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Abstract

Expectations have been connected to many central concepts of public relations research, yet, definitions of what is meant by expectations are lacking. This article aims to broaden the understanding of expectations by taking into account their multi-dimensional nature, suggesting that there are several explanations to expectations depending on what the expectation is based on. We suggest that in organizational context expectations are two-fold assessments of what is considered good or desirable (expectation tone ranging from positive to negative) and the confidence placed in the organization (organization-specific context ranging from high to low confidence). As a result of the conceptual review with theoretical input from areas outside the scope of public relations, the article presents the Expectation Grid, where expectations are acknowledged as continuums of tone and context.

Introduction

Public relations is a field that is concerned with the relationships that organizations have with their publics, i.e. groups, communities or constituents connected to an organization directly or indirectly. These relationships are affected by many factors (Dozier, 1986; Lauzen, 1995), among them expectations (Thomlison, 2000), yet relatively little is known about what expectations are conceptually and how they can be approached analytically in public relations research. Many popular areas of public relations focus on organization-public relationships starting from their establishment, ranging from relationship management and strategies (Flynn, 2006; Ledingham, 2003) to reputation, risk and crisis communication (Coombs & Holladay, 2006; 2012). In this article we propose that expectations are part of the vital process that take place both prior and after the establishment of relationships. Furthermore, we suggest that expectations have been recognized rather narrowly in the literature of public relations almost as observable data (cf. Lachmann, 1943) that can be derived from the publics without a need for further analysis. We address this gap and argue for a broader understanding of expectations and their formation: what contributes to their emergence and in what different ways they can be understood.

To broaden the understanding of expectations in public relations research, we look into expectations with the help of different theoretical backgrounds outside the traditional scope of public relations research, and break expectations into different types, ranging from normative expectations to expectations based on probability, ideal hopes, or even cynicism (Miller, 1977; Summers & Granbois, 1977; Swan, Trawick, and Carroll, 1982). We suggest that a more thorough understanding of expectations can advance the theory and practice of public relations, as expectations act as reference points for assessments and can affect both how own behavior is

adapted as well as how the behavior of others is assessed (Boulding, Kalra, & Zeithaml, 1993; Creyer & Ross, 1997; Roese & Sherman, 2007; Van Eerde & Thierry, 1996).

The purpose of this article is to (1) Review how expectations are currently understood in public relations literature, (2) Dismantle the concept of expectations into different types of expectations, primarily with the help of literature from customer satisfaction and customer management, and (3) Assess the relevance of expectations for public relations anew with the input drawn together in the conceptual review.

The article is organized as follows. First, we review previous literature of public relations with the means of a targeted literature search concentrating on expectations. Next, we add to the current understanding of expectations in public relations by exploring different types of expectations and by discussing two theories that deepen the understanding of how expectations affect relationships: expectancy violation and expectation gaps. In the final section, based on the conceptual review and analysis, we present a framework for understanding expectations in the public relations context. This framework, which we call the Expectation Grid, takes into account the spectrum of expectations as both positive and negative constructions, displaying a varying amount of confidence toward organizations.

Expectations in the Literature of Public Relations

To examine how the concept of expectations has been acknowledged in previous literature of public relations, we executed a targeted literature search in six journals: *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, *Corporate Reputation Review*, *Journal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, and *Public Relations Review*. The selection of the journals was two-

phased: first, an initial selection was made based Pasadeos, Berger & Renfro's (2010) list of the most cited public relations journals, from where only the academic, peer-reviewed journals were included: Public Relations Review, Journal of Public Relations Research, and Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly; second, three more journals were added based on test searches that indicated central journals with relevant hits: Corporate Reputation Review, Corporate Communications: An International Journal, and Journal of Communication Management.

The searches were done on August 13th, 2013, using the keywords of expectation, expectations, expectancy and expectancies, that were allowed to appear anywhere in the text. No time limit was set for the publication year in order to include both earlier and more recent contributions. To limit the search, only articles that mentioned expectations in relation to organizational relations were included in the analysis. This resulted in a sample of 197 articles (9 from Corporate Communication: An International Journal, 102 from Corporate Reputation Review, 9 from Journal of Communication Management, 68 from Journal of Public Relations Research, 1 from Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, and 8 from Public Relations Review).

The articles were analyzed to determine how and to what depth the concept of expectations was mentioned in the literature of public relations, and whether the concept was given explicit definitions. According to our results, expectations were often mentioned in the literature, yet only eight articles out of 197 offered a definition for expectations. Two of these articles defined expectations as beliefs of what will or should happen, affecting how stakeholders make decisions (Golob, Jancic & Lah, 2009; Podnar & Golob, 2007). Four articles defined expectations as some form of reference points, standards, mental models or prototypes against which judgments, comparisons and interpretations are made, for example, concerning

organizational behavior (Grunwald & Hempelmann, 2010; Hallahan, 2001; Luoma-aho, Olkkonen & Lähteenmäki, 2013; Reichart, 2003). The two remaining articles concentrated on defining expectations by the institutional factors that influence their emergence, such as moral or cultural values and norms, legal demands, and general acceptability (Brønn, 2012; de Quevedo-Puente, de la Fuente-Sabaté, & Delgado-García, 2007). Hence, according to our findings, expectations are heavily under-conceptualized in the current literature of public relations, despite the fact that they were frequently mentioned.

