrastructure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legal restrictions on journalism</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal restrictions on PR</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Degree of media censorship</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitude of journalists towards PR</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure of media ownership</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal restrictions on activism</td>
<td>.67</td>
<td>.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of literacy among population</td>
<td>.63</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public attitudes towards activism</td>
<td>.59</td>
<td>.40</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reach of different media</td>
<td>.57</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National language</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td>.74</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of an issue in the country</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of languages</td>
<td>.70</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History of the country</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of activism in that country</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural values</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.58</td>
<td>.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recent events in that country</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corporate culture in local units</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of economic development</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.52</td>
<td>.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of technological development</td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political system</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal restrictions on communication</td>
<td>.47</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Rotation method: oblimin direct; total variance explained = 67%; KMO = .94; Bartlett’s test: \(\text{Chi}^2(210) = 6886; p < .01\); factor loadings below .2 were suppressed.
contextual variables were most considered at centralized INGOs, although the more decentralized INGOs attributed less importance to such factors.

However, these relationships are only descriptive and do not represent sufficient evidence that confirms H3 because additional post hoc tests failed to produce significant differences between the clusters. In fact, only INGOs in Cluster 4 with very low scores of local responsiveness differed significantly from the INGOs in the remaining three clusters with higher levels of local responsiveness in their PR programs.

Discussion and Implications for NGO Communications

This study's primary goal was to gain better insight into how organizations in the global civil society sector manage communication across borders. The results suggest that, with some restrictions, INGOs should indeed be regarded as strategically mature. It was found that they highly value their strategic communications functions for attaining organizational goals. However, as INGOs often operate in resource-scarce environments, they do not always have the ability to establish an entire department for PR to integrate all communication functions. Consequently, this function is often assigned to the INGO's most senior manager (CEO or president) in both central and local units. Although they regard strategic communication a primary asset for their success, this might limit INGOs' ability to achieve their international communication goals as the PR function is not sufficiently separated from other functions and CEOs in many cases might lack the necessary background and time resources for setting up professional international PR programs. Thus, INGOs should look for ways to compensate for the lack of resources dedicated to international PR. A possible solution, which is already practiced by many INGOs such as the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), is the formation of alliances with MNCs. Actually, business organizations increasingly try to improve their reputation and perceptions of corporate social responsibility by partnering with NGOs. However, this may also result in conflict, reputational risks and financial dependency, especially for the INGOs. Given these risks, which in the case of the WWF already resulted in major reputational crises in 2011, INGOs might be better advised to form networks with other civil society organizations co-operating and sharing the PR function. This way they would be more likely to benefit from synergy effects and improve their international coordination and advocacy.

To measure local responsiveness in the communication programs of INGOs we applied the three-factor structure of variables influencing PR across borders proposed by Sriramesh and Vercić (2001). This taxonomy turned out to be empirically viable. However, the factor analysis also revealed slight differences. Respondents regarded public attitudes towards activism and legal restrictions on activism to be characteristic of the media environment rather than the national infrastructure. This might be due to the practitioners' understanding of the term “public attitudes,” which they probably construed as the tone of the media coverage on activism in a certain country. In addition, legal restrictions on activism constrain INGOs' access to media organizations and the national media agenda. This might explain the strong correlation of this item with the media–public communication factor. In contrast, the level of activism in a certain country was correlated with the factor of culture as it refers to the historically grown disposition of people to engage in activism and to commit themselves to social causes. Our findings also revealed additional aspects of the cultural environment of a country (national history, recent events, importance of an issue, language and diversity of languages), which were perceived by practitioners to influence their decisions on international strategic communication. Future studies should add these variables and apply confirmatory factor analysis to validate the three-factor structure.

Another goal of the present study was to identify the prevailing types of structures and coordination mechanisms used by NGOs that manage strategic communication across nations and cultures. The results suggest that management scholars’ assumptions regarding NGO structures (Lindenberg
Andreas Schwarz and Alexander Fritsch

& Bryant, 2001) are also viable in terms of the PR function. With the help of cluster analysis, four types of INGOs were identified: (a) organizations with strongly centralized PR functions that use local units to implement their decisions; (b) organizations with central and local units that develop and conduct their international PR collaboratively; (c) organizations that allow their local units to operate quite autonomously, but still undertake substantial efforts to coordinate their activities; and (d) INGOs that seem to be strategically immature as they do not cover many steps of strategic communication planning and lack some of the basic PR functions.

