BATTLE ON THE HOME FRONT:

A CONTINGENCY APPROACH TO ANALYZING HOW AN ARMY UNIT

COMMUNICATES WITH FAMILIES DURING A DEPLOYMENT

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis or dissertation entitled

BATTLE ON THE HOME FRONT:
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presented by Franzine Biebl Schneider, a candidate for the degree of master of arts,

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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ABSTRACT

A case study with an Army aviation unit was conducted to determine what factors in Cameron's contingency theory contribute to how Army rear-detachment commanders and family readiness group leaders communicate with families in their unit during a deployment, as well as how the families perceive and respond to the communication they receive. In addition, the case study, which included a two-month communication audit, in-depth interviews and a survey, evaluated the stances and strategies of unit leadership as they moved along the continuum from advocacy to accommodation.

Results support the application of the contingency theory of accommodation to military unit leadership during times of deployment. Although unit leadership tended to advocate more than accommodate, the information communicated affected if and when unit leadership moved along the continuum toward accommodation. Two factors were found to trigger a shift in communication stances and strategies by unit leadership: the intended recipient of the communication and the source of the message. Although the presence of strong predisposing variables made Army units more likely to advocate, situational variables allowed the possibility for dynamic communication. The public was satisfied with the communication they received, and the findings suggested that FRG members responded favorably to the communication they received and felt positively toward unit leadership.

CHAPTER 1: PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

Introduction

The military has long recognized the important role that families play in the success of the Armed Forces. A 1992 study, commissioned by the Department of the Army, found that soldiers are more likely to perform better on the job and have a higher morale level when their families are able to cope with the challenges of Army life (Burnam, Meredith, Shernbourne, Valdez, & Vernez, 1992). Additional research on this subject shows that certain factors, such as use of community support systems and marital stability, can increase a family's ability to cope with Army life (Bowen, Mancini, Martin, Ware, & Nelson, 2003; Swan et al., 2002), thus increasing a soldiers' effectiveness in his or her job.

Unit leadership — and support of the unit leadership — has been shown to have a significant correlation to family adjustment to Army life during periods of deployment (Rohall, Segal, & Segal, 1999). In other words, a family in a unit where the leadership is supportive and active contributes to a more well-adjusted family during a deployment. According to various Army regulations, unit leadership is ultimately responsible for maintaining and promoting the well-being of families, particularly during times of deployment. In theory, this connection between unit leadership and Army families is sustained through regular meetings and briefings, as well as through social events and unit-sponsored recreational activities (Bowen et al., 2003).

While the Army makes a somewhat-organized effort to communicate with families during a deployment, it is primarily left to the discretion of unit commanders and

volunteers, who have many demands placed on their time (Burnam et al., 1992). The Army has invested substantial funds into Army Community Service, which trains unit volunteers and rear-detachment commanders, in an effort to standardize how leaders communicate with family members. But ultimately, it remains up to the individual unit leaders to determine how best to communicate with families during a deployment and to execute that communication. So while one unit may foster a supportive environment with well-strategized communication, another unit may find itself with scant communication and low morale.

Because unit leadership is so important to the success of Army families, it is important that researchers understand how and why leaders communicate their support. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore the communication stances taken and strategies used by Army unit leaders and volunteers during a deployment of six months or longer to a Department of Defense-classified combat zone.

For the purpose of this study, "unit leadership" consists of the rear-detachment commander, the family readiness group leader, and the family readiness support assistant. The rear-detachment commander is a nondeployed officer charged with sustaining the well-being of soldiers and families remaining at the home station during the unit's deployment. The family readiness group (FRG) leader is a family-member volunteer responsible for leading the Army-mandated organization that consists of all family members. The family readiness support assistant (FRSA) is a civilian who works for the rear-detachment commander and provides the commander and FRG leaders with administrative assistance in support of family readiness programs and activities. This full-time paid position is typically filled by an Army spouse (Appendix A).

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More specifically, this study examines what factors contribute to how Army rear-detachment commanders and family readiness group leaders communicate with families in their unit, as well as how the families perceive and respond to the communication they receive. A variety of factors, or variables, likely contribute to the stance or strategy the unit leadership takes in the many times it communicates with family members and in the many conflicts it faces. These variables likely fluctuate from situation to situation. Essentially, this study seeks to find out how rear-detachment commanders and their volunteer and civilian counterparts communicate with their publics and manage conflicts, as well as how the audience responds to the communication or conflict-management strategy that was employed. While "unit leaders" refers to rear-detachment commanders, family readiness group leaders, and the FRSA, the "public" refers to the families ofas the deployed soldiers, who make up the family readiness group.

The Army makes many suggestions as to how unit leadership should communicate with their constituents. Very few situations are strictly dictated by the Department of the Army, and even those typically allow for some latitude on the part of the individual unit leadership. For example, if a deployed solider sustained injury or even death, the rear-detachment commander would be prohibited from releasing any identifying information until the next of kin has been officially notified by the Department of Defense. While unit leadership must adhere to this policy, they have significant latitude in how they handle questions from family members and how much non-specific information they release. Thus, do they reveal that the unit has suffered a casualty but maintain that additional information cannot be released, or do they deny all knowledge of information?

Military culture and tradition suggests to family members that unit leaders serve as the authority on matters relating to their spouses' deployment — they are speaking the truth. This, of course, lends credibility to the unit leadership and ultimately makes them more effective in conveying their messages to the audience. Thus, a misrepresentation of the truth may cause family members to perceive the unit leadership to be ineffective, or worse yet, jeopardize the leadership's credibility in future communication. This study, then, is important because it examines the various communication strategies actually employed by unit leadership during a deployment as well as how those strategies are perceived by the audience. To examine this, the current study employs a case study approach. This research will determine communication strategies and stances used by leaders of one deployed Army unit and the way family members perceive the communication they receive.

Rationale

Many public relations studies have focused on what strategies organizations use to communicate with their publics and why those strategies are selected (Cameron, 1997; Pang, Cropp, & Cameron, 2005; Reber, Cropp, & Cameron, 2003; Yarbrough, Cameron, Sallot, & McWilliams, 1998). Despite the many studies conducted on this matter, one defining method of communication has yet to emerge as a guide for organizations and communicators to follow. Rather, much of the recent public relations research has instead focused on a contingency theory of accommodation, which theorizes that the most effective communication ultimately depends on the situation (Cameron, 1997; Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, & Mitrook, 1997). According to the researchers who formulated the theory, "Consider the numerous publics being addressed by an organization at any given

time and the welter of techniques, skills, and approaches that can be taken, and any attempt to identify a single model of practice for public relations in an organization, much less a single ideal, is difficult at best" (p. 37). In other words, communication is complicated, and it is affected by many differing and complex situations.

From the perspective of the contingency theory of accommodation, public relations practitioners operate along a continuum between pure advocacy and pure accommodation when communicating with their publics (Cancel, Mitrook, & Cameron, 1999). Pure advocacy occurs when a communicator pursues the organization's interests exclusively; pure accommodation occurs when the communicator completely concedes to the public (Cameron, Pang, & Jin, 2006). Rarely, however, do organizations fall at one extreme of the spectrum. More often, according to Cameron et al., they fall somewhere in between, and their position moves based on the situation.

Researchers of the contingency theory of accommodation have studied public relations practitioners in a variety of settings, including multi-national corporations, federal governments, and non-profit associations (Pang et al., 2005; Pang, Jin, & Cameron, 2004; Shin, Park, & Cameron, 2006; Yarbrough, et al., 1998). A military setting, however, has yet to be explored. Pang et al., however, showed that the contingency theory can be used to evaluate intra-organizational communication, as this course of study intends to do. It is important to point out that although the Army has implemented policies and procedures for crisis management and crisis communication that unit leaders must follow in certain situations, it is still ultimately left to the individual organization and unit to implement the plan effectively. Research by Pang et al. has shown that contingency factors are still important and still come into play in units of a

much larger organization. No matter how detailed and thought-out a crisis communication plan is, unit leadership must still make decisions and overcome a multitude of communication challenges in times of crisis.

This test of the theoretical "it depends" premise will be examined within the context of a deployed Army unit and how its leadership communicates with families during a deployment. Unit leaders are charged with communicating a variety of messages to several publics during a deployment, and in many ways, they act as public relations practitioners. On a near-daily basis, they must provide their publics with updates on the deployment and protect the image of the organization. Ideally, they are promoting a caring and supportive environment through their communication. In terms of crisis and conflict management, unit leaders, much like their civilian counterparts, are responsible for effectively managing their public's perception of the crisis or conflict and their emotions toward the organization, so the heightened situation can be effectively resolved. For instance, if rumors of a deployment extension circulate before the official information is released, unit leadership must resolve the situation before it becomes a credibility crisis. In all of these situations, unit leaders must determine the most effective way to communicate with their public, whether that be an advocacy approach or an accommodating approach, or somewhere along the continuum. But unlike civilian public relations practitioners, rear-detachment commanders, FRG leaders, and FRSAs have received minimal communication training. Rather, they must rely on their best judgment and a few Army policies to determine the best course of communication during any given situation.

Communication and public relations responsibilities of the rear-detachment commander might include: organizing and speaking at pre-deployment briefings, communicating all essential deployment information to family members throughout the deployment, resolving any conflicts that might occur among unit family members during a deployment, and overseeing all official communication between the military unit and family members throughout the deployment.

Typically communication and public relations responsibilities of the FRG leader would include: promoting, planning, and publicizing all FRG-sponsored social and recreational events; organizing and leading monthly informational meetings; assisting the rear-detachment commander in the distribution of sensitive information and conflict management; and serving as a first-line communication resource for all family members in the unit.

FRSAs are new to the family readiness system within the past five years. While this individual's primary responsibility is to assist the rear-detachment commander and FRG leader leading up to and during a deployment to a combat zone, he or she also communicates with families and soldiers under the direction of the commander. They are often thought of as an extension of the FRG leader. While FRSAs do not handle the primary communication between unit leadership and family members, they would likely assist in the development and distribution of unit newsletters, announcements, flyers, and web sites (Bradner, 2007). All of the communication that occurs between the unit leaders and the families, then, would determine how the families perceive the organization.