Based on the literature search, the concept of expectations is primarily used when defining other concepts. Expectations were most often mentioned connected to reputation (64 articles), responsibility (42 articles), relationships (31 articles), legitimacy (24 articles), satisfaction (16 articles), trust (13 articles), and identity (12 articles). In addition to these most often mentioned concepts, expectations were connected to a myriad of concepts (such as brand, crisis, norms, issues, and quality) which received fewer, one to eight, hits in our sample. Table 1 lists the interconnecting concepts to expectations based on our literature search and analysis.

TABLE 1 Concepts Connected to Expectations in the Targeted Literature Search

Concept	Referring articles*
reputation	64
responsibility	42
relationship	31
legitimacy	24
satisfaction	16
trust	13
identity	12
other (1-8 hits per concept)	82

* *an individual article can be connected to several concepts*

Reputation was the most often mentioned concept in relation to expectations. Typically, reputation was defined as the ability to fulfill the expectations posed by stakeholders or publics. Furthermore, exceeding expectations was seen as a way to strengthen or improve reputation, whereas failing to meet expectations was seen as a reputational threat. Reputation was seen to be affected by past behavior that creates expectations for future performance; the better the reputation, the higher the expectations. The concept of reputation was linked, via expectations, to other central concepts that came up in the literature search. For example, reputation and *responsibility* were linked via societal expectations and, thus, performing in responsibility was seen to partly affect how an overall reputation is assessed or judged. *Relationships* were also mentioned together with reputation, as close organizational relations and interaction with the publics were seen as a way to stay on top of expectations and be able to build reputation. The reason expectations were seen central to reputation was the belief that the fulfillment of expectations will affect stakeholders' or publics' attitudes, motivation, behavior, and satisfaction toward the organization (e.g. Mahon & Wartick, 2003; Porritt, 2005; Vaaland & Heide, 2008; Wang, Kandampully, Lo, & Shi, 2006).

Responsibility, or more specifically corporate responsibility, was seen to be driven by societal expectations that relate to social and environmental consequences of organizational conduct. Being perceived as responsible was seen essential for *relationship* forming (resonating also with the concept of *trust*) and for gaining *legitimacy* in the eyes of the publics or stakeholders. As legitimacy was typically defined in the articles as support of organizational actions that result from congruence with societal expectations and norms, responsibility and legitimacy often appeared together as concepts. However, the actual contents of expectations of responsibility and consequently the prerequisites for legitimacy were often left undefined, as

they were seen to be dependent on the prevailing culture, values, and norms (that are conveyed in expectations). However, a common assumption presented was that the expectations for corporate responsibility have, and most probably will continue to increase (see e.g. Hanson & Stuart, 2001; Lindgreen & Swaen, 2005; Steyn & Niemann, 2010). Hence, being able to meet, exceed, or even to anticipate different societal expectations was seen essential for gaining legitimacy (Bitektine, 2008; Johansen & Nielsen, 2012; Westhues & Einwiller, 2006).

The concept of *relationship* was explained through expectations especially in the sense that meeting expectations is essential for the continuation of relationships. Relationship management was mentioned as a tool for aligning or reconciling organizational behavior with the expectations of stakeholders or publics (e.g. Bruning & Galloway, 2003; Hall, 2006). Two other concepts, *trust* and *satisfaction*, appeared frequently together with relationship, as trust was seen to be generated when a relational partner meets expectations, which, in turn, reinforces future positive expectations and generates a feeling of satisfaction, i.e. that expectations and experiences meet. Expectations of socially or morally accepted behavior were mentioned as factors that contribute to trust formation, as relational trust includes a willingness to take a risk or be vulnerable toward the other (e.g. Bekmeier-Feuerhahn & Eichenlaub, 2010; Yang & Lim, 2009). In relationships, each actor was seen to have expectations for other relational partner(s) and their behavior. When there is no prior experience to build expectations on, other factors, such as general acceptability and organizational messages weigh more and generate initial expectations (Kim, 2011; Kramer, 2010).

The articles that connected expectations with *identity* asserted that organizational identity induces expectations that should be met with organization's actions and responses. Identity was seen as one source of information when different groups or individuals assess an organization,

and, ideally, the identity makes organizational actions more predictable by inducing expectations that the organization can meet. Some of the articles concerning identity saw identity management as a tool to direct or even control the expectations of stakeholders or publics (e.g. Hansen, Langer, & Salskov-Iversen, 2001), while some saw identity more as a socially constructed concept that the organization can control only partly—rather, both internal and external expectations contribute to what organizational identity entails and how it comes to change over time (e.g. Jacobs, Christe-Zeyse, Keegan, & Pólos, 2008).