The first cluster is most similar to what Young (1992), as well as Lindenberg and Bryant (2001), described as the “federated model”, because headquarters possess most of the decision-making power. To a certain extent this group may even include some INGOs of the “unitary corporate” type. In the second type of INGO that was found, local subsidiaries have much more influence on communication programs, especially on the tactical level. However, they still involve the central unit in almost all steps of managing PR. That is why we tend to classify such organizations as examples of a more decentralized type of federation. The third cluster contained INGOs with very autonomous local units, although they still made substantial efforts of international coordination. This type best fits what has been described as the “confederated model.” The smallest group of organizations was assigned to the fourth cluster. The central and local units in these organizations are only loosely coupled and seem to lack efforts of cross-national coordination. In addition, they do not have a real strategic approach in their communication programs, which is probably due to their lack of financial resources or staff.

An overview of these four types of INGOs in terms of their approach to international PR is presented in Table 30.5. Future studies will have to show whether this classification is viable. In addition, this might serve as a benchmark to compare individual INGOs to existing models or to track changes in the predominant management models over time.

The data that was produced by this survey does not say anything about the actual effectiveness of the management models and structures that were identified. This will be the task of future research that should relate internal structures and different strategic communication approaches to indicators of external effectiveness of international PR. Usually, standardized approaches (global integration) were related to higher levels of internal efficiency, and higher degrees of local responsiveness of PR programs were assumed to increase external effectiveness (Lim, 2010). Based on these assumptions, the federated model might be most suited to achieving strategic goals across borders, as these INGOs seem to be most aware of cultural, social and communication-related context variables in their strategic choices. Indeed, increasing complexity in terms of international scope seems to favor or even require such a model. INGOs of this type were found to cover the highest number of continents in this study. On the other hand, it was shown that these organizations need to attribute more resources to their internal coordination, which means their communication management is more costly and time consuming. However, given the reputational risks that stem from being perceived as ethnocentric, Western-based or bureaucratic and ineffective organizations, these resources are a worthwhile investment.

Conclusions

Surveying communication managers at 440 INGOs, with 70% of the organizations operating on more than one continent and 30% on six continents, produced insights into structures and strategic orientations in the international communication management practice of civil society actors in the twenty-first century. Although their importance has been recognized in the management literature (L. Lewis, 2005), international PR of INGOs were barely examined. In addition, most of the international PR literature has been limited to descriptions of PR in various countries and has taken into account neither civil society organizations nor the extent to which organizations take contextual factors into consideration in their communication strategies. Therefore, this study will help to advance the study of truly international PR as practiced by transnational organizations.
Table 30.5 Classification of INGOs According to Their International Orientation and Coordination Mechanisms in PR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of INGO</th>
<th>Role of central units</th>
<th>Role of local units</th>
<th>Co-ordination efforts</th>
<th>Strategic consideration of contextual factors</th>
<th>Internationalscope in membership/operations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federations with dominating headquarters</td>
<td>Strong headquarters take most of the strategic decisions</td>
<td>Implement decisions made in central units</td>
<td>Moderate, less interactive</td>
<td>Consideration of national infrastructure; tendency to neglect cultural and communication-related context</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative federations</td>
<td>Decision-making based on consensus between central and local units; delegation to headquarters for some strategic issues (e.g., crisis communication, international media relations)</td>
<td></td>
<td>High, more interactive</td>
<td>Consideration of cultural and communication-related context; lesser importance of national infrastructure</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confederations</td>
<td>Umbrella-type co-ordination role with occasional decision-making power in overarching questions (e.g., crisis communication)</td>
<td>Rather independent, on the tactical level; occasional collaboration with central unit or delegation to central unit on the strategic level</td>
<td>High, more interactive</td>
<td>Great consideration of cultural and communication-related context; lesser importance of national infrastructure</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategically immature INGOs</td>
<td>Scant involvement in strategic issues; certain PR functions do not exist</td>
<td>Tactical autonomy; lack of strategic orientation; certain PR functions do not exist</td>
<td>Very low, less interactive</td>
<td>Tendency to neglect contextual factors</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*aThis classification is based on a validated two-step cluster analysis

*bThe differences in the use of co-ordination devices between these types of INGOs were significant (p < .05)