Because the contingency theory of accommodation is a fairly young theory, additional research is necessary to validate that it can be applied to a variety of

communication situations. For that reason, this study is important because it contributes to the growing body of scholarship on the contingency theory of accommodation. Based on existing research, one can hypothesize how unit leaders will communicate with their publics, but further research is necessary to explore how the organization and its public influence each other in various situations. For instance, Army leaders are often confined to communicate the unit mission or a policy to their publics. If the communication results in a conflict or the public is overwhelmingly dissatisfied, does the Army leadership have any room to accommodate the families? Can they take a customer-service approach (accommodation) rather than an authoritarian (advocacy) approach in their communication strategies? What about in crisis situations? Based on previous research and the autonomy of unit leadership, the researcher hypothesizes that the contingency theory of accommodation will apply, and unit leaders will move throughout the continuum based on the situation. Predisposing variables, such as the Army's reliance on policy and regulations and lack of formal crisis communication training, will likely place unit leaders to the advocacy side of the spectrum. Situational variables will move their stance toward accommodation.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The Contingency Theory: It Depends

Researchers of the contingency theory of conflict management propose a theory that builds on normative theories of public relations (Cameron, 1997; Cancel et al., 1997). They argue that existing models of public relations simply do not account for the many differing and complex situations that arise in public relations (Yarbrough et al., 1998). As an answer, Cancel et al. proposed 86 variables that they believe can determine the extent to which an organization practices advocacy and accommodation in a given situation. They note that between pure advocacy and pure accommodation are a wide range of strategies and practices that public relations practitioners can employ, each of which incorporates a different degree of advocacy and accommodation. In other words, the theory posits a continuum by which to measure how a public relations practitioner relates to his or her public at a given time.

It is important to note that the 86 variables defined in the theory affect the location of the organization along the continuum, not the satisfaction of the public in regards to the organization's communication (Cancel et al., 1999). Cameron et al. (2006) write, "The contingency theory is focused on the stance of the organization in dealing with a given public, not the outcomes of a public relations practice" (p. 6).

Normative theories of public relations have held that accommodation, or two-way symmetrical communication, is the preferred method of communicating (Grunig & Dozier, 1992). The contingency theory, however, proposes that accommodation or two-way symmetrical communication is not necessarily preferred or, in some instances,

possible or even inherently ethical (Cameron, Cropp, & Reber, 2001). In their interviews with experienced public relations managers, Cameron et al. (2001) found that despite the professionals' use of words such as "win-win" and "compromise," all of the public relations managers encountered instances where advocacy was, essentially, the only choice. Cancel et al. (1999) write, "We suggest that accommodation is logically impossible in certain situations when an organization faces two publics locked in an intractable moral conflict. To accommodate one might only be done at the expense of the other," (p. 173). Zhang, Qiu, and Cameron (2004) also found this to be true when they analyzed the media coverage surrounding the mid-air collision of a U. S. spy plane and Chinese military plane to determine what factors affected the U.S. government's stance and changes in dealing with the Chinese government. They found that the U. S. government made little accommodation, though they did attempt to engage in superficial dialogue.

This theory, then, sets out to provide a structure that allows researchers to better understand the dynamics and factors that play into a communication strategy. The emphasis the theorists put on the situation echoes their message that there is no "excellent" communication strategy that public relations practitioners should abide by. Rather, excellence results when public relations practitioners have the insight and awareness to pick the appropriate strategy or stance along the continuum for the situation the organization has currently encountered (Cancel et al., 1997).

The theory shows how flexible public relations practitioners and their organizations must be; they must constantly reassess their environment and adjust accordingly. For instance, Yarbrough et al. (1998) conducted a case study on three

different public relations cases Yarbrough encountered in his position as the director of

communications for the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. The researchers

found that in a relatively short period of time, Yarbrough and his committee found

themselves at varying points along the continuum. Different situations – and different

publics – required different responses, and the organization needed to adjust accordingly.

Pang et al. (2004) came to a similar conclusion in their study of the Chinese

government's reaction to the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) crisis. The

researchers found that the government's stance changed over time, "with external

contingent factors associated with the changing level of accommodation" (p. 18).

In their case study, Reber et al. (2003) hypothesized that six variables (moral

conviction, multiple publics, regulatory constraints, management pressure, jurisdictional

issues, and legal constraints) would essentially prohibit the Norfolk Southern Corporation

from taking an accommodative stance in its hostile takeover bid of Conrail Inc. The

public relations division of Norfolk Southern had one goal: the acquisition of Conrail

Inc., and therefore, there was only one position to advocate. However, the researchers

found that in order for the takeover to be successful, Norfolk Southern needed to

accommodate several organizational stakeholders at some point throughout the process.

The researchers note, "The contingent factors are bivalent; they can move an organization

toward more or less accommodation of a given public at a given time" (p. 20). In other

words, even in situations that at first seem to demand advocacy, the organization can still

move along the continuum throughout the communication process because different

factors apply varying degrees of pressure in opposing directions along the continuum.

While all of the 86 defined variables have been shown to be relevant to the contingency

theory of accommodation, researchers have found additional support for certain variables in various studies. Cancel et al. (1999) distinguished between predisposing and situational variables: Predisposing variables influence where an organization begins on the advocacy-accommodation continuum, while situational variables influence how the organization actually relates to the public. According to Cancel et al., "Organizations in general deal with their external constituencies in situation-dependent ways" (p. 191). Additionally, they found that certain variables are more highly supported than others, including the following: corporation business exposure, public relations access to the dominant coalition, the dominant coalition's decision power and enlightenment, corporation size, individual characteristics of involved persons, urgency of situation, characteristics of external public's claims or requests, characteristics of external public, potential or obvious threats, potential cost or benefit for a corporation from choosing various stances, public's power to positively impact the corporation, support of the public relations department by dominant coalition and employees, and availability of resources in the corporation.

More specifically, management-level public relations practitioners have found organizational-level variables to be more significant than staff-level public relations practitioners, who found individual-level variables to be more influential (Shin et al., 2006). Choi and Cameron (2005) discovered that unexpected and previously unfounded contingency variables can come into play in different cultures. For instance, they found that fear, national identity, and local culture were extremely influential in an international setting in their in-depth interviews with five CEOs and leaders, whose clients are multi-national corporations that operate in Korea. Additional research by Pang et al. (2005)

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sought to determine which variables most influenced the way an organization was able to implement and follow-through on its crisis communication plan. They found support for the contingency theory of conflict management in that certain variables, such as the influence of the dominant coalition and the overall organization culture, appeared to determine how the organization operated. Reber and Cameron (2003) found that although public relations practitioners strongly lean toward a bridge-building -- or accommodative -- goal of public relations, their allegiance toward that wanes when specific situational and predisposing variables are present, such as the presence of influential in-house counsel and past negative experiences.

Cameron et al. (2006) sum up the validity of the contingency theory in this way: "Research evidence shows that the contingency theory offers a richly complex and realistic portrayal of changing public relations activity along a continuum from pure advocacy and to pure accommodation of a given public at a given time" (p. 13).

The Contingency Theory Applied to Conflict Management

Many of the situations in which organizations strive to find the appropriate location along the advocacy-accommodation continuum involve conflict. On one hand, the organization argues to advance its position, while at the same time it must accommodate and give in to the opposing position (Cameron et al., 2006). The ultimate stance taken, of course, depends on the matrix of variables defined in the contingency theory of conflict management.

Cho and Cameron (2006) clearly show how an organization migrates between give and take in a conflict in their study of public nudity on cellphones. Netian Entertainment found itself embroiled in conflict after releasing a series of nude photos as

screen savers on Korean cell phones. The company faced extensive criticism from a variety of civic and online groups. Using the contingency theory of accommodation as a theoretical framework, the researchers found that Netian initially took a strong advocacy position; the company staunchly defended and justified its reasons for releasing the photos. After five days of criticism — and essential failure of the advocacy approach — the company moved toward an accommodation position. It hinted toward an apology but continued to justify that its intentions were misunderstood. On day seven of the conflict, the organization moved back toward the advocacy side of the continuum in its attempt to explain its position during a press conference. Public outcry followed the organization. Netian finally reached resolution between the organization and its public by accommodating public demands with a full apology and burning the photos at a press conference.

This study illustrates what Cameron and his colleagues (Cancel et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1999; Shin, Jin, Cheng, & Cameron, 2003) have found to be true of organizations involved in conflicts: organizations tend to move away from accommodation and toward advocacy when confronted with conflict.

The very nature of conflict suggests that the organization and its public are migrating toward different goals (Shin et al., 2003). Plowman et al. (1995) define conflict as "any situation in which two or more parties have a divergence of interests" (p. 237). Wilcox and Cameron (2005) define conflict as "any sharp disagreement or collision of interests and ideas" (p. 243). Shin and Cameron (2004) note that value is a crucial factor in conflict in that perceived value differences can create discords or disagreements. And in fact, they show in their research that the perception of conflict can be just as important

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as actual conflict — and can eventually lead to actual conflict. The researchers examined the perceived conflict between two groups (journalists and public relations practitioners) and ultimately concluded that the perceived conflict between the two groups was a strategic choice. Each group viewed the other as what they should be for their purpose. As Shin and Cameron point out, "Such in-group identity tends toward ethnocentrism, contributes to the establishment of group norms, provides potential for conflict engagement and struggles for the group empowerment" (p. 408).

While conflict has the organization and its public moving in two different directions, public relations practitioners have relied on a variety of strategies and tactics to resolve the situation. Plowman (2005) notes that communication is key to resolving conflicts. He presents five strategies or behaviors that public relations practitioners can use to resolve conflict. They are:

1. Contending — involves one party forcing its position on another party.
2. Collaborating — both parties work together to reconcile basic interests and reach a mutually beneficial solution.
3. Compromising — an alternative agreement that stands part way between the parties' preferred positions.
4. Avoiding — one or both parties leave the conflict either physically or psychologically.
5. Accommodating — one party yields on its position and lowers its aspirations (Plowman et al., 1995, 239-240).

Shin et al. (2003) note that public relations is the over-arching tool that organizations use to change the mind of their publics. They write, "Strategy essentially explains the choices, plans, or action one makes in attempting to translate one's goals in a particular situation" (p. 9). They found in their research that organizations and public involved in difficult conflicts appeared to employ hard conflict-management tactics, such as contending or litigation, to change the public's mind. When the same researchers

evaluated organizations that had successfully resolved a conflict, they found that the organizations employed overall advocacy and a contending strategy, as defined by Plowman et al. (1995).

In their research on conflict resolution in various organizations, Shin et al. (2003) and Shin, Cheng, Jin, and Cameron (2005) found that each organization they studied employed specific strategies or tactics. They also found that the contingency theory applied to all of the cases they studied. In other words, the stance and strategy the organization took was directly associated with certain contingent factors. Interestingly, researchers found that in both of their studies of successful and unsuccessful conflict resolution, the organization's position was not static. Whether the conflict was resolved or remained messy, the organization moved along the continuum between advocacy and accommodation. Kelleher (2003) also found support for the contingency theory in his study of the 2001 University of Hawaii faculty strike.