Based on the literature search, expectations are connected to some of the most central concepts in the literature of public relations. However, explicit definitions for expectations are lacking. Many of the analyzed articles, regardless of the concept they connect expectations with, recognized that gaps between expectations and performance can cause threats to organizational operations and future vitality (e.g. Brønn, 2012; Kang, 2013; Kim, Park, & Wertz, 2010; Reichart, 2003). As such, the literature of public relations has recognized expectations as elements that affect how organizations are perceived and assessed and how publics shape their own behavior toward organizations. This is in line with research on cognitive science and interpersonal relations that see expectations as part of human logic and interaction (Gärdenfors, 1993; Jones, 1986)—people have expectations when they enter a room, when they encounter a new person, or when they choose to act in a certain way (Gärdenfors, 1993). Searching for causal explanations of others' behavior and making predictions of future behavior is a way of making sense of the social world, as addressed more broadly by attribution theory (Heider, 1958; Jones et al., 1972). Expectations play a part in this process by framing and filtering social interaction, either as general anticipations grounded in societal norms, typicality or appropriateness, or as

adaptations depending on individual persons or situations grounded in previous knowledge and experience of a specific interaction style (Burgoon, 1995).

Though expectations were recognized as central to how stakeholders or publics experience their relationships with organizations, with very few exceptions the articles of the literature search treated expectations only as positive constructions—anticipations or hopes of a positive outcome the organization ideally is able to deliver. We claim that there are more sides to expectations left to be discovered and connected with public relations research. In the next section, we draw from customer management and customer satisfaction literature and explore expectations as a multifaceted concept that cannot be explained only with adjacent concepts or with a single definition; rather, several definitions for expectations are needed to grasp their full scope.

Dismantling the Concept of Expectations: Multiple Types of Expectations

The concepts expectations have been linked to in the literature of public relations give hints that expectations derive from different origins: for example, when expectations are mentioned together with responsibility they are typically driven by ideals and aspirations of building a better society, and when expectations are connected with reputation they are influenced by past experience that may have been good or bad, depending on the case. To be able to explore the different origins of expectations more profoundly, we introduce customer satisfaction and customer management literature where a lot of conceptual work on expectations has been conducted.

TABLE 2 Four Categories of Expectation Types

Category 1: VALUE-BASED EXPECTATIONS			
Expectation	Description	Authors	Field
<i>Normative</i>	Indicates a level of what should or ought to be	Summers & Granbois, 1977	Consumer research Service quality research
<i>Ideal</i>	Indicates an ideal state guided by what is valued, or is wished for, in ideal settings	Miller, 1977	Service quality research
Category 2: INFORMATION-BASED EXPECTATIONS			
Expectation	Description	Authors	Field
<i>Precise</i>	Indicates a level that is consciously formed and acknowledged	Ojasalo, 2001	Service management
<i>Realistic</i>	Indicates a level that is possible to meet	Ojasalo, 2001	Service management
<i>Explicit</i>	Indicates a level based on actual attributes, or conscious assumptions or wishes	Miller, 2000; Ojasalo, 2001	Information system management Service management
<i>Official</i>	Indicates a level based on official information	Mittilä & Järvelin, 2001	Relationship management (b-to-b)
<i>Unrealistic</i>	Indicates a level that is impossible or highly unlikely to be met, i.e., a level based on low, insufficient or incorrect information	Ojasalo, 2001	Service management
<i>Fuzzy</i>	Indicates a level based on a vague feeling, i.e., a level based on low, insufficient or subconscious information	Ojasalo, 2001	Service management
Category 3: EXPERIENCE-BASED EXPECTATIONS			
Expectation	Description	Authors	Field

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<i>Experience-based</i>	Indicates the level based on what is believed to be possible based on past experience; what should be able to be achieved	Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983	Consumer research
<i>Predictive</i>	Indicates a level based on a likely scenario under certain settings or attributes	Summers & Granbois, 1977; Swan, Trawick, & Carroll, 1982 ; Miller 1977	Consumer research Service quality research
<i>Implicit</i>	Indicates a level based on outside cues based on what should be possible elsewhere and by other actors	Miller, 2000	Information system management Service management
<i>Comparative</i>	Indicates a level based on comparisons with similar brands or competitors	Prakash, 1984; Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983	Consumer research
<i>Brand-based</i>	Indicates a level based on brand-comparisons	Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983	Consumer research
<i>Adequate</i>	Indicates a level based on the minimum level where satisfaction is maintained	Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993	Service quality research
<i>Minimum tolerable</i>	Indicates a level based on the lowest level where satisfaction is maintained	Miller, 1977; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993	Consumer research Service quality research

Category 4: PERSONAL INTEREST-BASED EXPECTATIONS

Expectation	Description	Authors	Field
<i>Deserved</i>	Indicates a level that a person considers (s)he appropriately deserves	Miller, 1977	Consumer research
<i>Desired</i>	Indicates a level based on what is considered desirable on a personal level.	Swan, Trawick, & Carroll, 1982; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993	Consumer research Service quality research
<i>Unofficial</i>	Indicates a level based on individual wishes or desires	Mittilä & Järvelin, 2001	Relationship management (b-to-b)

In customer satisfaction and customer management literature, evaluations of quality and satisfaction are seen to result from a comparison between expectations and experience (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993). This pool of literature has mentioned a number of different types of expectations that all relate to how assessments are made, yet they are acknowledged to arise from different origins. For example, a division has been made between *predictive* and *normative* expectations, where the former describes what is considered likely (a prediction of what will happen), and the latter represents what should or ought to occur (a hope or value-guided estimation of what one should be able to expect) (Summers & Granbois, 1977). However, this is only one typology among many. To summarize the vast amount of literature dealing with expectations in customer satisfaction and customer management literature, we list and categorize the different types of expectations we have identified in Table 2. We introduce each category next in more detail.