*cThe differences in the consideration of contextual factors between these types of INGOs are only descriptive and did not reach statistical significance (p > .05)

*dmеasured by the number of continents the INGOs cover; these differences were significant (p < .05)
Our findings seem to confirm the suspicions of some management and communication scholars: INGOs should be viewed as relevant actors with strong strategic orientation in the global arena of business and politics. This applies to the ways they organize and implement strategic communications across national and cultural borders. In our study, approximately two thirds of the respondents stated that their organizations cover all elements of strategic planning, implementation and evaluation with respect to their international PR programs. Almost all communication professionals claimed that they highly value communications for attaining strategic organizational goals. Thus, research on international PR should increasingly investigate INGOs as organizations “in and of their own right” (Lambell et al., 2008, p. 75) alongside governments, intergovernmental organizations and MNCs. However, almost half of the INGOs in this study either had highly centralized PR functions (Cluster 1) or had failed to establish well-coordinated communication programs (Cluster 4). It is questionable whether these organizations are able to cope with their culturally heterogeneous stakeholders (including voluntary members) or if these organizations can manage to balance the global and the local in their communication strategies. Based on our insights from the literature, these INGOs should move towards more collaborative models of coordination of international PR that involve both central and local units with differing degrees of autonomy (Clusters 2 and 3). These two types of INGOs (confederations and collaborative federations) correspond most closely to common recommendations in the literature on international PR management of MNCs (Lim, 2010; Wakefield, 2000). They coordinate communication at both headquarters and internationally, they offer more opportunities for interaction between staff of central and local units, and they tend to give tactical autonomy to local subsidiaries even though their global strategy is coordinated internationally.

**Perspectives for Strategic NGO Communications**

The presumably increasing professionalism of INGOs, in terms of managing their reputation and influencing public perceptions of a broad range of globally relevant issues, will have a greater impact on global politics, international business and cultural dynamics in the future. This finding highlights the need for more systematic research on this type of organization and more detailed investigations of the ways that INGOs practice strategic communication beyond “fashionable case studies” (Tkalac & Pavíc, 2009, p. 812) of well-known INGOs. International NGOs organize and coordinate their communication functions in manifold ways which roughly correspond to the models of managing international strategic communication at MNCs (Huck, 2005). Future research will have to produce further insights into the relationship between these models and the external effectiveness of the NGOs’ communication programs. This will also allow for a better understanding of the actual impact of NGO communication on the global political agenda, nation images and important international issues such as global warming and social justice.

NGOs often have to struggle with a lack of resources and staff, for which they have to compensate by means of voluntary participation, donations and cheaper ways to attain their communication goals. In many NGOs, CEOs and presidents are the key persons that manage strategic communication. Future research will have to answer the question of who these persons are and what background they have, especially with regard to communication. Another important aspect will be the measurement of communication processes and results. To date, NGOs still lack sophisticated models for measuring their reputation. In addition, NGOs need reliable and affordable tools to link strategic communication activities to the achievement of program goals (e.g., lower poverty rates or increasing school attendance of children in certain regions). Communication scholars have only just begun to focus their research on these issues.

Another trend in NGO communications seems to be the establishment of strategic alliances between major NGOs and MNCs. The question of whether NGOs really benefit from this approach, also in terms of their communication goals, urgently needs further research. In many cases this might lead to the consequence that NGOs have to face reputational crises and allegations of fraud. In the
crisis communication literature, however, NGOs have played a marginal role. As in PR research in general, they have mostly been studied in their role as inconvenient stakeholders of MNCs. Neither the crisis preparedness of NGOs nor their use of crisis response strategies have been systematically analyzed, although various NGO scandals and crises (Gibelman & Gelman, 2000) might indicate that the so-called “new super brands” (Woodiff & Deri, 2001) are eroding with regard to reputation and trust.

Further research in this respect would also allow for a better understanding of the role of strategic communication in the globalization process and its contribution to “social good” in an international environment (Sriramesh & Verčić, 2007). The systematic study of the peculiarities of NGO communications, such as their often sophisticated use of online communication and social media, would also help to assess the impact NGOs have on possible changes in the PR profession in terms of strategies, ethics and role perception. Future research on strategic communication of NGOs should extend beyond the PR discipline and look at related and/or overlapping types of strategic communication such as public diplomacy where NGOs have been regarded as top priority on the research agenda (Gilboa, 2008).

References


