# FROM CSR TO USR: REPOSITIONING PUBLIC RELATIONS' ROLE IN UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PRACTICES IN THAILAND

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## Abstract

Whereas corporate social responsibility (CSR) has captured the interest and imagination of scholars and professionals in the business world since the beginning of the new millennium, CSR in Thailand is still in the early stage of development. The concept was introduced to Thailand, as a Western influence, through the efforts of multinational companies in the past decade. Yet, the imported models of CSR has neither translated well into the Thai context nor generated real consensus among business leaders. Too often, much of the existing literature on CSR in Thailand has focus on business organization perspectives.Given the stressed condition of Thailand in this 21st century and the increasing needs of society in terms of educating highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens, giving students the opportunity to develop their own full abilities with a sense of social responsibility, it is now essential that universities should recognize their own responsibilities not only as providing skills and knowledge, but also contributing to the formation of citizens endowed with ethical principles, committed to building peace, and defending human rights and democratic values. All these have highlighted the significance of social responsibility of the university which can be termed as "USR – University Social Responsibility," and its increased call for the authentic development of human sustainability.USR has recently begun to receive attention to Thai universities and turned to play a vital role in the university teaching and educating system.  Despite the fact that the value of responsibility has strongly been rooted in Thai traditional beliefs, there is very little Thai influence on current USR initiatives. This research paper recognizes the need for culturally sensitive, homegrown approaches to demonstrate USR value in the Thai way. The paper places USR in the context of sustainable development and sufficiency economy advocated for the past three decades by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and then uses holistic relationship management framework with the alternative voice of Thai values to explicate the growing involvement of Thai universities in USR practices.The paper makes further argument that USR concepts and practices in Thailand have not

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yet been adopted on a large scale. It is also questionable if the involvement of those universities practicing USR is merely as an after-process activity trying to increase images and leverage positive exposure in the media. To such extent, it is found that while public relations educators and practitioners elsewhere recognize the significant role of public relations practitioners in helping universities to be more socially responsible, public relations profession in Thailand has been devalued merely as publicist, media relations specialists and marketing support staff. The paper seeks to consider these concerns by proposing the repositioning of public relations' role in USR practice. It argues that the value of public relations to the universities is the capacity to maintain holistic relationships, to stress ethical behavior in all stakeholder transactions and interactions towards the authentic development of human sustainability.

**Keywords:** CSR, USR, Thailand, PR

## Background

Whereas corporate social responsibility (CSR) has captured the interest and imagination of scholars and professionals in the business world since the beginning of the new millennium, CSR in Thailand is still in the early stage of development (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009). Despite the fact that the "social responsibility" practices have long been prevalent in the Thai society in the form of religious practices of Buddhism (Thai CSR, 2010), the western development of the term and concept of CSR has just evolved in Thailand after the World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting in 1999 (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009), and has developed further through the efforts of multinational companies and many large business corporations in the form of business strategies campaigns and activities (Asian Development Bank Institute, 2007).

For the past several years, CSR practices have become prevalent not only among multinational companies but also among other Thai-owned

companies. To the extent that multinational companies and Thai-owned companies have tried to implement CSR programs based on the Western CSR concept that theoretically refers to their commitment to take full responsibility on economic, legal, ethical, philanthropic, and social responsibilities (Caroll, 1991), their practices are concentrated in a few concerns. Previous research found that different business owners and practitioners understand and practise CSR in different ways (Rajanakorn, 2012). Thus far, the CSR concept has failed to help create the real sustainable society, and CSR practice has not yet delivered on its promise. The primary concerns among those who practise CSR during the decade-long dialogue have focused mainly on philanthropic, volunteering, and cause-related marketing activities. Many Thai business companies have seen the benefits of CSR approaches in terms of short-term donations that impact positively on the company's image. To achieve CSR, tools and activities are basically the main attention. Therefore, the CSR practice in Thailand has often been perceived as a reflection of window dressing activities to support a marketing goal rather than a reflection of corporate authentic integrity to implement socially oriented principles, strategies and long-term commitments for all stakeholders.

Previous surveys reveal that although there has been an increasing CSR awareness in Thai business and Thai society, limited knowledge and practice of CSR remains as Thai companies rank low in their level of understanding about the true value of CSR (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009). The global CSR survey by the consultancy Grant Thornton shows that "only 11% of Thai companies donate to charities and 4% participate in communities activities compared with the global averages of 65% and 55% in charity and community participation, respectively (Kesaprakorn, 2008; Rajanakorn, 2012). The additional survey conducted by the Thaipat Institute and the Foundation for Thailand Rural Reconstruction Movement (2009) reveals that 30.46 percent of 4,350 businesses respondents in Bangkok who

earlier had denied their awareness of CSR, changed their answers after seeing a list of CSR activities (Yodprudikan, 2010). Many of them revealed that they had engaged in several CSR activities such as good governance, ethical business conduct, product liability, donations and volunteerism, without being aware that this wide range of activities was considered as part of CSR. Another survey done by CSR Asia Center found that many Thai companies had CSR policies but only occasionally put these policies into concrete pratice (Prachyakorn, 2010; Rajanakorn, 2012).