The first category we identify is value-based expectations. These expectations are normative or ideal in the sense that they indicate a level of what should or ought to be; an ideal state based on what is valued or wished for (Miller, 1977; Summers & Granbois, 1977). As they are value-based and describe an ideal level, they represent the highest possible level organizations can achieve, regardless of probability or likelihood.

The second category, information-based expectations, contains those expectation types that are formed based on what is known, i.e. what information is available (or unavailable) when the expectation forms. Precise, realistic (Ojasalo, 2001), explicit (Miller, 2000; Ojasalo, 2001), and official (Mittilä & Järvelin) expectations are all based on information that can be seen as “factual” and explicitly articulated. For example, Miller (2000) states that explicit expectations are formed by assessing the actual attributes available, such as behavior, interface, and accuracy.

Also lack of information can be the source of expectations, such as in the case of unrealistic and fuzzy (Ojasalo, 2001) expectations that are formed based on insufficient, incorrect, or imprecise information. Whereas a fuzzy expectation is vague: a feeling that something should be different without a clear picture of what should be changed, an unrealistic expectation is a wish or anticipation that is either impossible or highly unlikely to be delivered under any circumstances (Ojasalo, 2001). What is common to all expectations in this category is that there is some sort of information source that predominantly influences its formation, whether it is consciously acknowledged or not.

In the third category, experience-based expectations, we have grouped all expectations that are based primarily on direct or indirect previous experience. Simply put, experience-based expectations indicate a level that is believed to be possible based on past experience (Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983). Expectations in this category can indicate a likelihood, as predictive expectations do (Summers & Granbois, 1977; Swan, Trawick, & Carroll, 1982 ; Miller 1977), or they can be based on comparisons made with, for example, similar brands or organizations, as implicit (Miller, 2000), comparative (Prakash, 1984; Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983), and brand-based expectations (Woodruff, Cadotte, & Jenkins, 1983) do. Furthermore, as prior experience can influence expectations in the sense that expectations are set lower to avoid future disappointments (Van Dijk, Zeelenberg, & Van der Pligt, 2003), experience-based expectations can also take the form of adequate (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993) or minimum tolerable (Miller, 1977; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993) levels, where satisfaction is not high but it is still maintained.

The last category, personal interest-based expectations are those expectations that are primarily influenced by an evaluation of personal gains, dealing either with what is considered as

deserved, based on, for example, the effort and resources invested (Miller, 1977), what is desired (Swan, Trawick, & Carroll, 1982; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993), or what is unofficially hoped or wished for based on individual preferences (Mittilä & Järvelin, 2001). These expectations can even cause official information to be discarded or ignored, if it is not fitting with personal interests (Mittilä & Järvelin, 2001).

As the four categories of expectations identified from the literature of customer management and customer satisfaction show, expectations have been given different conceptual explanations. Dismantling the concept of expectations into different types may add to the previous understanding of public relations literature by explaining the many ways expectations form and how, consequently, their outcomes are assessed differently. For example, expectations for organizational behavior might be different whether the expectation is based on a normative, value-based evaluation, or a predictive, experience-based evaluation. Most essentially, while normative expectations are, presumably, always positive as they are based on what should or ought to be, experience-based expectations can take both positive and negative forms, depending on the experience. If prior experience has been a disappointment, expectation that is based on probability might predict the disappointment to repeat itself. This is important for the continuation of relationships, as according to Nesse (1990), people seek to renew their positive emotions and avoid reliving the negative. This has been a central idea when discussing expectations from the viewpoint of interpersonal communication and relations (Burgoon, 1993; Thomlison, 2000).

To open up the negative side of expectations, we look next into expectancy violation theory stemming from interpersonal communication, and the theory of expectation gaps originating from customer management research. Expectancy violation theory offers insights on

expectations as both positive *and* negative constructions—a notion that has not been strongly present in public relations literature. Expectancy violations can produce expectation gaps that, according to customer management literature, have significant effects on satisfaction and relationships. Hence, also literature explaining expectation gaps is introduced.

Expectancy Violation and Expectation Gaps

The discrepancies between an organization's actions and publics' perceptions can be understood with the help of expectancy violation theory (EVT). In EVT, expectations are seen as integral for social interaction and guiding components for how relationships evolve: whether relationships are formed and continued, whether behavior is accepted, and whether a partner is trusted (Burgoon, 1993; Thomlison, 2000). EVT originates from the field of interpersonal communication and it aims to open up the process how expectations and their fulfillment are assessed. Thus, expectations are seen to function as agents explaining social interaction and emotional exchange (Burgoon, 1993). A theory closely related to EVT is disconfirmation theory used in psychology of customer behavior and satisfaction literature (Oliver, 1980), in which expectations are either confirmed or disconfirmed. However, EVT stresses the importance of relationships, making it especially relevant for public relations.