Just as there is no magic formula for public relations practitioners handling everyday situations, there is no one answer as to how an organization should handle a conflict situation. However, based on external and internal factors, the situation, and predisposed variables, there are certainly some ways that are better than others for organizations to resolve conflicts. In other words, the best way to reach conflict resolution in a given situation depends on a variety of factors (Wilcox and Cameron, 2005).

The Contingency Theory Applied to Crisis Management

The above overview of literature on conflict management suggests that an organization has at least some control in resolving a conflict by taking the appropriate stance dictated by the situation. But what about the times when an organization finds itself embroiled in a crisis?

"Crisis" can be defined as a "state of uncertainty resulting from a triggering event that disrupts an organization's routine activities" (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006). Sturges (1994) notes that "any unusual or out-of-the ordinary event may be considered a crisis if it is perceived by organizational members to have high values on one or more of three dimensions: importance, immediacy, and uncertainty" (p. 298). By their very nature, crises are largely unexpected and involve a high level of uncertainty (McConnel & Drennan, 2006).

Much of the literature on crisis communication focuses on the value of a crisis plan. Pang et al. (2005) note that "Crisis plans have come to symbolize the epitome of an organization's preparedness, the lynchpin that determines the success, or failure, of a crisis communication and management campaign" (p. 317). Recent literature, including the study by Pang et al. on corporate crisis communication, has noted that effective crisis management and communication is much more complex and intricate than a plan.

Marra (2004) finds that overall autonomy of a public relations staff and the culture of communication within an organization are much better predictors of how an organization will fare during a crisis. Like other crisis management scholars (Ulmer, 2001), McConnel and Drennan (2006) note that even the best-laid, most-thorough crisis-

preparedness plan does not ensure that an organization will emerge from a crisis

unscathed. However, they conclude that even though crises are difficult to predict,

organizations should still engage in pre-planning.

Ulmer (2001) notes the importance of organizations building relationships with

stakeholders before a crisis hits: Organizations that have good relationships with their

publics will communicate more effectively during a crisis. As he points out:

> Crisis managers should remember that pre-crisis communication has a
> significant impact on post-crisis communication. Managers should also be
> careful of public commitments they make pre-crisis that they may have to
> account for later. From this perspective, everyday communication and
> relationship building with internal and external stakeholders can be seen as
> an important part of crisis preparation (p. 612).

Lerbinger (1997) suggests that managers take a two-way or accommodative

stance to crisis communication, which allows the affected publics to arrive at a

collaborative solution to the crisis. He notes: "The idea is to allow interested parties to

exchange information and views about risks so that everyone feels adequately informed

within the limits of available knowledge" (p. 282).

Sturges (1994) suggests that crisis communication should be integrated into the

broader context of communication strategy or policy. He argues that if researchers

consider the broader impact of crisis communication in terms of its ability to shape the

opinions of members of the public, then it must be considered in a broader context.

Pang et al. (2005) propose that the contingency theory of conflict management

can be integrated with crisis communication strategies. They suggest measuring the

public relations practitioners' stances and evaluating how they move along the continuum

between advocacy and accommodation throughout the crisis. When Cameron and his

colleagues (2006) evaluated the Singapore government's management of the SARS

crisis, they found that the government, assisted by the media, moved from an advocacy

approach to an accommodative approach during the crisis. They also found that the

majority of publics dealt with by the government followed the same movement along the

continuum. Pang, Jin and Cameron (2006) found additional support for the contingency

theory of conflict management in their study of the Department of Homeland Security's

communication on the color-coded threat system. They argue that the stance or strategy

an organization takes in response to a certain threat depends on a variety of factors.

    Other researchers have evaluated more specific strategies or tactics that are used

to manage crisis communication. In her case study of banking web sites during Y2K,

DiNardo (2002) found that web sites were used primarily for information dissemination

rather than interactivity and that each site could have been improved to be a more

effective tool for the organization. She notes that organizations missed an opportunity to

use the Internet as a way to increase two-way communication. Greer and Moreland

(2003) also looked at the Internet as a way to foster crisis communication between an

organization and its stakeholders. The researchers analyzed both United Airlines' and

American Airlines' web sites immediately following the September 11 attacks. While

they determined that each company used the web site to provide instructional and coping

information to the public, neither company used its web site as a vehicle of interactive

communication among its publics. DiNardo elaborates on the potential of using the

Internet as a vehicle for two-way interactive communication this way:

> In times of crisis, organizations must identify a reliable system for
> distributing information and responding to inquiries. The Internet can be
> an ideal tool to communicate crisis management efforts because it enables
> organizations to reach a large audience, with in-depth information, in a
> consistently responsive fashion. By using the Internet for two-way
> communications, organizations and their constituencies in a sense can both

become information providers and share knowledge of the crisis solutions in order to mutually understand, implement, and further develop solutions together (p. 369).

Lerbinger (1997) suggests other tools that might be used to foster open communication during a crisis. These include briefings, community interviews, door-to-door canvassing, open houses, public meetings, site tours, and telephone contacts as ways to increase credibility for the organization.

Call for Further Research

Although still a relatively young theory, the contingency theory provides a theoretical framework through which one can study how unit leaders communicate with their publics during a deployment. Because of the stressful nature of a military unit's deployment, unit leaders encounter a variety of conflicts and crises throughout their tenures, and as such, they must respond and communicate the situations to their publics in the most effective manners possible. The contingency theory, as shown above, can be applied to both conflict management and crisis communication.

With the exception of a few studies, most research on the contingency theory has been qualitative, and therefore, is not generalizable to other settings. And although researchers have found strong support for the contingency theory of accommodation (Cancel et al., 1999; Choi & Cameron, 2005; Pang et al., 2005), they note that further research that explores how various organizations and their publics communicate and influence each other is necessary. This work not withstanding, the contingency theory has not been tested in a military setting, though it has shown to be relevant in intra-organizational communication (Pang et al., 2005). This study, then, seeks to fill some of this void. The following research questions are posed to determine how unit leaders

communicate with their publics in the context of the contingency theory and how crisis

and conflict during the deployment impact that communication:

RQ1: What stances and strategies do rear-detachment commanders, FRG leaders, and the

FRSA take during a unit's extended deployment?

RQ2: How do these stances and strategies change when a conflict or crisis occurs?

   Additionally, the contingency theory has been shown to be relevant to public

relations professionals (Cameron et al., 2001; Cancel et al., 1999; Cho & Cameron, 2006;

Reber & Cameron, 2003; and Shin et al., 2006), but few studies have evaluated whether

the theory is relevant to other professionals acting in a public relations capacity. Zhang et

al. (2004) did apply the contingency theory to the U.S. (the organization) and diplomats

(public relations practitioners). In that same way, this study deals primarily with military

commanders and their volunteers, who are unlikely to be trained in public relations, but

still deal with many of the same issues as public relations practitioners when

communicating with their publics. For this research, though, the contingency theory table

of variables is slightly adapted. The organization is the military rear-detachment unit.

Public relations is adapted to communication. Public relations practitioners are rear-

detachment commanders, FRG leaders, and FRSAs. Then, the contingency theory cluster

of variables is:

External Variables

Threats
- Litigation
- Government regulation
- Potentially damaging publicity
- Scarring of organization's reputation in both the military community and in the
   general public

- Legitimizing activists' claims

Industry environment
- Changing (dynamic) or static
- Number of competitors/level of competition
- Richness or leanness of resources in the environment

General political/social environment/external culture
- Degree of political support of unit locally
- Degree of social support of unit

The external public (Members of the family readiness group)
- Size/and or number of members
- Degree of source credibility/powerful members or connections
- Past successes or failures of groups to evoke change
- Amount of advocacy practiced by the organization
- Level of commitment/involvement of members
- Whether the group has public relations counselors or not
- Public's perception of group: reasonable or radical
- Level of media coverage the public has received in past
- Whether representatives of the public know or like representatives of the organization
- Whether representatives of the organization know or like representatives from the public
- Public's willingness to dilute its cause/request/claim
- Moves and countermoves
- Relative power of organization
- Relative power of public

Issue under question
- Size
- Stake
- Complexity

Internal Variables

Organization (Unit)'s Characteristics
- Open or closed culture
- Dispersed widely geographically or centralized
- Level of technology the organization uses to produce its products or services
- Homogeneity or heterogeneity of officials involved
- Age of the organization/value placed on tradition
- Speed of growth in the knowledge level the organization uses
- Economic stability of the organization
- Existence or non-existence of issues management officials or program

- Organization's past experiences with the public
- Distribution of decision making power
- Formalization: number of rules or codes defining and limiting the job
- Stratification/hierarchy of positions
- Existence or influence of legal department
- Exposure within the military
- Military culture

Rear detachment and FRG characteristics
- Number of commanders/volunteers total and number of college degrees
- Type of past training
- Location of rear detachment unit in hierarchy
- Representation in the dominant coalition
- Experience level of commanders and FRG leaders in dealing with crisis
- General communication competency of the unit
- Autonomy of the unit
- Physical placement of unit in the building
- Staff trained in research methods
- Amount of funding available for dealing with FRG members
- Amount of time allowed for dealing with FRG members
- Gender: percentage of female commanders and FRG leaders
- Potential of unit to practice various models of public relations

Characteristics of dominant coalition (battalion-level military headquarters)
- Open or closed to change
- Management style: Domineering or laid-back
- General altruism level
- Support and understanding of public relations
- Frequency of external contact with publics
- Departmental perception of the unit's external environment
- Calculation of potential rewards or losses using different strategies with external publics
- Degree of line manager involvement in external affairs

Internal threats
- Economic loss or gain from implementing various stances
- Marring of FRG member's perception of the unit
- Marring of the personal reputations of the unit's decision makers

Individual characteristics (rear-detachment commanders, FRG leaders, FRSAs, battalion-level unit leadership)
- Training in diplomacy, marketing, journalism, public relations, communication, etc.
- Personal ethics
- Tolerance or ability to deal with uncertainty

- Comfort level with conflict or dissonance
- Comfort level with change
- Ability to recognize potential or existing problems
- Extent of openness to innovation
- Extent to which individual can grasp other's worldview
- Personality: Dogmatic, authoritarian
- Communication competency
- Cognitive complexity: Ability to handle complex problems
- Predisposition toward negotiations
- Predisposition toward altruism
- How individuals receive, process, and use information and influence
- Familiarity with external public or its representative
- Like external public or its representative
- Gender: Female versus male

Relationship characteristics
- Level or trust between the unit and the FRG members
- Dependency of parties involved
- Ideological barriers between the unit and the FRG members

Given this matrix of contingency factors, this program of study will explore the

following research question:

RQ3: What contingency factors influence rear-detachment commanders, FRG leaders,

and FRSAs in their communication with the unit's family members during a unit's

extended deployment?