CSR has become a catchphrase among the Thai businesses. However, many organizations and companies show diverse interpretations, perspectives and adaptations, even among the most growing companies in the country. Only a few corporate executives are able to provide a clear and specific definition. It shows that there is ittle consensus on the definition, value and framework of CSR in Thailand. In addition, CSR practices of big business corporations in Thailand still generate considerable doubt in the public eye, and on the part of development agencies or NGOs as to whether they are sincere, sustainable attempts to benefit society or if they are public relations or social marketing tools to increase corporate images and leverage positive exposure in the media (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009).

In the meantime, several working groups such as government and public organizations have tried to develop and promote CSR policies and implementation corresponding to the international initiatives from the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC), the United Nations Environment Programme's (UNEP) Principles for Responsible Investment (PRI), the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) Performance Standards, the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) and the new revision of ISO 26000. These international organizations put their efforts to encourage all businesses and companies to understand the values of CSR not in terms of CSR business viability, but in terms of connecting to stakeholder values and demands and society in an environmentally sustainable way (Prayukvong &

Olsen, 2009). The key CSR aspects encouraged by these international initiatives are: 1) the triple bottom line of people (society), planet (environment) and profit (economy); 2) the ethical and moral dimension of the firm towards its internal and external stakeholders; and 3) a healthy and sustainable society.

Among those several working groups that show their CSR expression in the organization values, vision and mission statements are the National Corporate Governance Committee (NCGC), the Ministry of Social Welfare and Human Security, the Office of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET). Other organizations supporting CSR among Thai organizations and corporations include Thai Bank Association (TBA), Thai Industrial Standard Institute (TISI), Thailand Volunteer Services (TVS), Corporate Social Responsibility Institute (CSRI), Thaipat Institute, CSR Promotion Center, and National Center for Giving and Volunteering (NCGV), under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS) and Institute of Directors (IOD) (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009). However, the imported models of CSR applied by those organizations have not yet translated well into the Thai context or generated real consensus among Thai organizations. This is multifaceted by the fact of different countries' ideologies ranging from individualist cultures (that values short-term orientation which is more characteristics of the US) to communitarian cultures (that values long-term orientation and the need of community which is more common of the Eastern countries and the European Union) (Lodge, 1990; Shawyun, Al-Karni, Al-Shehri, & Al-Hamali, 2012). Cross cultural differences and traditional value differences in how organizations and their CSR activities are regulated could lead to how each organization defines its own version of CSR that could range from strategic CSR, altruistic CSR or coerced CSR (Husted & De Jesus Salzar, 2006).

Taking CSR practices in Thailand another step further, from the infant development stage to the maturity stage of development, there is a need for Thai companies and organizations to

understand the true value of CSR and its multifarious aspects, then learn how other organizations implement and improve their CSR practices, share and exchange their good practices, develop a sustainable CSR implementation plan, and finally manage the experiential learning and knowledge (Prayukvong & Olsen, 2009).

## CSR, Academic Services and USR: A Move Towards the Knowledge Society

While the fundamentals and principles of CSR are still widely debated in the business communities, several working groups and supporting organizations, some of the same issues can also be questioned of the operations of a university as an academic organization (Anderson & Cook, 2012). Given the stressed condition of Thailand in the 21st century (i.e., distressing social, economic and political conditions, mass expansion of higher education, commercialization of higher education, internationalization, student access and student mobility, and impact of digital economy), there are increasing needs of society in terms of educating highly qualified graduates and responsible citizens, giving students the opportunity to develop their own full abilities with a sense of social responsibility. It is now essential that universities should recognize their own responsibilities not only as providing skills and knowledge, but also contributing to the formation of citizens endowed with ethical principles, committed to building peace, and defending human rights and democratic values. All these have highlighted the significance of social responsibility of the university and its increased call for the authentic development of human sustainability.

At the dawn of the 21st century, the new social order of knowledge society has highlighted the importance of the university, as an academic organization with multiple missions, and the increased obligation to be a good corporate citizen. The multiple missions of all Thai universities include 1) teaching and producing its graduates and postgraduates; 2) researching and creating the new knowledge; 3) delivering academic services utilizing its expertise and calibrating the strategy of knowledge application for social problems; 4) preserving and enriching art and culture, as well as 5) transferring and developing new technology. The execution of all these missions requires knowledge and scholarship which are the expertise of the university. All these missions are officially stipulated in the charges of both public and private universities. Despite the mission statement, universities are more active in some missions, while less active in others depending on the expertise and readiness of the university, and the resources and supports received from external bodies and individuals. In general, teaching and research are the two most focused missions of the university, while others are also maintained but with varied degrees (Srisa-an, 2015).