According to expectancy violation theory, expectations can be either confirmed or violated – positively or negatively. When expectations are confirmed, the outcome is the same as had been expected, and when expectations are violated, the outcome is something different than initially expected. In the case of positive violation, the enacted behavior is more positive than initially expected, and in the case of negative violation, the enacted behavior is more negative than initially expected (Burgoon, 1993). Because not only outcomes, but also expectations, can

be positive or negative, there is a significant difference in whether a positive expectation is violated positively (leading to an even better outcome than anticipated) or negatively (turning positive anticipation into a negative outcome); or, whether a negative expectation is violated negatively (leading to an even worse outcome than expected) or positively (turning negative anticipation into a positive outcome) (Weber & Mayer, 2011).

A violation of expectations has a tendency to distract attention from the original situation or issue, as the violation leads to emotional responses and a need to make sense of the violation as well as to evaluate its consequences (Burgoon, 1993). In the organizational context, this can mean that the original issue turns into something else. However, people can also stick to their initial expectations despite disconfirming evidence, distorting the assessment process (Burgoon, 1993). For positive expectations, this can create a halo effect described in reputation studies (see, for example, Coombs & Holladay, 2006; Aula & Mantere, 2008), but for negative expectations, it implies the opposite: a vicious cycle or the stigma of a damaged reputation (see, for example, Reuber & Fischer, 2010).

An expectancy violation can be understood as an expectation gap, a central concept in customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction research. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990), a gap emerges when expectation differs from perception, affecting perceived quality and experienced satisfaction. Both positive and negative violations of publics' expectations can produce gaps that require attention and action from organizations. For example, a reputation that is too good compared to actual performance can pose as big a risk as a negative reputation (Luoma-aho, 2007). Gaps can originate from multiple sources: not knowing what is expected; offering a quality that does not meet expectations; not meeting expectations with performance; or promising something that cannot be delivered (Zeithaml et al., 1990).

Since expectations act as frames against which assessments are made and behavior is adapted (Burgoon, 1993; Roesse & Sherman, 2007), they contribute to the dynamics of relationships and affect the way parties act in relation to each other and how they interpret the actions of the other. To understand this through the eyes of public relations, the next section narrows the scope back to the perspective of organizations, and presents the Expectation Grid as a framework for differentiating between different types of expectations in organizational context.

Expectations and Organizational Relations: Tone and Context

As the characteristics of different types of expectations have previously been noted primarily by fields of research other than public relations, what they mean for organizational relations has not been explained. Connecting expectations more firmly with the organizational context may, however, bridge the gaps we detected in the literature of public relations. We attempt to start this bridging by leaning on expectancy violation theory, as it emphasizes that expectations take place in a reciprocal context where meeting or failing expectations is assessed, determining how the relationship will evolve in the future (Burgoon, 1993). As EVT theory is interested in both positive and negative expectations, it acknowledges that the task of simply fulfilling expectations—a typical goal mentioned in the literature of public relations—does not necessarily lead to prosperous relationships. Instead, expectations need to be interpreted in their proper contexts or according to their reference points; an idea also emphasized by behavior economics and prospect theory (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

Understanding expectations as both positive and negative estimates might be the key to understanding expectations from a public relations perspective instead of, for example, a marketing perspective where cues for business opportunities are the main interest. For public

relations, expectations can be acknowledged both as implications of future wishes as well as critique. Expectations can express distrusting doubts and reservations that might, from the organization's perspective, feel inconvenient or difficult. Hence, understanding expectations as both positive and negative might explain more profoundly what they do for organizational relations. Moreover, taking positive and negative expectations equally into account can bring forth publics' voices that may have been previously left unheard.

Earlier we identified four categories for types of expectations (Table 2). Of these four, value-based and personal interest-based expectation categories deal with what the one who has expectations, i.e. the expectant thinks or feels is a desirable outcome, whereas the two others, information-based and experience-based, deal with assessments based on attributes possessed by the object of expectations. In the context of public relations the object of expectations is the organization, or more precisely, a particular relationship with a particular organization. Building on this, in Table 3, the expectation categories are combined into two groups based on their shared focus. Furthermore, we build a scale where expectations can land based on this grouping: the positive–negative scale and the high confidence in organization–low confidence in organization scale.

TABLE 3 Organizational Focus of Expectation Categories

Grouped categories	Focus	Scale
Value-based expectations & Personal interest-based expectations	What the expectant thinks is or is not desirable, valuable, attractive or good without organizational influence	positive–negative
Information-based expectations & Experience-based expectations	What the expectant thinks can be expected from an organization based on what (s)he knows based on information and experience	high confidence in organization– low confidence in organization

The positive–negative scale relies on the value-based expectation category and the personal interest-based expectation category, as they acknowledge that expectations take place on different levels and range from what the expectant feels is a desirable or undesirable outcome (based on values or personal preferences and interest). The high confidence–low confidence scale, in turn, deals with the experience-based expectation category and the information-based expectation category since the scale is built on the expectant’s relationship with the organization, where both direct (e.g., proximity, own position, own experience, information available) and indirect (e.g., reputation, word-of-mouth) cues come into play. Hence, we define confidence here as the assessment of an organization’s ability and willingness to fulfill the expectation. The two scales take into account that publics assess both what they expect and how probable this expectation is in the case of a particular organization. The scales rest partly on expectancy-value theory (Ajzen & Fishbein, 2008; Fishbein, 1963; Wigfield & Eccles, 2000), which suggests that assessments are influenced by what is considered valuable and whether that outcome is

considered probable. However, in an organizational context, probability is assessed based on whether the organization is considered able and willing to deliver certain outcomes.