Although communication effectiveness is beyond the purview of the contingency

theory of accommodation, evaluating how the public perceives the organization's

handling of communication during a conflict or crisis is not (Pang et al., 2004). In fact,

recent research by Pang, Jin, and Cameron (2007) suggests the importance of analyzing

audience reception in crisis communication studies. The researchers note, "Studies

analyzing audience reception in crises should increasingly dominate crisis scholarship for

the simple argument that organizational strategies would be ineffectual if these do not

appeal to the hearts and minds of the publics the organization are trying to reach" (p. 26).

Evaluating how family members' perceive the rear-detachment commander and FRG

leader's communication strategies during conflicts and crises is an important aspect of

this study and is addressed in the fourth research question.

RQ4: How do family members perceive the organization's handling of communication

throughout the deployment?

CHAPTER 3: METHOD

This study took a case study approach to answer the four research questions. A squadron-level Army aviation unit that was deployed to Iraq for a period of fifteen months was selected for this case study. A unit at this level has approximately 300 soldiers, who are divided among six troops. During a deployment, the majority of the 300 soldiers deploy, though a small contingency remain at the home station. This small contingency of soldiers are led by one rear-detachment commander, who is appointed by the squadron commander prior to a unit's deployment.

According to the Army's "Rear-Detachment Commander Handbook," the rear-detachment commander assumes the daily workload of the deployed unit and provides home-station support for the unit (Mancini, 2006). In addition, the rear-detachment commander serves as the official link between the deployed soldiers and family members, who either remain near the unit's home station or return to their permanent homes, often to be near extended family. While the deployed commander focuses on the unit's mission in a combat zone, the rear-detachment commander's goal is "to work in tandem with that of the deployed commander to help families solve their problems at the lowest level so that problems and resulting anxieties do not overflow to the deployed soldier or require the attention of the deployed commander" (p. 4).

Although each company in a squadron has its own family readiness group, there is also a squadron-level FRG that provides structure and support to the smaller, troop-level FRGs. For the purpose of this study, the squadron-level FRG was analyzed, and the

leader(s) of the squadron FRG were considered "unit leadership," along with the rear-detachment commander and FRSA, who also served the entire squadron.

A two-month period of communication was analyzed for this study. Military deployments to a combat zone are highly dynamic, and the researcher believed that the time frame was of sufficient duration for a variety of situations to arise. Analysis of the unit's entire fifteen-month deployment was not practical for this exploratory study.

In order to answer the first two research questions (What stances and strategies do rear-detachment commanders, FRG leaders, and FRSAs take during a unit's extended deployment? How do these stances and strategies change when a conflict or crisis occurs?), a two-month period of communication between unit leadership with the FRG members was analyzed. This was be done by evaluating all communication tools used throughout the period, including e-mail messages, web sites, newsletters, fliers and other promotional items, and online bulletin boards. Additionally, recounts of personal phone calls were detailed by the FRG advisor for the researcher.

Communication tactics employed by unit leadership included e-mail, a static web site and electronic newsletter. A total of 98 e-mails were sent over a two-month by unit leadership and were analyzed for this study. Of those 98 e-mails, 77 were intended for distribution to all family members of the unit. The remaining e-mails were administrative in nature and intended for troop FRG leaders. The e-mails for mass distribution were primarily sent by the FRSA to all troop FRG leaders, who were instructed to forward the communication along to the family members. Newsletters, which were PDFs, were distributed monthly (two issues were analyzed) and were sent via e-mail to troop FRG leaders and on to family members; they were also posted on the squadron web site.

During the two-month analysis, four general announcements were posted on the squadron web site, and five announcements from rear-detachment leadership were posted. To the researcher's knowledge, no communication materials were sent through the mail. It should be noted that the task of communicating to family members fell largely to the FRSA and was supplemented by the squadron FRG advisor. The rear-detachment commander communicated only in the form of official announcements on the squadron web site. When examining the communication materials, the researcher identified different stances taken along the accommodation-advocacy continuum.

The third research question (What contingency factors influence rear-detachment commanders and FRG leaders in their communication with the unit's family members during a unit's extended deployment?) was answered by analyzing the communication, as well as by conducting in-depth interviews with the rear-detachment commander, FRG leaders, and the FRSA.

The researcher adapted Cameron's original matrix of contingency factors for the purpose of this study, and key factors most appropriate to this analysis and their operationalizations are as follows:

External Factors

1. External threats: Communication materials that mention Army regulations, the media, or the unit's reputation

2. Industry environment: Communication materials that mention that the impact of conflict or crises on the unit

3. General political/social environment/external culture: Communication materials that mention the level of political and social support for the unit; communication

materials that mention that unit leadership trying to improve the situation of family members during the deployment

4. External public: Communication materials that address the characteristics of the FRG membership and their ability to evoke change with unit leadership; that mention or encourage FRG-member involvement in the organization; and that address the FRG members' perception of and familiarity with unit leadership and the organization

5. Issue under question: Communication materials that address the reputation of the unit and unit leadership

Internal Factors

1. Organization's characteristics: Communication materials that address family members' proximity to unit headquarters, mention ways to get information (i.e. e-mail or flyer directing family members to a web site), and relate to the military's unique culture

2. Characteristics of dominant coalition (squadron-level military headquarters): Communication materials that are filtered through or address the wishes of higher-level headquarters

3. Internal threats: Communication materials that address availability and access to FRG and unit funds

4. Relationship threats: Communication materials that depict the level of trust and barriers between unit leadership and FRG members

After adapting Cameron's matrix, the researcher identified factors from the contingency theory matrix that were evident in the communication materials. The researcher closely read all communication three times. During the second reading, the researcher identified four overarching categories (Army culture, administrative messages, unit-specific messages, and personnel-related messages). Communication was sorted into these categories. Finally, the researcher evaluated each message, and identified the strategy and factors present in each message.

In addition to analyzing the communication, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with unit leadership. The interviews were designed to answer questions regarding the same contingency factors noted above and also explored additional internal factors that influenced unit leaders. Additionally, unit leaders were asked to evaluate how communication changed throughout the course of the deployment and what factors influenced this change.

The in-depth interviews with the rear-detachment commander, FRG advisor and FRSA were conducted after the two-month period of evaluation was complete. The communication audit was conducted between January 15 and March 15, 2008; all three interviews were conducted between March 15 and April 8. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the subjects, which is why they were extended over a three-week window of time. On one occasion, an interview was rescheduled to a later date due to a conflict on the part of the interview subject.

The interview with the rear-detachment commander lasted approximately 40 minutes, while the interviews with the FRG advisor and FRSA lasted approximately 60 minutes. All three interviews were conducted over the phone, and to ensure consistency,

each subject was asked the same interview and probe questions. Interviews were not taped and transcribed; however, the researcher took detailed notes during the interview to record the subject's answers.

The interview questions, which were adapted from previous studies, were designed to ask about the most relevant contingency factors. The researcher analyzed the detailed notes from each interview to determine how much that particular variable influenced the subject matter's actions and whether the variable influenced where unit leadership fell on the accommodation-advocacy spectrum. After an initial review of the notes, several additional rounds of analysis were conducted to determine which variables from the contingency theory were applicable to the case and how those variables might affect the meaning of the case for the contingency theory.

To answer the fourth research question (How do family members perceive the organization's handling of communication throughout the deployment?), the researcher queried members of the family readiness group with a questionnaire at the end of the two-month period of evaluation. The questionnaire was designed to determine how family members (the external public) perceived the unit's handling of communication during the extended deployment to that point.

Because of Army privacy regulations, the only option for distribution was through the FRSA and troop FRG leaders. The researcher sent the invitation e-mail and survey link to the FRSA, who sent the message to the troop FRG leaders, who in turn sent the message to the family members. Because unit leadership does not maintain a distribution list, the population size could not be determined by unit leadership, and the researcher could not guarantee that all family members received the online survey.

Fifty-two family members participated in the survey. Although the rear-detachment commander noted that 300 soldiers are in the unit, the unit does not track how many family members are part of the FRG. Army demographics estimates that 44.9 percent of soldiers are married (Maxfield, 2007); however, parents, siblings and significant others may participate in the FRG. Of the 52 survey respondents, 44 were current spouses, two were parents and two classified themselves as "others." Assuming that every soldier in the squadron has one adult family member participating in the FRG, the response rate would have been 17 percent. However, knowing that the FRG is targeted toward spouses of soldiers and the Army demographics estimate, the response rate is likely much higher.

Of the 52 respondents, three were male, 45 were female and five did not disclose their gender. Forty-five percent (n=22) fell between the ages 28 and 37, 35 percent (n=17) between the ages 18 and 27, 16 percent (n=8) between the ages 38 and 47, 2 percent (n=1) between the ages 48 and 57, and 2 percent (n=1) 57 or older. The majority (61 percent, n=29) had some college or vocational/trade school, which was followed by 23 percent (n=11) having a bachelor's degree or higher and 15 percent (n=7) being high school graduates. Thirty-three percent (n=16) have no children under the age of 18 residing in the household, while 67 percent (n=33) had at least one child in the household.

The Case Study Method

Yin (2003) notes that the case study method can be used to expand our knowledge of organizational phenomena. He writes that this method "allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events" (p. 2). Wimmer and

Dominick (2006) point out that the case study approach allows researchers to incorporate as many data sources as possible to systematically investigate an organization or event. This data collection can occur in a variety of ways (Creswell, 2003).

Unlike many quantitative research methods, the design of a case study is not clearly defined (Yin, 2003). However, several researchcers have provided guidelines for researchers embarking on a case study. Yin lays out five components of the research design that must be met in case study research. They include:

- A study's questions,
- Its propositions, if any,
- Its unit of analysis,
- The logic linking the data to the propositions, and
- The criteria for linking the data to the findings

Wimmer and Dominick (2006) note that "how" and "why" questions are most appropriate to the case study method. Although this study's research questions have been focused, this program of study essentially sought to define how unit leaders communicated with family members during an extended deployment, how that communication changed during a deployment, why they selected the stance and strategies that they did, and how family members perceived that communication. This study's propositions (unit leaders will take a variety of communication stances throughout a deployment) provided an important theoretical framework and guided the researcher toward a starting point in collecting evidence (to define the specific stances and strategies used by unit leaders). Creswell (2003) notes that a case study is bound by both activity and time. For this program of research, the timeframe was limited to a two-month period of a unit's deployment, and the researcher has confined the course of study to communications-related activity.