"University's academic services to the society" is an addition to the two original key missions of teaching and research. The concept started in the United State and later has been widely adopted as another main mission by numerous universities around the world. Academic servicesrefersto "the fact that the university is in the position on which the communities could rely, or is an academic reference point, or performs any functions which impact the development of learning and knowledge of the communities, as well as improving the strength of the community, the nation and other countries" (Shawyun, Al-Karni, Al-Shehri, and Al-Hamali, 2012). The mission of academic services to society gives rise to a variety of terms such as social services and community services.

In most cases, it could be seen that Thai universities provide academic services in a one-way giver-taker relationship in which the services are delivered by the university and received by the people in the community. Occasionally, they are organized collaboratively by the university and the community. Academic services provided by Thai universities have come in a variety of activities, such as knowledge dissemination through academic seminar, advice and consultancy, testing and experimentation, demonstration and joint projects. Each university offers these services in quite a number of formats and in varied degrees depending on two main factors, which are 1) the expertise and readiness of

the university, and 2) the current needs of the society. Most of what the universities in Thailand practise as university's academic services are within the requirements and standards of quality management and assurance. Most of the universities will work within the confines of these standards and criteria to fulfill or meet the minimum criteria (Shawyun, Al-Kami, Al-Shehri, and Al-Hamali, 2012; Srisa-an, 2015).

Turning towards the new social order, there is an alternative interpretation of traditional academic services to society towards the more popular term, the so-called University Social Responsibility or USR. The term waslaunched in 2008 with the definition of USR, modified from CSR concept, as "an ethical approach to develop a sense of civic citizenship and socially responsible students, academic staff and faculty members in other to promote social, ecological, environmental, technical and economical engagement for a long lasting and sustainable local and global community" (Aurilla Bechina Arnzten, 2009). The concept is now spreading throughout universities around the world. USR has become a central topic of positive discussion among organizations relating to higher education (Sawasdikosol, 2009). In addition, USR has been cited as one of the most important factors in driving for the development and reform of the university education system.

Despite the fact that the value of responsibility has strongly been rooted in Thai traditional beliefs, there is very little Thai influence on current USR initiatives. The operations of a university must respond to local needs, taking into consideration the benefit for each locality. It should also think about how to produce a workforce to serve as a driving force for national development. On top of that, there is the need for universities to communicate more with the public, so that they will be better known and their role will receive greater recognition. Since USR is still a very new concept to Thailand and directed exclusively toward institutions of higher education, not enough work has yet been done relating to specific USR concepts and practice in

the country. In addition, it is found thatuniversities in Thailand have been practicing USR on a piece-meal basis as envisioned through their visions and mission statements.

In reality, not many Thai universities know what and how envisioned outcomes and contributions of USR can be systematically applied and implemented in the university's prioritization for sustainability. The following section recognizes the need for culturally sensitive, homegrown approaches to demonstrate USR value in the Thai way. The paper places USR in the context of sustainable development and sufficiency economy advocated for the past several decades by His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej, and then uses holistic relationship management framework with the alternative voice of Thai values to explicate the growing involvement of Thai universities in USR practices.

## Holistic Framework: From Glocalization Perspective to Sufficiency Economy

In this section, the paper applies the glocalization perspective as a lens to see today society as the combination of different, but interrelated and interconnected, narratives. To create a better understanding in building local strengths or intensive growth for globalization, Robertson (1995) suggested a more accurate term called "glocalization," originated in Japan as a popular business strategy (p. 28). Khondker (2004) added that while globalization as a framework is naturally biased in favor of macro-macro relationship, "glocalization" as a concept arose to help alleviate the conceptual difficulties of macro-micro relationship. He further concluded that the main propositions of glocalization are: 1) Diversity is the essence of social life; 2) Globalization does not erase all differences; 3) Autonomy of history and culture give a sense of uniqueness to the experiences of groups of people whether we define them as cultures, societies or nations; 4) Glocalization is the notion that removes the fear from many that globalization is like a tidal

wave erasing all the differences; and 5) Glocalization does not promise a world free from conflicts and tensions but a more historically grounded understanding of the complicated—yet pragmatic view of the world

In short, the true meaning of glocalization appreciates the significance of cultures, and the construction of diverse localities through global flows of ideas and information (Eade, 1996, p. 4). The glocalization concept can lead to s trengthening of local and national identities (Featherstong, 1996; Robertson, 1992, 1995) by bringing together people around a common purpose with shared values that transcend cultural and national boundaries (Culberston, Jeffers, Stone & Terrell, 1993; Kruckeberg & Starck, 1998). Viewed through the lens of glocalization, public relations practitioners are challenged to balance local and global expertise. To this extent, glocal public relations practice should move toward the development of holistic relationships from which the new approach, such as dialogic, diplomatic and collaborative public relations, has emerged (Hayes, 2007).