We propose these two scales to form a framework for a four-quadrant grid. We call this framework the Expectation Grid (Figure 1). The Expectation Grid recognizes that the concept of expectations is not “flat”—rather, it needs to be scaled on different dimensions to be able to explain and analyze its relevance for organizations.

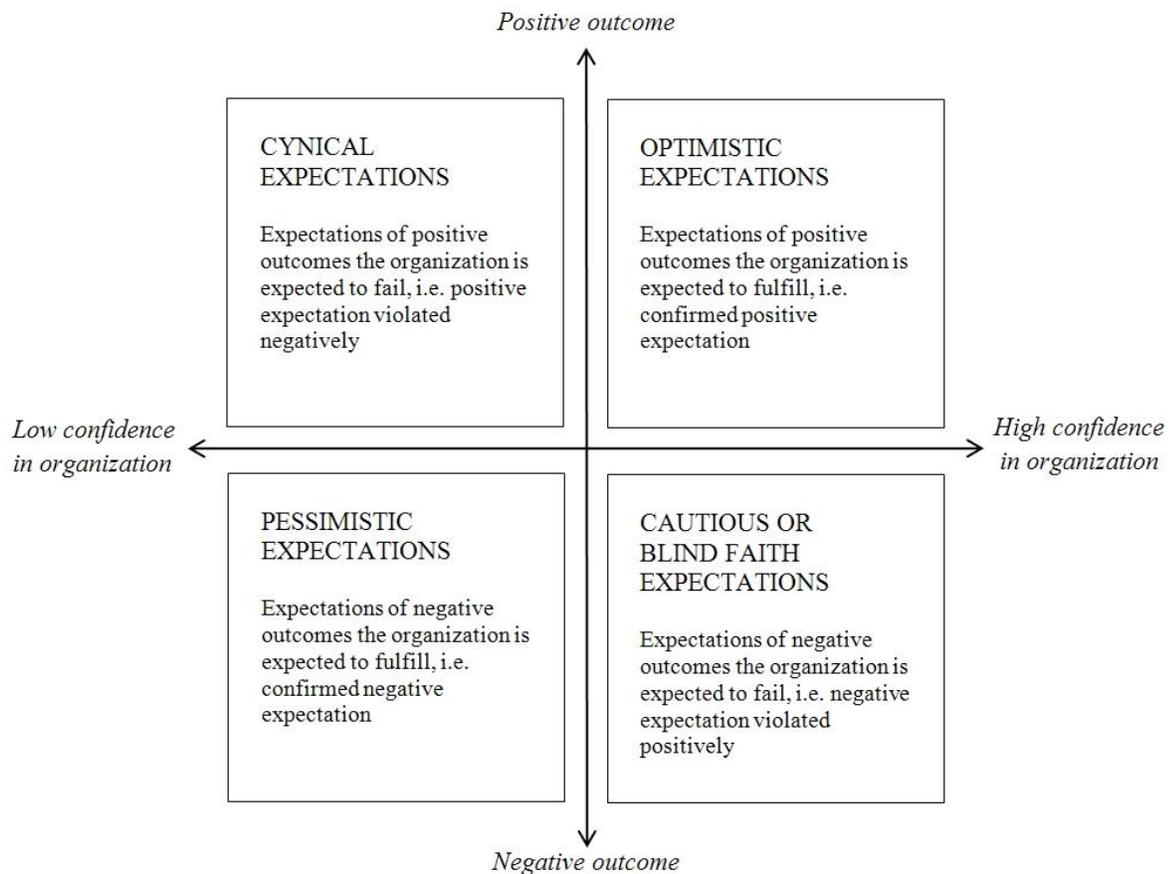


FIGURE 1 The Expectation Grid

The quadrants of the Expectation Grid form four areas that are a combination of whether the expectation itself deals with a positive or negative outcome and whether the expectant has confidence in the organization’s ability and willingness to fulfill the expectation. As the first, top

left quadrant of the Expectation Grid deals with positive expectations the organization is expected to fail, they could be described as *cynical expectations* (positive outcome/low confidence). In other words, the organization is seen to lack either ability or willingness to offer outcomes that are valued. These expectations can be, for example, expectations of broken service promises or greenwashing, especially if the expectant has been previously disappointed. Hence, the expectant can lower their expectations by adjusting their confidence to avoid future negative emotions (cf. Van Dijk, Zeelenberg, & Van Pligt, 2003).