The unit deployed November 2007 for a 15-month tour of duty in Iraq.

Communication was evaluated from January 15 through March 15, 2008. The unit

experienced one casualty in November 2007, which was a non-combat-related illness.

The first 60 days of the deployment were avoided because of the transitory nature of this

time period: While the soldiers settled into their mission, the family members also

adjusted to life without their soldier. There were no significant announcements, such as a

deployment extension, during this time period.

Wimmer and Dominick (2006) point out that four sources of data can be used in

case studies, including documents, interviews, observation/participation, and physical

artifacts. This program of study incorporated both document collection and interviews, as

multiple sources of information can improve both the reliability and validity of the case

study. Advantages of documents are that they enable researchers to use the participants'

own words, responses are typically thoughtful, and they prevent the researcher from

transcribing quotes (Creswell, 2003). Disadvantages include that they can be challenging

to locate, materials may be incomplete, and they are not always accurate or authentic.

Advantages to interviews are that they provide a good substitute for participant

observation, the subjects can provide historical background, and they allow the researcher

to dictate the questions; disadvantages are that responses are filtered through an

individual, they typically do not occur in the natural, real-life setting, the researcher's

presence can invoke bias, and respondents are not equally articulate.

Justification for Method

The qualitative method of analysis was chosen because "it seeks to explain and delve into the complex relationships between the organization and its stakeholders" (Plowman et al., 1995, p. 243).

In studying the contingency theory, several researchers have used case study methodology to discover both what stances and strategies organizations use in communicating with their publics and what variables influence the stances and strategies taken by the organization. Yarbrough et al. (1998) were the first to apply the case study approach to the contingency theory. Yarbrough combed through tape recordings, policy papers, notes and diaries from the time he spent in his job, and press clippings to identify the stances he took in his role with the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games. His fellow researchers then analyzed the case study to determine which variables from the contingency theory played a role in determining his stance.

Reber et al. (2003) used the case study approach to determine whether six variables associated with the contingency theory could be considered proscriptive. To conduct their case study, the scholars evaluated news accounts, public relations materials of the organization, court records, SEC files, legal analyses, and in-depth interviews. The researchers note, "The complexity and textures of practicing public relations are particularly well captured in the case study, supporting an underlying principle of contingency theory: 'It depends!' And it takes subtle judgment to handle the contingencies implied by 'It depends!' (p. 21).

Researchers of conflict management and crisis communication have also used the case study approach in their studies. Ulmer (2001) conducted a case study analysis of

Malden Mills CEO, Aaron Feuerenstein, in which he examined the pre- and post-crisis

communication of the 1995 Malden Mills fire. Plowman et al. (1995) combined case

study methodology with the in-depth interview in their study comparing Walgreens and

its stakeholders on a particular issue. The depth interview allowed the researchers to

uncover the perceptions of the organization's stakeholders.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

RQ1: Stances and Strategies

The first research question addressed what stances and strategies unit leaders employed with family members during the extended deployment. Cameron et al. (2006) note that the contingency theory separates stances from strategies and tactics: Stance is operationalized as the position the organization takes, and the strategies and tactics used are a result of the stance taken.

Stances

Unit leadership relied primarily on one-way communication throughout the deployment, which suggests that its stance fell more on the advocacy side of the continuum. However, upon a more careful analysis, the e-mails suggested that unit leadership moved on a continuum from advocacy to accommodation, depending on what was being communicated.

Throughout the two-month period of analysis, unit leadership was required to pass along a significant amount of information to family members from various post agencies. In these cases, unit leadership advocated for the various services and policies. For example, on a near-weekly basis, a compilation e-mail with the subject line "Info and Events" was sent to all family members. Information included in these messages was as diverse as hospital holiday hours, the availability of free child care, and career information for spouses. These messages often included as many as 20 or 30 news items. On Feb. 7, the "Info and Events" e-mail included the following items: FRG focus forum (an information session for FRG leaders), a monthly van tour of Ft. Hood for new family

members, health insurance information, Child and Youth Services registration, Month of the Military Child artwork contest, a Valentine's evening event from the Better Opportunities for Single Soldiers organization, Dell computer jobs, Killeen community theater shows, a financial readiness class from Army Community Service, Month of the Military fest, a babysitting class being offered on Ft. Hood, Build-a-Bear Huggable Heroes search and a plug for Phantrom Distro, which is the information e-mail distributed by Ft. Hood.

Other subject lines that demonstrated advocacy included "Credit Card Scam," "IRS Warns of Advance Payment Scams," and "Self Care Class Info." In all of these instances, information was simply being pushed down to family members. In fact, all of these messages were passed to unit leadership for distribution from another source. In the majority of e-mails, it is clear that the e-mail message originated with some official organization on Ft. Hood. However, for the "Credit Card Scam" e-mail, it appears to be a forward from a soldier or family member. In the message, the FRSA wrote: "Here is a new and very clever credit card scam. It may be worth notifying spouses and FRGs." The message then picks up what appears to be a forwarded message: "[Name of soldier]: this is a new scam and worth sending to everyone you know." It then sites a web page on Snopes.com. The name of the original sender has been removed.

In many instances, the FRSA included a note instructing the troop FRG leaders how to distribute the information, such as with the "IRS Warns of Advance Payment Scams." She wrote: "FRG Leaders, please share the following important message with your members. Thank you very much." In others, however, she simply forwarded the information along, as in the "Self Care Class Info" e-mail.

Three e-mails were also sent to family members regarding Vice President Dick

Cheney's visit to Ft. Hood. Two were sent regarding traffic restrictions ("Traffic and

Work Restrictions" on Feb. 25, 2008, and "Info and Events – Important On Post Traffic

Update for Feb. 26" on Feb. 26, 2008), and one included a link to a local news story that

thanked Ft. Hood soldiers for their hospitality during the visit ("Cheney Thanks Ft. Hood

Soldiers" on Feb. 26, 2008). No messages were sent asking for feedback or input for the

vice president's visit.

Unit leadership did encourage participation and ask for feedback on other matters,

which signified a willingness to accommodate family members' opinions in certain

instances. The collaborative approached tended to be more prevalent when information

was squadron-specific rather than regiment- or community-wide. For example, when a

couple of spouses organized a program for family members, unit leadership offered

support ("MFLC Counseling for Kids and Parents Scheduled!!!," sent Feb. 11, 2008).

The message from the troop FRG leader read:

> Longknife FRG leaders: I have made the final arrangements for the kids
> counseling session that we have discussed over the previous months.
> Sorry it took so long to get it up and running, but there was no program
> that was set up previously, so this was sort-of from scratch. Attached and
> below are the details. Please forward this info to your FRG's. I will be
> taking reservations on a first come first served basis, so have your
> interested parents call asap. This program is open to all of our Longknife
> troops, so if you want to be guaranteed your place don't hesitate. You can
> RSVP to me by phone or email - just include your name(s) and ages of the
> kids (workshop & STACC). The FRSA will also be posting this info on
> our website as of this mailing. (Thanks!) I think this will be a worthwhile
> program that our families will benefit from.

In another message, a family member passed along helpful communication tools

("Information Links," sent March 3, 2008). Finally, in two messages, unit leadership

asked for family member assistance on a banner being created to send downrange to the

soldiers ("April Fool's Banner Pictures," sent March 5, 2008, and "April Fool's Banner

Get Together," sent March 5, 2008). The message titled "April Fool's Banner Pictures"

from the FRG advisor reads:

> Hi everyone,
>
> I just wanted to send a reminder out to all you guys to remind your
> spouses to turn in the funny/embarrassing pics of their husbands by 15
> MAR 08 for our April Fool's Day banner. Also be sure to tell them this is
> a surprise so please do not tell their husbands. It would be particularly
> great if we could get a lot of pics from the more senior husbands. We
> would also like to include out-of-town spouses in this project, so please be
> sure to contact them. If any spouse only has a hard copy of the picture,
> they can send it to me and I'll scan it in on my computer and then return
> the hard copy to them. I just got a great picture of [command sergeant
> major] from his wife. I am still laughing over it.
>
> Thanks a bunch and have a great day!

Although many of these messages were benign, they demonstrate the top-down

approach taken by the command in distributing information. Information was not

evaluated for quality or even relevancy; rather it was forwarded simply because it was

pushed down. Very little of the communication was actually generated by unit leadership.

Rather, the majority was forwarded by another Army unit or organization, and unit

leadership considered it a requirement to pass the information along to family members.

As a result of this approach, the research suggests that unit leadership advocated more

than accommodated. However, the communication stance was not static and was issue-

and source-dependent.

Strategy

The research demonstrated that unit leadership predominantly employed a

contending strategy during a conflict situation. However, instances of conflict were rare,

and the majority of communication analyzed was benign. In fact, most communication

was simply informative and demonstrated the importance unit leadership felt in simply

passing along information and being viewed as communicative with family members; the

FRSA sent out 54 e-mails that promoted various activities on the Army installation and

also included operational messages, such as severe weather reports and e-mail scam

notices.

The contending strategy was primarily employed when unit leadership

communicated specifically with troop FRG leaders and passed along information

regarding unit casualties. Unit leadership sent 16 e-mails to troop FRG leaders, which

were not intended for mass distribution. Rather, these messages contained administrative

communication that focused on the day-to-day operation of the FRG. Examples included

subject lines such as "FRG Fund Reports" (sent Jan. 24, 2008), "Roster Updates" (sent

Jan. 25, 2008) and "FRG Leader Book Requirements" (sent Feb. 22, 2008). The message

titled "FRG Fund Reports," sent by the FRSA, reads:

> Ladies,
>
> Please share with your Fund Custodians that FRG Fund Reports are due.
> Please turn in to [the rear-detachment commander] NTL the FRG Meeting
> on Monday. [He] must submit them to Regiment next week. Thank you.

 While ten of these messages employed a perfunctory strategy of being seen as

communicative, five messages showed unit leadership contending its position to the troop

FRG leaders. Examples included unit leadership enforcing treasury fund requirements for

the FRG and passing along instructions related to posting photos from the deployment on

personal blogs.