In the glocalization perspective, a holistic worldview is taking place. It is one that perceives the human being as an organic whole, embedded in the socio-cultural sphere, embedded in turn in the wholeness of the environmental biosphere. Recently, the notion of "holistic approach" has been received high attention among Asian scholars in general and Thai scholars in particular. The recent introduction of an holistic approach based on contemporary Buddhist principles, has great influence on Thai national development. According to the 11th National Economic and Social Development Plan (2012-2016) based on the philosophy of sufficiency economy, universities are the source of knowledge that produces high quality manpower for the nation's sustainability while creating life-long learning society. A significant shift in the national development planning has taken place from a growth-oriented approach to the new model of holistic people-centered development. In order to ensure a more balanced development, priority was given to broad-based participation, and to actively engaging civil society, the private sector and academia, in the formulation the national development plan. Underling this holistic framework is the view that "strong community" or "civil society" is a foundation unity operating in a social system in connection with environment constituencies.

## Socio-Cultural Exploration

It is important to understand that Thailand is a very open country with diverse traditions, values, way of living, and culture; mainly because Thai people often welcome outsiders and like to look outwards (Phongpaichit & Baker, 1998). In spite of its openness to external forces, Thailand has also been known as a country with highly-preserved local cultures. Unlike the East Asian nations, Thailand is a quasi-democratic country where the structure of the state reflects the economic, politic, and social changes. Girling (1996) found that the analysis of Thai society involves many different, yet related, factors such as the assertion of state power, the rise of the business, the money politics, and the emergence of the middle class and the civil society.

The consequence of economic downfall, although causing Thailand a great pain, is waking up the nation to the truth that its past development has been marked by "compartmentalized thinking," which focuses on a few parts rather than a whole. In the reforming paradigm, the nation requires the holistic framework that leads to more participative and collaborative community. In other words, the holisticframework is an initiative concept for a collective decision, followed by collective action that was aimed at the good of all. Relationships formed in a holistic framework draw attention to three units of analysis: macro-social, individual, and psycho-centered levels. As a consequence,

the holistic framework facilitates a broader sense of "public relationships" in which a public becomes a society of citizens or a civil society (Mathews, 2000).

In consistency with the holistic framework discussed earlier, His Majesty King Bhumibol Adulyadej has suggested that Thailand needs to learn how to become self-sufficient before heading toward success in the global arena. In a Buddhist country like Thailand, holistic development would be good to the point of sufficiency. His Majesty, then, has developed the philosophy of the Sufficiency Economy to lead Thai people to a balanced way of life and to be the main sustainable development theory for the country. Sufficiency Economy, in his context, is a way of life that sees the world in the pattern of relationship-building process operating within existing social and cultural structures in a given community. In responding to the King's ideas, many Thai sectors have joined hands in promoting the philosophy of Sufficiency Economy, as a holistic framework to build a civil and sustainable society.

## Sufficiency Economy as Thai Holistic Framework: The Explication Of Buddhist Teaching

Many Western scholars, who have been interested in Thai culture and society, consider that the complex nature of the Thai community is essentially attributed to Buddhist values (Kapur-Fic, 1998). They suggest that "if one wants to understand the value orientation of the Thais, it is enough to study the precepts of Buddhism" (p. 504).

From the Buddhist standpoint, the glocalization worldview, the holistic framework and the Sufficiency Economy philosophy are all based upon a "Middle Path" way of thinking, the interplay between society at the local level and the market in the global context. In Buddhist teachings, the

Middle Path, is the noble way composed of Eight-fold Path: 1) proper understanding, 2) proper thought, 3) proper speech, 4) proper action, 5) proper livelihood, 6) proper effort, 7) proper mindfulness, and 8) proper concentration. Beyond the Eight-fold Path are two more paths: 1) proper insight and 2) proper liberation. These paths depend on and lead to one another. It is a training method to be used for eliminating clinging, craving and attachment to self (Kapur-Fic, 1998). To develop more generally defined phases for the daily practices, Phra Payutto (1995) incorporates the Eight-fold Path to the Threefold Training, the three major principles of the Buddhist teachings which starts with ethical and moral behavior and speech, continues on to mental training or concentration, and then reaches the final level of developing insight or wisdom to the point of overcoming ignorance, craving, and attachment.