The second quadrant in the top right corner deals with positive expectations that the organization is expected to fulfill, i.e. *optimistic expectations* (positive outcome/high confidence). In this case, the organization is believed to offer outcomes that are valued by the expectant. These expectations can be based on previous good experience or positive information of the organization, dealing with, for example, products or community involvement. Positive expectations are signs of trust in the organization (its ability and willingness), and hence violating them can severely damage relationships and support.

The third type deals with negative expectations that the organization is expected to fulfill, described in the bottom left quadrant as *pessimistic expectations* (negative outcome/low confidence). They are pessimistic in the sense that the organization is believed to offer negative outcomes. These expectations, as opposed to the optimistic expectations defined above, display distrust in the organization and its ability or willingness to offer outcomes that are valued by the expectant. Instead, the expectant feels the organization's actions actually harm or threaten the expectant's values or personal interest. Expectations in this quadrant can be, for example, expectations of poor quality, withheld or distorted information, or irresponsible behavior, such as causing safety risks or harming the community.

As the fourth quadrant in the bottom right section presents negative expectations that the organization is expected to fail (negative outcome/high confidence), this type is somewhat more complex than the other three. On the one hand, the fourth type can display caution, as publics can become, for example, cautious about a certain issue with negative impacts but might have confidence in the organization's ability to avoid the negative outcome. On the other hand, the fourth type might also indicate a form of blind faith toward the organization, if the organization is expected to be able to avoid the negative outcome despite the probability. Thus, the fourth type could be described as *cautious or blind faith expectations*.

The Expectation Grid forms a framework where expectations can land based on their tone and context. This framework suggests that expectations offer cues to why they are what they are—that they are affected by values and personal interest, setting the expectation tone, and past information and experience, setting the organizational context. Thus, the actions and behavior of organizations affect expectations, but there are also other, implicit and explicit factors that have an impact. How then, should the Expectation Grid be understood and what public relations can do with a broader understanding of expectations? We conclude the article with a discussion on this.

Discussion

Expectations need to be defined to understand their role in public-organization relationships. In this article we have suggested that the concept of expectations is not “flat” or one-dimensional, but rather, built on two continuums. The continuum of the tone ranges from what is considered good or desirable to what is not, and the continuum of confidence placed in the organization ranges from high to low. On these continuums, expectations take different forms, which affect

how their fulfillment is assessed. This we acknowledge in the Expectation Grid, according to which expectations in organizational context can display cynicism, optimism, pessimism or caution/blind faith toward an organization. We hope that the Expectation Grid helps to bridge some of the most crucial gaps currently existing in public relations literature about expectations and their relevance for the field.

First, the Expectation Grid addresses the lack of definitions we detected in the literature of public relations. As only eight out of 197 articles in our literature search sample offered a definition for expectations, expectations have been under-conceptualized in public relations literature, and used primarily to explain other concepts. The concepts expectations are most frequently attached to are some of the most central in the field, such as reputation, responsibility, relationship, and legitimacy. Hence, we suggest that an advanced understanding of expectations might help to understand these central concepts more profoundly. For example, the ability to fulfill expectations is a popular way to define a reputation. This view suggests that the expectations publics have for organizations are always about positive outcomes such as good service, prompt communication, or taking part in community-building. However, this view lacks the negative side of expectations, and concentrates on expectations as hopes, wishes, or demands. As we have argued, expectations can also take the form of negative anticipations, especially if previous experience has been poor, and hence, they could help to decipher why publics sometimes display pessimism or cynicism toward organizations. This connects not only to how not meeting positive expectations can lead to reputational losses, but how meeting negative expectations might actively build or maintain an unfavorable reputation, or, for example, cause damage to legitimacy.

Thus far, it has been research in fields other than public relations that has divided expectations into different types. While customer research stresses the importance of satisfaction for future business opportunities, the view of public relations is broader: how satisfaction or dissatisfaction affects organization-public relationships. Hence, the second gap the Expectation Grid addresses is the existence of different types of expectations. Though all types of expectations can contribute to assessments, dismantling the concept of expectations explains what expectations are built on and what, in fact, is assessed when they are compared with experience or performance. We used customer satisfaction and customer management literature to open up the different types, and assembled the Expectation Grid based on the categorizations we made from this literature to translate the different origins of expectations into the context of organizations and public relations. Hence, we suggest that expectations cannot be treated as observable data to be derived from the publics, but as a phenomenon that cannot be understood without analysis. The Expectation Grid is a possible tool to give this analysis structure.

Third, the Expectation Grid can be applied to understand expectation violations and gaps and determine their context. Though gaps resulting from mismatched or unfilled expectations have already been recognized in the literature of public relations, not much is known of how to interpret these gaps. Based on the Expectation Grid we suggest that the significance of different gaps varies depending on the expectation type: a gap in optimistic expectations (positive outcome/high confidence) might indicate unrealistic assessments when it comes to, for example, the resources the organization is working with, whereas a gap in cynical expectations (positive outcome/low confidence) could indicate that the organization would be, in fact, able to deliver a positive outcome, but for some reason (lack of reputational capital, for example) publics are not confident in the organization's capability or willingness.