Unit leadership also assumed a contending strategy in relationship to rumor

control and casualties. When a spouse presented three rumors to unit leadership, unit

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leadership responded by presenting the official information. A spouse initiated the communication with an e-mail to the regimental unit leadership:

> My husband is in [the unit]. I have heard several rumors floating around and I wanted to let you know and see if you know if they are true or not.
>
> 1. I know during the town hall [the regimental commander downrange] said the rumor about the tour being shortened to 6-8 months was not true right?
>
> 2. I've heard that [the regiment] will be disbanded upon returning to Ft. Hood after the deployment. I can't understand this since there is so much rooted tradition and history with the [the regiment] but I know the ARMY does crazy things.
>
> 3. I've heard that the aviation piece or all of [the regiment] will be relocating to Ft. Carson when they return from the deployment.
>
> Thought you might want to know what rumors are floating around. Thank you for any light you can shed on all this!

Unit leadership's response was:

> Thanks for writing to me about those rumors - they are all definitely false. Yes, [the regimental commander] confirmed that there has been no change to the length of the deployment. I know that the *Army Times* and some other sources have been talking about deployments being shortened back to 12 months, but I believe that will start with the next rotation of units to Iraq (the units that replace the Regiment at the end of the 15-month deployment).
>
> The Regiment will not be disbanded or moved after the deployment - in fact, we are going to finish making some upgrades (sort of a modernization) when the unit returns to Fort Hood to give us additional capabilities that will let the Regiment continue to serve well into the future. Many of the changes that have been made to units across the Army have actually made them more like the [regiment] - our diverse capabilities make us very versatile, and this has made the Regiment sort of a model for the rest of the Army as it transforms for the future.
>
> Thanks again for writing, and please feel free to contact me if you have any other questions.

In relationship to casualties within the regiment but beyond the squadron (no casualties occurred within the squadron during the two-month period that was analyzed),

unit leadership passed along the official Department of Defense press release. However, the FRSA noted that the strategy for distributing casualty notifications changed during the deployment to be more accommodating to family members. "Instead of filtering it down [through the troop FRG leaders], it now gets sent out to a regimental list," she says. "It started with me sending it out and has now changed to regiment sending it out directly to those who wish to receive it."

Other instances arose during the deployment where unit leadership showed signs of collaborating or compromising with family members. This was most evident in one-on-one communication between unit leadership and family members. Of five personal e-mail communication streams analyzed, all but one employed a collaborative tone, and communication also tended to be two-way. In four of five exchanges, unit leadership communicated with the troop FRG leader or family member about the situation, and in all instances, the communication suggested that they reached a mutually beneficial resolution. For example, when a troop FRG leader wasn't sure how to handle a particular situation with a family member, the FRG advisor coached her through it. The FRG advisor explained the situation to the researcher:

> A spouse with two small children seriously broke her foot. I was initially informed of this via a phone call from our FRSA. She said the troop FRG leader was heading over to the injured spouse's house to see what sort of assistance she needs. [The FRSA] suggested that the troop FRG leader can request CARE team assistance. [The Care Team is a group of FRG volunteers who are prepared to help family members in the event of an emergency or casualty.] The CARE team roster is held at the squadron level; what that means is that we have some spouses from all the squadrons on the CARE team. I told the FRSA to advise the Troop FRG leader that my preference was for the troop FRG itself can provide the assistance for this spouse, and then if they can't get enough volunteers to help, we could put it out to CARE Team members from other troops in the squadron. I don't want to start a precedent of tasking all squadron spouses for situations like this because then people who volunteered for the CARE

Team will get burned out. Plus, most of our CARE team training focus has been on casualty situations, not ones where a spouse is sick or injured, so those who volunteered for the CARE teams may only want to help out in casualty situations. Nevertheless, it all worked out. [The spouse] had some family assistance over the weekend, and ironically, her husband is scheduled to come home on EML (environmental morale leave) later this week (he was scheduled to come home at this time, well before this incident with his spouse). So overall, it seems to have all worked out.

In one instance, a troop FRG leader resigned, and the squadron FRG advisor collaborated with squadron leadership to address some of the troop FRG leader's concerns. "The commanders need to understand that it's their FRG, and even though they're busy, they need to take the time to thank their FRG leaders," says the FRG advisor. "In this instance, I talked to my husband [the squadron commander] about ways to ensure our troop FRG leaders are thanked by the commanders."

Beyond a contending or collaborative strategy, it became clear during the in-depth interviews that the major communication strategy employed by unit leadership was one of constant information — the tone was secondary. "For the most part, the constant information relieves some of the stress family members are under," says the FRSA. "People like to hear from the FRG. They want the information," says the FRG advisor. "We get the information out, but it's up to them to read it."

The FRSA notes that it is not only unit leadership distributing the information; family members are going to get it, too. During the month of March, the squadron web site had 3,676 page views and 445 unique visitors. To accommodate their requests for information, the FRSA posts new information any time she receives it, whether that was photos from the soldiers downrange, FRG information or new events. "The web page has been a tremendous asset," notes the rear-detachment commander. "It's helped dispel a lot

of rumors. We know from page views that our spouses and family members are using it, and we know from comments that it's been helpful."

RQ2: Changing Stances and Strategies

The second research question looked at how stances and strategies used by unit leadership changed when a conflict or crisis occurred. As noted above, limited conflict occurred during the period analyzed, and there were not any individual situations that met the definition of a crisis. That said, the nature of a military deployment is conflict-ridden by its definition, and in many ways, the entire deployment represented a "state of uncertainty resulting from a triggering event that disrupts an organization's routine activities" (Cloudman & Hallahan, 2006). So although there were no documented individual crises, all of the communication can be looked at as unit leadership's response to a triggering event — the deployment.

As previously noted, most of the communication intended for mass distribution fell on the advocacy side of the continuum and, in certain instances, employed a contending strategy. The stance seemed to move toward accommodation when family members became involved in the communication. In other words, when unit leadership had a message intended for mass distribution, whether that was a casualty notification or community information, they tended to advocate their position. When a family member became involved in the communication, which typically made the communication more personal, unit leadership was more accommodating. Therefore, the data suggested that unit leadership was more likely to collaborate or compromise with personal communication than with mass communication.

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For example, when a family member was in a dispute with the on-post housing office due to an unauthorized person living in the home, the troop FRG leader and squadron FRG advisor negotiated with the on-post housing office and the spouse to find a solution. In another instance, a family member broke her foot and requested assistance from the FRG. The troop FRG leader responded by organizing meals for the family member and providing rides.

The strategies and stances taken by unit leadership also appear to be influenced by the source of the message. When information was passed down from the squadron's higher-level headquarters (the regiment) or various agencies on Ft. Hood, communication appeared to be more advocating. When the message originated with unit leadership, it appeared to be more accommodating and employed a more collaborative strategy. The majority of communication analyzed came from an outside source, whether it was higher headquarters or a family support agency on Ft. Hood, and seemed to follow a public information model. This communication passed through unit leadership rather than the leadership being the source of the information. However, when information came from unit leadership — rather than *through* unit leadership — the descriptive data show it to be more accommodating. Of the 23 e-mails sent that contained information specific to the squadron, five employed a collaborating strategy and showed unit leadership working with family members. Of the 54 e-mails sent that contained Ft. Hood-related information, only two employed a collaborating strategy.

The above-noted shifts point to a central tenet of the contingency theory, as described by Yabrough et al. (1998): stances exist at a given time for a given public.

RQ3: Contingency Factors

The third research question looked at what factors influenced unit leadership in their communication with family members. In addition to analyzing a two-month period of communication, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the rear-detachment commander, FRG advisor and FRSA. The analysis confirms that the contingency theory variables affected unit leadership's stance.

External Factors

The variables identified within external threats as being most applicable to this study (Army regulations, the media, and the unit's reputation) were all employed. In terms of Army regulations, the rear-detachment commander notes that although regulations had not been much of an issue yet, the potential certainly exists. "If a spouse calls having heard that her husband was hurt, Army regulations would affect how I would communicate," he says. "I wouldn't lie, but I wouldn't tell them either so I could still comply with regulations."

The FRG advisor notes: "The [unit's reputation] is always an underlying factor. We want to be known as taking care of our families. It's always in the back of your mind. We want people to be satisfied." The rear-detachment commander agrees: "I consider myself to be representing the squadron commander, and I don't want anything negative to come to him."

The media are a variable mainly in terms of rumor control. The FRG advisor cites the length of the deployment as an example. When the media reported that deployments were shifting from 15 months to 12 months, the squadron was not affected. "Certain information goes out in the media, and we have to qualify or explain," she says. "We do

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this through e-mail, town hall or FRG meetings, or the newsletter. We end up dispelling a lot of rumors."

The variable of industry environment (impact of conflict or crisis on the unit) was manifest through notification of casualties within the unit. Although no casualties occurred within the squadron during the two-month analysis period, casualties did occur within other squadrons within the regiment, and these were passed along to family members. However, there was one non-combat-related casualty at the beginning of the deployment (November 2007). "It happened so quickly and so unexpected," says the squadron FRG advisor. "It was a learning experience for us."

Of the external factors, the most supported variables are general political/social environment/external culture (political and social support for the unit and unit leadership trying to improve the situation of family members during the deployment). Fifty-one of 98 e-mails sent to family members suggested the predominant contingent factor associated with the stances of the unit leadership was general political/social environment/external culture. Through these messages, leadership demonstrated overwhelming support for the families during the deployment. Support primarily came from the Ft. Hood community in the form of programming from various agencies. The rear-detachment commander states that the unit has been supported "outstandingly" by the local community. In addition to the information passed along via e-mail, he cites two nonprofit organizations as having adopted the squadron and providing additional support to family members.

The variables of FRG members' characteristics and their ability to evoke change with unit leadership were not applicable to this case. However, the data did support the

encouragement of FRG-member involvement in the organization and the FRG members'

perception of and familiarity with unit leadership and the organization. Unit leadership

tried to get FRG members involved in the organization through a squadron-level FRG

meeting, as well as through monthly "coffees" (social gathering of spouses in the unit).

Although only a small number of family members come out to these regular events, unit

leadership felt that they were well-known to family members by name. According to the

FRSA, family members know how to contact unit leadership and who they are.

"It can be frustrating for the FRG leaders when they only have three people show

up for a meeting," says the FRG advisor. "I tell them not to take it personally; you make

the effort, and no one can complain. That's all that really matters."

Concern for the reputation of the unit and unit leadership was manifest through all

communication tactics. The squadron and troop commanders used the monthly newsletter

to tout current accomplishments. The FRG advisor notes that she has taken the best

practices of her previous Army experiences and tried to implement them in part to

improve family members' experiences with the unit. "I'm very concerned that we want to

be known as taking care of our families," she says. "We want people who are satisfied."

Internal Factors

All variables of the organization's characteristics were applicable to the case.