By highlighting the Sufficiency Economy philosophy through the lens of the Buddhist Middle Path, the philosophy allows the nation to modernize without resisting globalization, but provides a means to counteract negative outcomes from rapid economic and cultural transitions. In short, the Sufficiency Economy philosophy and its expected outcomes are best summarized, by His Majesty himself;

"Sufficiency Economy is a philosophy that guides the livelihood and behavior of people at all levels, from the family to the community to the country, on matters concerning national development and administration. It calls for a 'middle path' to be observed, especially in pursuing economic development in keeping with the world of globalization. At the same time we must build up the spiritual foundation of all people in the nation, especially state officials, scholars, and business people at all levels, so they are conscious of moral integrity and honesty and they strive for the appropriate wisdom to live life with forbearance, diligence, self-awareness, intelligence, and attentiveness. In this way we can

hope to maintain balance and be ready to cope with rapid physical, social, environmental, and cultural changes from the outside world." (UN ES-CAP, 2006).

## Holistic Relationship Framework: Repositioning Public Relations Practice in Thailand

In this section, the paper makes further argument that throughout the past several decades USR concepts and practices in Thailand have not yet been adopted on a large scale. It is also questionable if the involvement of those universities practicing USR is merely as an cosmetic activity trying to increase their image and leverage positive exposure in the media. To such extent, it is found that while public relations educators and practitioners elsewhere recognize the significant role of public relations practitioners in helping universities to be more socially responsible, public relations profession in Thailand has been devalued merely as publicists, media relations specialists and marketing support staff. The paper seeks to consider these concerns by proposing the repositioning of public relations' role in USR practice. It argues that the value of public relations to the universities is the capacity to maintain holistic relationships, to stress ethical behavior in all stakeholder transactions and interactions towards the authentic development of human sustainability.

Albeit that the body of knowledge of public relations has been around for three decades; the practice remained fragmented and existing literature lacks reasonable representation of multicultural experiences. The growing body of knowledge has been ethnocentric, focused on the U.S., to a lesser extent Europe and largely based around management and business thinking (Hayes, 2007, p. 3).Vercic, Ruler, Buischi and Flodin (2001) reflected that twentieth century public relations had been dominated by U.S. scholars and practitioners. The two American-based practitioner organizations--Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), and International Association of Business Communicators (IABC)--each had more members than the International Public Relations Association (IPRA). Major textbooks from both the practitioner and academic press were originated in the U.S. The global marketplace for public relations services was served primarily by U.S. agencies (p. 374). Only until 1998, the European Association of Public Relations Education and Research (rather changed its name to European Public Relations Education and Research Association—EUPRERA) mandated a task force to produce the European Public Relations Body of Knowledge—EBOK. Yet, the educators and practitioners around the world are being hampered by the lack of an established body of knowledge about public relations practices in different parts of the world (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001).

As the public relations profession has become a global enterprise, it seems insufficient merely to translate American textbooks for use in other parts of the world, particularly the newly emerging countries, or to undertake country by country studies without reference to other contextual aspects, such as national character, historical background, economy, environment, technology and culture (Hayes, 2007). The demanding increase in multicultural communication puts public relations educators and practitioners at the forefront of managing the relationships among people of varied nations and cultures (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2001). Throughout the world today there is evidence that effective public relations practice requires multicultural knowledge, skill and intellect. In addition, public relations practice and commitment should dedicate to creating stronger ties and sustainable relationships between people and the larger communities to which they belong and depend.

This has stressed the need for a new paradigm with a new mindset that reframes public relations beyond the rationalist model of management and

communication focusing on the narrowly defined corporate self-interests, to develop more of a relational, dialogic, collaborative, and ethic-based approach to help organizations, their stakeholders, and society adapt, resolve conflicts, create greater understanding and build sustainable relationship and long-term partnerships to solve multicultural issues (Hayes, 2007).