As such, the Expectation Grid does not do away with the previous understanding of expectations in public relations research; in fact, it complements it by adding understanding of the different ways expectations are formed, and possibly also why publics behave as they do. For example, violated value-based expectations can make publics cynical, even pessimistic, and make them withdraw their support. Expectations are delicate as they may not lead to loud opposition (which is easy to recognize or even impossible to miss), but to silent manifestations in terms of turning away from the relationship when expectations are not matched properly. Expectations can eventually turn into issues or even prevailing demands (Luoma-aho, 2008), but the result can also be simply disengaged publics who turn away from the relationship without great turmoil. To organizations, however, disengaged publics are lost relationships.

Different views of expectations in existing public relations literature might give some direction to how organizations might utilize the information provided by the Expectation Grid. Organizations can employ different strategies to respond to expectations, ranging from denial of expectations, or minimal response to them, to proactive anticipation of expectations (Sethi, 1979). For example, creating realistic expectations (and thus avoiding disappointment) with a neutral, rather than an excellent reputation can serve as a strategy (Luoma-aho, 2007). However, meeting low positive expectations rarely results in prosperous relationships (Weber & Mayer, 2011). As such, the Expectation Grid is not inherently good or bad, but it depends on how it is used—whether the information organized by it is used in attempts to alter or restrain publics' expectations, or whether the information is used to adapt and align the organization and root the organization more firmly within society. In other words, there is a difference whether organizations try to manage publics' expectations, or whether they try to manage their own understanding of their publics' expectations. As expectations are influenced by notions of what is

valued, and they are socially constructed in interaction that can take place between organization and publics or between publics, we suggest that organizations can influence them only partially.

Understanding expectations highlights organizational functions such as monitoring and listening. Keeping track of expectations is a continuous process, as expectations can change over time or turn from something that was desired into something that is undesired due to, for example, changes in societal values or attitudes. Especially from a dialogic and co-creational perspective, the Expectation Grid can help organizations make better sense of their publics' feedback, both in terms of future opportunities as well as threats. From the perspective of the publics, this might mean that their voices are acknowledged and publics are offered a way to be more included in organizational processes. As such, a more sophisticated interpretation of expectations might help to understand tensions between actors, and to identify power discrepancies. A broader understanding of expectations could also be connected to an activist interpretation of public relations that embraces differing, competing and conflicting interests.

We hope this article will inspire future research in terms of recognizing expectations as a multi-dimensional concept and in shedding more light on their role in organization-public relations. However, as this article is an introduction to a broader understanding of expectations, there are still many areas to cover. First, as the theoretical background utilized in the article was drawn primarily from areas outside the scope of public relations literature, one can argue whether this input can fit the organizational context and apply to understanding publics and their behavior. However, as the theoretical input we introduced is essentially about human behavior and interaction, we believe it can serve public relations research, though there can be other views still to be included. In addition, there can be more specific questions that still need answering, such as knowing how publics understand their role as contributors in relationships, and how this

affects their expectations. In addition, the notion that all parties in relationships can intentionally lower their expectations to avoid disappointment is an area that deserves further investigation in the organizational context.

Furthermore, as this article is conceptual, we presented the Expectation Grid as a framework that organizes the input from various reviewed theories, but we did not test how the Grid works for mapping expectations in reality and whether, for example, all types of expectations we present actually exist. There might be interesting avenues for future research in assessing whether there are more types or categories of expectations to identify, and what types of expectations are most relevant for specific situations. For example, value-based expectations might become most relevant in terms of corporate responsibility, whereas information and experience based could matter most for reputation and trust.

We also call for case studies to test the Expectation Grid and its value in different cultural and environmental settings.

Conclusion

The concept of expectations lacks a clear definition and analytical understanding in public relations research, though expectations are connected to many central concepts in the field. To offer a broader conceptual understanding of expectations, we visited disciplines outside the scope of public relations which viewed expectations as frames and filters that affect both the way behavior is adapted and how the behavior of others is assessed. We explored the many dimensions of expectations, that is, the different types of expectations that may originate from values, information, experience or personal interest. As such, we proposed that expectations are multi-dimensional rather than one-dimensional constructs.

Based on our exploration into the concept of expectations, we proposed that in organizational relations expectations are two-fold assessment of what is considered good or desirable (expectation tone ranging from positive to negative) and the confidence placed in the organization (organization-specific context ranging from high to low confidence). This duality was depicted in the Expectation Grid, which divided expectations into four different types: cynical, optimistic, pessimistic and cautious/blind faith expectations. The Expectation Grid recognizes the spectrum of expectations from positive to negative and each quadrant of the Expectation Grid represents a different outlook on an organization and its ability or willingness to deliver outcomes that are valued by the publics.

We argue that understanding expectations requires analysis, as there are several explanations to expectations. As a central point, we discovered that expectations do not always convey positive aspirations which organizations can, when the right opportunities and resources are available, start fulfilling. Instead, expectations can convey caution or distrust toward organizations, changing the dominant understanding of expectations in the literature of public relations as hopes, wishes or demands of only positive outcomes. Thus, we conclude that understanding also negative expectations and their origins may significantly broaden the understanding of organization-public relations, and with this we hope to both advance the theoretical understanding of expectations in public relations research, as well as better meet the current needs of public relations practitioners when they interact with publics.

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