Although family members' proximity to unit headquarters was not directly mentioned in

communication materials, it was certainly a factor, says the FRG advisor. "Most of the

information we put out is specific to those in the local area, so someone living in

Kentucky won't benefit from it," she says. E-mail messages were sent every time a phone

number of unit leadership changed, and each issue of the newsletter contained contact

information for rear detachment and FRG leadership. Additionally, the February issue of the newsletter contained step-by-step instructions to access the unit web site. The military's unique culture — including the tightly-knit community, use of acronyms and a common language, evidence of a chain of command, and basic military protocol — was inherent in nearly all communication.

The characteristics of the dominant coalition were identified as a factor of how unit leadership communicated with family members. Although the squadron FRG operated autonomously from the regimental FRG, there were monthly steering committee meetings for the FRG advisor. "There's an expectation [by the regiment] that the squadrons are going to put a high priority on family readiness," says the FRSA. "How it's done is left to the individual levels." However, regular communication occurred between rear-detachment and FRG leadership and the squadron headquarters in Iraq. The FRSA and rear-detachment commander both noted that they communicated directly with the squadron commander, XO, troop commanders and first sergeants, who were all deployed. In e-mails relating to personnel matters, the FRG advisor corresponded with her husband, the squadron commander.

The variables of FRG and unit funds were closely tied to Army regulations, and as such, communication relating to funds by unit leadership took more of an advocacy stance. Besides the regulations surrounding FRG funds, unit leadership noted that the availability of funds has enhanced unit communication, mostly in the addition of the FRSA position, which is a relatively new position. In addition to handling the near-daily e-mails, she was responsible for gathering content for the monthly newsletters and building and maintaining the squadron web site.

The variables that depicted the level of trust and barriers between unit leadership and FRG members were identified. "Overall, I would say family members are happy with communication and trust us," says the rear-detachment commander. "But there are those who have tried to beat the system, and I've had to say no." The FRSA echoes that sentiment: "We're always going to have somebody who isn't happy. Maybe we haven't been able to help resolve an issue with their soldier, or they don't understand our purpose. We had a spouse who asked if we can help them move. In that instance, we reiterated why we're here, and gave her five names of moving companies." According to the FRSA, the FRG exists for information, resources and referrals. "We've had spouses e-mail the squadron advisor about decisions that were made regarding soldiers — movement, deployment dates, etc. That's definitely not the FRG lane, and in those instances, we refer back to the green-suitor side and inform the spouse that that is an issue for the chain of command," she says.

RQ4: Family Members' Perception

The fourth research question asks: How do family members perceive the organization's handling of communication throughout the deployment? The survey was divided into two sections: demographics and communication satisfaction. Survey respondents were asked their gender, age, highest level of education completed, family size, number of children and relationship to the soldier.

Communication Satisfaction

Responses in the communication satisfaction section were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). A total of 10 single-item variables were asked.

Overwhelmingly, family members "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the statement, "I am satisfied with the amount of communication that I receive from the rear-detachment unit, including my FRG" (mean=1.53). For the statement: "I am satisfied with the quality of communication that I receive from the rear detachment and FRG," the mean was 1.47. The availability of the 24-hour web site, monthly newsletters and near-daily e-mails paid off; the mean was 1.49 for the statement, "I received the information that I needed in a timely manner." In fact, the mean was 1.45 for the statement "I have no need to complain about the

Results shifted only slightly when family members were asked if they were aware of the communication goals and objectives of their rear-detachment commander and FRG leaders: the mean was 1.90. The mean was 1.39 for the statement: "The rear-detachment commander and FRG leadership are sincere in their effort ot communicate with FRG members." For the statement: "Unit leadership is willing to accommodate member's concerns or requests when they arise," the mean was 1.73.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This exploratory study examined communication by Army leadership during a deployment using Cameron's contingency theory as a framework. The value of this study, as noted earlier, is that it addressed a gap in previous contingency theory research. Although researchers have studied communication in a variety of settings, a military setting had not been previously explored.

The past five years represented a time of unprecedented deployments — both in duration and frequency — for Army soldiers and their families. Army units have been deploying for 15 months at a time every other year, and knowledge of how unit leadership communicates with families during times of deployments may minimize the negative impact of lengthy and frequent deployments.

In their positions, the rear-detachment commander, FRG leader and FRSA were the official source of command information during a deployment, and although unit leadership and the FRG provided a support system to families during a deployment, the ultimate purpose was to provide official information to families. These seemingly contradictory purposes of unit leadership were reflected in the communication. On many occasions, unit leadership advocated the official information and left little room for discussion or accommodation. However, on other occasions, particularly when addressing a personal issue or when approached by a family member, unit leadership played a more supportive role. It is in these instances, when unit leadership was supportive, that they appeared to be more willing to accommodate.

Research question one looked at what stances and strategies unit leaders used when communicating to family members during a deployment. The findings suggested that although unit leadership tended to advocate more than accommodate, the information communicated affected if and when unit leadership moved along the continuum toward accommodation. Cancel et al. (1999) found that the collective demand of a public or a powerful situation can force an organization to shift toward accommodation to resolve a crisis. This study extended that finding: The information or subject matter being communicated influenced an organization to shift its stance or strategy. Public relations practitioners, then, might look for shifts in content to determine when their stance and strategy should shift as well.

The second research question looked at how unit leadership's stances and strategies changed during the deployment. Two factors were found to trigger a shift: the intended recipient of the communication and the source of the message. The more personal in nature the message, the more likely unit leadership was to accommodate. Likewise, if the message originated with unit leadership rather than through unit leadership, communication tended to be more accommodating.

Findings from the first two research questions showed that although unit leadership seemed to assume initial advocacy, they embarked on accommodation when the situation or message allowed. Many aspects of military culture predispose it to advocacy — its chain-of-command structure, a heavy reliance on black-and-white regulations and policy. But when unit leaders were given more flexibility, they tended to move toward accommodation. In other words, when given the choice, unit leadership moved toward accommodation.

Based on the findings of this study, public relations practitioners, particularly those in an organization predisposed to advocacy, can identify opportunities that might lend themselves to accommodation. It might be information that was more personal that allows the organization to communicate one-on-one. Or there may be instances where the message is still being crafted and allows for input from the public. Using appropriate strategies, public relations practitioners can take advantage of the times when they have flexibility to make the best communication decisions rather than continue to fall back on advocacy.

The third research question looked at what variables impacted unit leadership in their communication with their public. The findings in this study supported the research by Cancel et al. (1999), who noted a difference between predisposing and situational variables. Those variables considered predisposing, such as unit characteristics and characteristics of the dominant coalition, influenced where unit leadership fell along the continuum before the communication occurred. Those variables considered situational, such as relationship characteristics and the external public, were more likely to influence how unit leadership related to FRG members. Although the presence of strong predisposing variables made Army units more likely to advocate, situational variables allowed the possibility for dynamic communication. Public relations practitioners can recognize these variables and seek out opportunities when the presence of situational variables makes communication more likely to evolve.

The nature of communication by unit leadership was predominantly associated with the contingent factors of "external threats," which appeared to drive unit leadership to advocate more than accommodate, and "general political/social environment/external

culture," which appeared to drive unit leadership toward more accommodation. The contingent factor of "external threats" was consistent with previous findings (Shin et al., 2003), where both an organization and its public were dominated by a higher authority. In the regulation-rich and command-structured Army, external threats — most specifically, Army regulations, the media and the unit's reputation — justified advocacy. The contingency factor of "general political/social environment/external culture" demonstrated the support aspect of unit leadership and their willingness to accommodate. It was during these instances where unit leadership tried to improve the experiences of family members during the deployment.

The fourth research question evaluated how family members perceived unit leadership's handling of communication. Overwhelmingly, the public was satisfied with the communication they received, and the findings suggested that FRG members responded favorably to the communication they received and felt positively toward unit leadership. Although we should be cautious in extrapolating meaning from the survey, the findings suggested that the public was satisfied with unit leadership's shifts between advocacy and accommodation — as well as the unit's predisposition to advocacy.

Theories of public relations excellence (Gower, 2006; Grunig & Dozzier, 1992) hold that two-way symmetrical communication is nearly always preferred. However, this research suggests that in a hierarchical organization, such as the Army, advocacy and one-way communication work. Unit leadership's basic strategy of constant communication left family members satisfied.

There's an old saying that if the Army wanted a soldier to have a wife, they would have issued one to the soldier. Recent efforts by the Army, including the addition of the

FRSA position and the rear detachment's focus on the family, suggest that this cliché no longer applies. It does, however, raise the question of what family members have come to expect from the Army in terms of communication. Do family members expect to be marginalized by the Army, thus the constant communication exceeds their expectations?

Another purpose of this study was to evaluate how unit leadership communicated during times of conflict. Shin et al. (2003) found that an organization and its public involved in conflict were more likely to advocate than accommodate, and this held true in the research. Although direct conflict was not observed, the nature of the deployment is rooted in conflict, and as such, this research supported that Army units communicating with families during a deployment were more likely to advocate than accommodate. Although this study did not look at the public's communication, the connection between personal communication and the strategy employed by unit leadership was notable. Shin et al. (2003) showed that one party's strategies were associated with the other's strategies. In this research, personal communication appeared to impact unit leadership's stance and strategy and, as such, deserves further research.

Limitations are inherent in every exploratory study, and this research is no exception. All participants came from the same Army unit, and these results may not be generalized to a larger Army population.

The major limitation comes from the way the online survey was distributed. Because the invitation e-mail had to go through two people — the FRSA and the troop FRG leaders — the researcher could not guarantee that all family members received the online survey. Future researchers might explore the possibility of mailing a survey to all family members through unit leadership. Additionally, unit leadership was not able to

identify how many family members received the survey, which means a population size and response rate could not be determined.

It is also unknown who self-selected into the online survey. Unit leadership acknowledged that a low number of family members were actively involved in the FRG and that the majority of those were spouses. It is unknown whether those involved members who attend events self-selected into the survey at a higher rate than those who have had limited or no contact with unit leadership. This issue could have been solved by adding a question to the survey that addressed a family member's involvement in the FRG and evaluating responses through that filter. However, this limitation was not identified until the survey was complete.

The unit studied was an aviation unit, which is smaller than an infantry or armor unit. A larger, more diverse unit may be beneficial to future studies, as it would likely allow for a broader spectrum of personal communication and additional crisis situations to arise. In an aviation unit, there may be as few as 20 spouses in a troop FRG. In an infantry unit, there may be up to 200 spouses per FRG, which would certainly allow for additional communication challenges. Additionally, aviation units have a higher officer-to-enlisted ratio than many other combat-arms units in the Army. All pilots either hold the rank of warrant officer or commissioned officer and must go through extensive training. One might hypothesize that an aviation unit, then, would have a more education population than other Army units.