Recently, emerging terms in public relations literature are mutually beneficial relationships, community, integrating diversity, social responsibility, accountability, collaboration, and sustainability. These terms take on increased significance due to business, organization, and university leaders' desires to reach increasingly fragmented segments of consumers and stakeholders in the global market. Despite the relatively recent emergences of these new terms, acceptance seems to be widespread in both academic and professional areas. Sriramesh (2002) suggested that public relations education would need to stand on two principal pillars: a comprehensive body of knowledge and a pool of qualified educators who can impart, and contribute to the building of, this body of knowledge (p. 55). The question remains to be answered is whether the current public relations education system is adequately equipped to train future public relations professionals to practice effectively in the increasingly multicultural environment in which organizations are forced to operate.
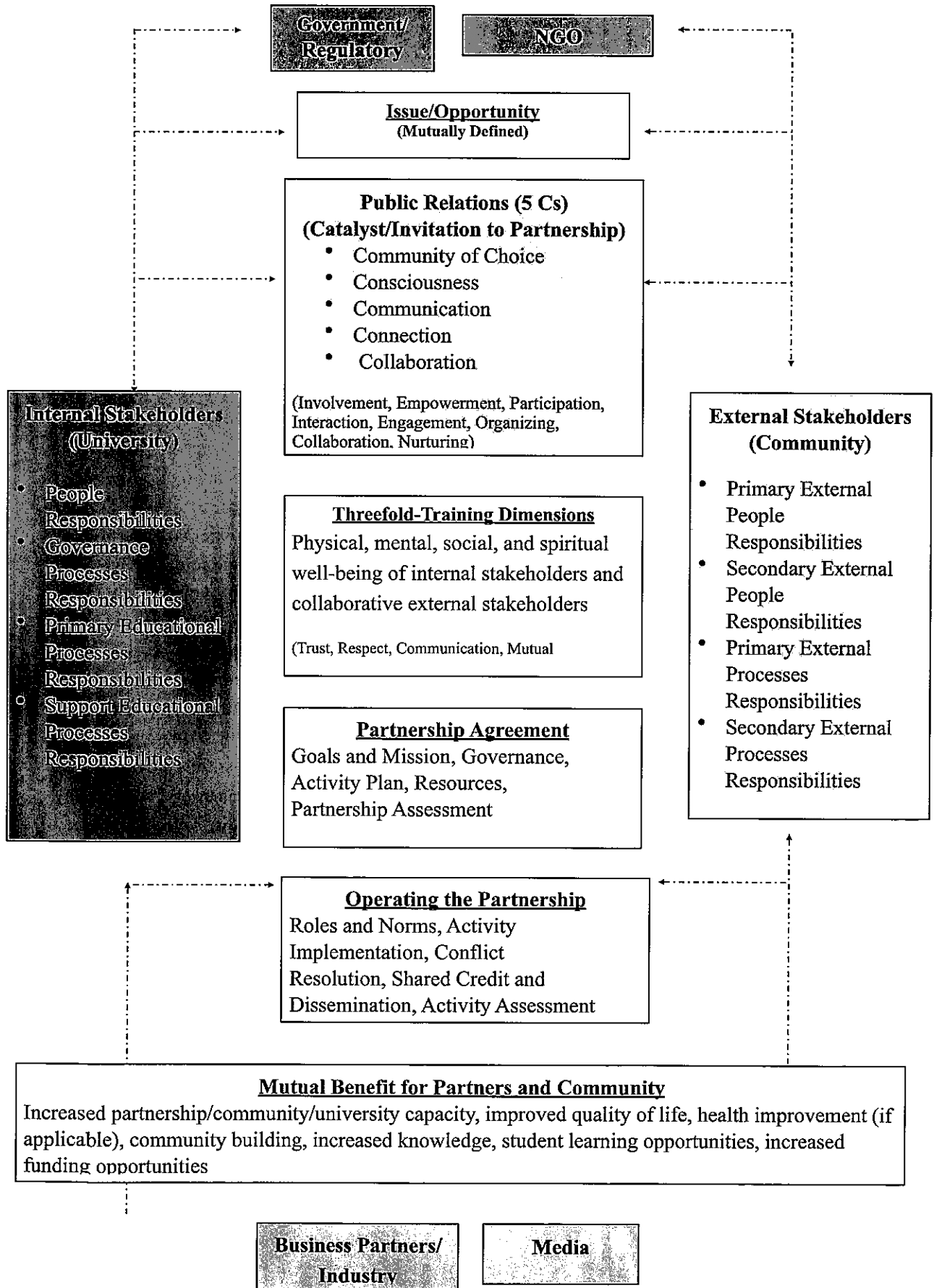
## Holistic Relationship Framework and Public Relations' Role In USR Practice

As contemporary public relations scholars begin to shift their unit of analysis to socio-cultural relationship processes, it is hoped that understanding the Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy philosophy as Thai holistic framework will shed light on public relations' role in USR practices in Thailand. The repositioning of public relations as holistic relationship management will brings with it an

opportunity to shape the way a university think about public relations profession, and they can come to recognize the true values of public relations for USR as a whole. In addition, the holistic relationship framework of public relations can help provide a good explanation to the new interpretation of USR as University-Social Engagement. This new interpretation will embrace the social engagement philosophy that based on 4 key principles: 1) university-social organization partnership, 2) mutual Benefit, 3) knowledge sharing & scholarship and 4) measurable social impact. For institutionalization the University-Social Engagement mission, there are two interrelated approaches — 1) internal engagement and 2) external engagement (Srisa-an, 2015). Explicitly, university engagement "implies purposive, respectful and productive interaction between both internal (academics, students and administrative staff) and external stakeholders (industry, government agencies, NGOs and communities) for the establishment of mutually beneficial partnerships. This will involve working together with shared understanding to develop shared solutions, through shared governance and shared assets, with the ultimate aim of gaining shared advantages for all stakeholders (Kaur Gill, 2014).