The time period examined may also need to be longer to adequately examine all the issues and conflicts that arise during a deployment. As noted earlier, the month-period that was analyzed represented a period of relative calm. Would family members have felt

differently about the communication they received had the two months have been a period of unrest?

Overall, this study supported the contingency theory in a military setting with identification of stances and strategies and the validity of several variables. Unit leaders at least partially operated as communication practitioners during a deployment, and they should understand the implications of their communication with family members. However, further research is necessary with a larger sample. Additional units at a variety of military installations should be studied to determine how various contingency factors influence the stances and strategies used. Also, communication was evaluated during months four and five of the unit's 15-month deployment, so it will be interesting to see in future studies how communication evolves from the beginning to the end of a deployment. Researchers may see additional movement along the contingency theory continuum over additional time. It has also been noted that the unit experienced isolated conflict during the period of study, and no casualties were experienced during this period. The question remains whether a casualty or additional conflict would have contributed to increased or decreased advocacy.

Additionally, further research is needed to determine if there are other organizations or situations where advocacy or one-way communication would be effective. According to Grunig (2006), "The symmetrical model and its parent, the coorientational model, proposed that individuals, organizations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behavior to those of others rather than to try to control how others think and behave" (p. 156). In an organization such as the Army, which is hierarchical in nature and has an established culture, is symmetrical

communication the goal? Additionally, are there other instances or situations where this may apply? Finally, as noted previously, the survey posed limitations in terms of distribution and response. A more direct and broader method of collecting family member responses would help Army unit leaders develop a better understanding of how family members perceived communication with unit leadership. Although understanding how and why unit leaders communicate the way they do is helpful, determining how family members perceive the communication they receive — particularly during period of intense conflict — is the most practical in terms of improving communication and the overall experience of a deployment.

APPENDIX A

Sample FRG Organizational Structure for Army Squadron

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                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │      Rear-      │
                    │   Detachment    │
                    │   Commander     │
                    │  Army Officer   │
                    └─────────────────┘
                             │
          ┌──────────────────┴──────────────────┐
┌─────────────────┐                   ┌─────────────────┐
│ Family Readiness│                   │  Squadron FRG   │
│ Support Assistant│                  │     Leader      │
│    Civilian     │                   │  Volunteer –    │
│    Employee     │                   │     Senior      │
└─────────────────┘                   │   Army Spouse   │
                                      └─────────────────┘
```

Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*	Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*	Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*	Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*	Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*	Troop FRG Leader *Volunteer – Army Spouse*

APPENDIX B

In-Depth Interview with Army Unit Leaders

Hello! The following questions are designed to help researchers determine what variables influence your communication with family members during your unit's extended deployment. We are very interested in learning about why you chose the communication strategies and stances that you did to convey your message to family members.

This interview will take approximately 60 minutes. There are no right or wrong answers to any questions, and your responses are confidential. Thank you very much for your time and participation.

We'll start the interview with a few broad questions about how you communicate with your FRG members.

1. As you think about your communication with FRG members throughout the deployment, what factors pose challenges?

2. What factors pose opportunities?

    Possible Probe Questions:

    ☐ What role do Army regulations play in your ability to communicate with FRG members during a deployment?

    ☐ How do the media influence your ability to communicate with FRG members during a deployment?

    ☐ When making decisions on how or what to communicate with FRG members, to what extent do you consider your unit's reputation both in your military community and with the general public?

    ☐ How have the resources available to you during this deployment impacted your communication with FRG members? Are there any additional resources that you think could benefit your communication with FRG members?

    ☐ To what extent would you say that your unit is supported politically by the local community? How has this affected your communication with FRG members?

    ☐ To what extent would you say that your unit is supported socially? How has this affected your communication with FRG members?

- How many members are in your FRG? Does this influence the communication strategies that you employ? How and why?

- Can you give me any examples of times when the FRG members have tried to evoke some sort of change with unit leadership? Were they successful? Why or why not?

- Would you consider the majority of your FRG members to be involved and committed to the organization?

- How would you describe your FRG members' perception of the rear-detachment and FRG leadership?

- Do you think that you are recognized and known by the majority of your FRG members?

- Do you know the majority of your FRG members?

- Are the majority of your members located within close proximity (less than 60 miles) to the unit's headquarters? How does this impact the communication strategies and stances that you have utilized?

- What technology do you use to communicate with FRG members? How does the availability of this technology impact your communication?

- Would you consider FRG members to be a homogenous or heterogeneous group? Does this impact the ways in which you communicate with them? Why or why not?

- Who determines how, when, and what to communicate with FRG members?

- Are there policies or guidelines that determine your communication with FRG members?

- Do you or have you ever consulted with the JAG (Judge Advocate General) office about what you will communicate to FRG members? Why or why not?

- Think about the military culture. To what extent does it impact your communication with FRG members?

- How would you explain your unit's (rear detachment) relationship with the deployed battalion- and brigade-level headquarters?

☐ How autonomously would you say that you operate from your higher-level headquarters?

☐ How much funding is available to your FRG? How does this affect your communication with FRG members?

3. How have these factors influenced or changed how you've communicated with family members during the deployment?

Possible Probe Questions:

☐ How does the dynamic nature of an Army unit's deployment affect your communication with FRG members? Can you give me an example?

☐ When deciding how you will communicate with FRG members, do you or have you ever considered how your communication with impact FRG members' perception of the unit or of you? Can you give me an example?

☐ Can you think of any specific instances that have triggered a change in your communication strategy?

4. How would you say that your communication with FRG members has evolved throughout the deployment?

Possible Probe Question:

☐ Prior to the deployment, what was your perception of unit leadership's communication with FRG members? Do you think it was effective? Why or why not?

Now I'm going to ask you a little bit more about you and your experiences.

5. Could you please share with me the highest level of education you have achieved and what degrees you hold?

6. Tell me about any communication training you've received, either military or civilian.

7. Prior to your unit's deployment, have you ever dealt with a crisis on a professional level? Would you consider yourself to be experienced in dealing with crises?

8. During an average week, how much time do you devote to FRG members?

9. How would you rate your comfort level with change? What about with conflict?

10. Are there any major ideological differences between unit leadership and FRG members? If so, what are they?

Thank you very much for your time!

Online Survey with Family Members

Hello! Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study regarding communication in Army rear detachments and FRGs. We are very interested in learning about your perception of the communication you have received from your rear-detachment commander and FRG leadership during this deployment.

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers to any questions, and your questionnaire responses will be both anonymous and confidential. When you are finished, please click "submit." Thank you very much for your participation, and we look forward to receiving your survey.

Part 1: Communication Satisfaction
Please check the box that best describes how you feel about the communication you have received during your soldier's deployment.

1. I am satisfied with the amount of communication that I receive from the rear-detachment unit, including my FRG.
    Strongly Agree .... [   ]   (1)
    Somewhat agree .... [   ]   (2)
    Neutral/Uncertain .... [   ]   (3)
    Somewhat disagree .... [   ]   (4)
    Strongly disagree .... [   ]   (5)

2. I am satisfied with the quality of communication that I receive from the rear detachment and FRG.
    Strongly Agree .... [   ]   (1)
    Somewhat agree .... [   ]   (2)
    Neutral/Uncertain .... [   ]   (3)
    Somewhat disagree .... [   ]   (4)
    Strongly disagree .... [   ]   (5)

3. I received the information that I needed in a timely manner.
    Strongly Agree .... [   ]   (1)
    Somewhat agree .... [   ]   (2)
    Neutral/Uncertain .... [   ]   (3)
    Somewhat disagree .... [   ]   (4)
    Strongly disagree .... [   ]   (5)

4. I have no need to complain about the communication that I received from the rear-detachment commander and FRG leadership.
    Strongly Agree .... [   ]   (1)
    Somewhat agree .... [   ]   (2)
    Neutral/Uncertain .... [   ]   (3)

Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

5. The overall communication efforts of my rear-detachment commander and FRG leaders are sufficient and meet my needs.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)
     Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
     Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

6. I am aware of the communication goals and objectives of my rear-detachment commander and FRG leaders.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)
     Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
     Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

7. I trust the unit leadership when it comes to the information that I receive.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)
     Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
     Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

8. The rear-detachment commander and FRG leadership are sincere in their effort to communicate with FRG members.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)
     Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
     Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

9. Unit leadership is willing to accommodate member's concerns or requests when they arise.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)
     Somewhat disagree ....[   ]   (4)
     Strongly disagree ....[   ]   (5)

10. Unit leadership communicates openly and honestly with FRG members.
     Strongly Agree ....[   ]   (1)
     Somewhat agree ....[   ]   (2)
     Neutral/Uncertain...................[   ]   (3)

Somewhat disagree ....[ ]   (4)
Strongly disagree ....[ ]   (5)

Part II: Demographic Information
Please check the appropriate box. This information will be used strictly for classification purposes.

1. What is your gender?
    Male ....[ ]   (1)
    Female...................................[ ]   (2)

2. What is your age today?
    18-27 ....[ ]   (1)
    28-37 ....[ ]   (2)
    38-47 ....[ ]   (3)
    48-57 ....[ ]   (4)
    57 or older.............................[ ]   (5)

3. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
    High-school graduate ....[ ]   (1)
    Vocational/trade school ....[ ]   (2)
    Some college..........................[ ]   (3)
    Bachelor's degree...................[ ]   (4)
    Master's degree......................[ ]   (5)
    Ph.D/Professional degree.......[ ]   (6)
    Other_____ [ ]   (7)

4. What is your family size?
    One.......................................[ ]   (1)
    Two ....[ ]   (2)
    Three ....[ ]   (3)
    Four......................................[ ]   (4)
    Five ....[ ]   (5)
    Six ....[ ]   (6)
    Seven or More.......................[ ]   (7)

5. How many children under the age of 18 currently reside in your household?
    None.....................................[ ]   (1)
    One.......................................[ ]   (2)
    Two ....[ ]   (3)
    Three ....[ ]   (4)
    Four......................................[ ]   (5)
    Five or More ....[ ]   (6)

5. Please list the ages of your children under the age of 18.

6. What is your relationship to the soldier in the unit?

    Current Spouse.........................[   ]   (1)
    Ex-Spouse ....[   ]   (2)
    Parent ....[   ]   (3)
    Sibling.....................................[   ]   (4)
    Adult Child..............................[   ]   (5)
    Other ....[   ]   (6)

To finish the survey, please click the "Submit" button. Thank you very much for your time in completing this survey!

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