This section demonstrates how holistic relationship management framework, conceptually developed from the Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy philosophy can contribute to public relations' role in USR practices in Thailand. The paper proposes a conceptual holistic USR model [Figure 1] that build upon the work of Gass (2008), Israel (1998), Lasker (2001) and Holland (2004), who have attempted to identify the necessary dimensions of university-community partnerships, and the work of Shawyun, Al-Karni, Al-Shehri, and Al-Hamali (2012), who have established a strategic USR management framework.

## Figure 1: Holistic University Social Responsibility Model

**Government/ Regulatory**          **NGO**

**Issue/Opportunity**
(Mutually Defined)

**Public Relations (5 Cs)**
**(Catalyst/Invitation to Partnership)**
* Community of Choice
* Consciousness
* Communication
* Connection
* Collaboration

(Involvement, Empowerment, Participation,
Interaction, Engagement, Organizing,
Collaboration. Nurturing)

**Internal Stakeholders (University)**
* People Responsibilities
* Governance Processes Responsibilities
* Primary Educational Processes Responsibilities
○ Support Educational Processes Responsibilities

**External Stakeholders (Community)**
* Primary External People Responsibilities
* Secondary External People Responsibilities
* Primary External Processes Responsibilities
* Secondary External Processes Responsibilities

**Threefold-Training Dimensions**
Physical, mental, social, and spiritual
well-being of internal stakeholders and
collaborative external stakeholders

(Trust, Respect, Communication, Mutual

**Partnership Agreement**
Goals and Mission, Governance,
Activity Plan, Resources,
Partnership Assessment

**Operating the Partnership**
Roles and Norms, Activity
Implementation, Conflict
Resolution, Shared Credit and
Dissemination, Activity Assessment

**Mutual Benefit for Partners and Community**
Increased partnership/community/university capacity, improved quality of life, health improvement (if applicable), community building, increased knowledge, student learning opportunities, increased funding opportunities

**Business Partners/ Industry**          **Media**

## Holistic Relationships Management

Based on the adoption of the Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy philosophy, this research paper develops an holistic USR model (see Figure 1) to illustrate how public relations plays an important role in the holistic USR practice. The main emphasis is to advocate physical, mental, and spiritual well-being for their collaborative communities. The holistic relationship management scheme focuses on educating and building community cohesion and stakeholder relationships around the central theme of healthy and sustainable lifestyles for individuals and societies. The role of public relations not only shares information but also provides practical tools and techniques for their stakeholders to implement into their organization that enable Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy values to penetrate into various situations. These values include: authenticity, transparency, honesty, integrity, professionalism and love for mankind and the environment.

## Threefold-Training Dimensions

The USR model creates an holistic relationship management system that advocates physical, mental, social, and spiritual well-being of internal stakeholders and collaborative external stakeholders. The USR philosophy is about building relationships, based on Thai social values, between university and community.

## Collaborative Management System

Under the holistic relationship management scheme, there are three potential channels in which the new collaborative management system is implemented: 1) collaborative share values, such as trust, meaning, community, and ownership, 2) community business ecology, and 3) sustainable market. The collaborative management aims to put together the new structure and new consciousness for an alternative collaborative scheme. This new scheme aims to mobilize the university to work collaboratively with the communities.

This new collaborative management system values the community empowerment and stakeholder relationships. Unlike the mainstream business management, itbrings forth the Buddhist teaching to their business plan by introducing a so-called "The Collaborative Happiness," which believes that "if people begin their days with good outlooks, the deeds that followed would be righteous, thus leading people to happiness and well-being. People who are happy generally want to make others happy too, which in turn, makes them happier."

## Public Relations' Role in Holistic USR Practice

The holistic USR model suggests two integral approaches: the hard approach and the soft approach. The hard approach develops the physical well-beings of the organization. The soft approach develops the mental well-being and the spiritual well-being of the organization. The model illustrates that the physical well-beings are determined by health and safety (i.e., productivity, quality, and efficiency), economic status (i.e., finance profits, funding, sales, service, and product excellence), and good environmental conditions (i.e., air, water, food, and earth).Mental well-being includes interaction, mutual learning, participation, involvement, corporate culture and values, vision and mission, and employee fulfillment. Spiritual well-being includes collaborative alliances, partnership, social responsibility and social accountability.

As the hard approach is mainly practised by marketers and those from hard-corefunctions, the soft approach is more related to social practitioners, such as public relations and communication practitioners. Public relations' role in holistic relationship management process can be encapsulated under the following "5Cs": Community of

Choice, Consciousness, Communication, Connection, and Collaboration.

## Community (Stakeholder) of Choice

The holistic USR facilitates community of choice, in which the stakeholders remain members because they want to be, not because they have to be. In such case, public relations must prove its worth to the internal community as much as the internal community must prove their worth to their external community. Within the social integration system, there are different types of communities/stakeholders. Members of these communities are often looking for personal growth, self-development, and opportunity to serve others. Public relations should play the role of facilitator to help members in each community feel valued and accepted.

## Communication

The holistic USR recognises that a good communication system cannot be separated from the more fundamental question of a good society and a good life. Laszlo explains that communication unfolds on multiple levels: 1) communication with oneself means caring for and developing one's consciousness and personality, 2) communication with one's family, community, and work/profession; and 3) communication with one's society. The holistic USR implies that the communication process should be seen as the value-transferred process, rather than one of simply sending messages to the stakeholders. In the value-transferred process, public relations should take into consideration that every content and message should be developed in contact with specific target audience or specific stakeholder linkage, and in relevant to their needs and want with the aspirations of their local culture, values, and traditions.

## Connection

One of the great myths of the rationalist paradigm

of management and communication has been the skin-enclosed separation of individuals from each other and the disjunction of their interests from the interests of others. Many organizations which followed such worldview appeared to be self-contained, self-centered, pursuing their own interests, harmonized at best with the interests of others through the workings of the market. In the Buddhist teaching, the essential principles embrace the understanding of complexity, plurality, interrelatedness, and interdependence. The holistic USR reflects that individuals and communities are constituted of one another and their relationships are, at one and the same time, mutually supportive and tensed. In the holistic USR, public relations' roles are: 1) to promote social capital, such as environmental concerns, basic wisdom of local communities, and the knowledge of civic groups, 2) to empower local communities, grassroots organizations, activists, and civil societies, and 3) to establish glocal business, social and cultural networks.

## Collaboration

Collaboration requires a great deal of win-win positive relationships. The holistic USR enhances communities of strong relationships that value serial reciprocity, or collaboration. Collaboration requires a strong community and values where fairness is maintained about who gets from and gives to the community. Collaboration as authentic relationship is at the heart of the Buddhist way of living, one that calls for individuals to live in accordance with the principles of respect for others and the active pursuit of loving-kindness, mutual support, and shared values. The authentic relationship should go beyond the understanding of a relationship as a transaction market (you get what you give) toward the understanding of a relationship as collaboration (you will get if you give). Public relations should learn how to facilitate the collaborative/ authentic relationships with their stakeholders.

## Consciousness

The full potentials of public relations unfold when the practitioners understand the strands of holistic relationships through which they communicate, connect, and collaborate with their stakeholders. A high level of public relations calls for a high level of consciousness that enables people to make use of the strands of holistic relationships that bind them to each other, to their community, society and environment. Consciousness of these holistic relations lifts human thinking from the outdated ego-centered level to the urgently needed community, society, ecology, and global-centered dimension.

## Conclusion

The major challenge of this research paper is the repositioning of public relations' role in holistic USR that is well-adjusted to the Thai context and the articulation of how the new approach can be brought forward to other universities and the society as a whole. The review of glocalization perspectives, Asian values, Buddhist-based Sufficiency Economy philosophy, Thai values, and holistic relationship management raises interesting heuristic issues for public relations practice in Thailand.

The repositioning of public relations as holistic relationship management has gone beyond the conventional public relations approach that focuses on the self-centered conversation and information-centered communication. The concept abides by the new context of relationship management that incorporates 5Cs: 1) Community (Stakeholder) of Choices; 2) Value-transferred Communication Process that values mutual caring, loving families, strong communities, cultural vibrant and healthy environment; 3) Connection; 4) Collaborative relationship; and 5) Consciousness.

This research paper reflects a call for a repositioning of public relations practice in Thailand, in which public relations should not only be considered as a tool of university, but in its broader, more human applications. It is an approach of establishing an idea in the minds of the public that a product, service, and organization is not only worthwhile, but that it is somehow more than just a product, service, and organization, that it is something essentially important to their lives. It is ultimately the most difficult kind of public relations in the world, but also by far the cheapest, and without doubt the most effective.

The position taken in this research paper attempts to change the paradigm of public relations to a non-Western approach. Will this new public relations mindset sustain itself and live up to its promise? Only time will tell. However, it is hoped that this paper will, more or less, encourage Thai scholars and leading professionals to continue to refine their thinking on several key challenges.

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